

**Talking points for AGRA's Board Chair H.E. Hailemariam
Dessaegn on 'Enhancing Climate Resilience and
Sustainable Development in the East African Community
Region' at the 23rd Ordinary Summit of the EAC Heads of
State**

- **H.E. *Evariste Ndayishimiye, President of Burundi, and Chairperson of the Summit of EAC Heads of State.***
- **H.E. Yoweri Museveni, President of Uganda**
- **H.E. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda**
- **H.E. Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of the Republic of South Sudan**
- **H.E. Samia Suluhu Hassan, President of the United Republic of Tanzania**
- **H.E. Dr William Samoei Ruto, President of the Republic of Kenya**
- **The Chairperson of the EAC Council of Ministers**
- **Honourable Ministers**
- **Heads of Regional Economic Communities**
- **Members of the Diplomatic Community**
- **Representatives of Development Partners**
- **The Chairman of the EABC and other Representatives of the Private Sector**
- **Heads of EAC Organs and Institutions**
- **Members of the East African Legislative Assembly**
- **EAC Executive Staff**
- **EAC Members of Staff**
- **All protocols observed,**

Introduction

- It is with great honour and a profound sense of shared responsibility that I stand before you today to address one of the pressing issues facing the East African Community (EAC) region, one that demands our collective attention – enhancing climate resilience for food security and environmental sustainability.
- As I say this, I am reminded of the myriad of crises we have faced recently, from the effects of climate change, including extreme weather conditions, persistent drought, floods, landslides, and rising sea levels, which threaten food security and efforts to eradicate poverty. These challenges manifest in the form of food, water, and energy insecurity, as well as land and water degradation.
- According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), East Africa is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change because of its dependence on rain-fed agriculture. Altered precipitation patterns, erratic rainfall, and prolonged droughts disrupt the traditional agricultural calendar, adversely affecting soil health and diminishing yields.
- This intricate nexus between climate change, rain-fed agriculture, and soil productivity has far-reaching implications for regional food security. The pace of population growth and urbanization, escalating at 18% annually, exerts additional pressure on our natural environment. Ensuring the resilience of our agricultural systems is more crucial than ever.
- The interplay of these factors threatens the livelihoods of millions of farmers and challenges our ability to meet the escalating food demands of our growing populations.

- Urgent and strategic interventions are essential to address forest, soil, and water degradation, enhance agricultural practices, and deploy innovative technologies that strengthen the productivity and sustainability of rain-fed agriculture.
- Latest estimates put the cost of adaptation in East Africa Region between US\$10 and US\$15 billion per year. This illustrates the magnitude of the problem of building resilience to climate change.
- In the face of an ever-changing climate, it is imperative that we adopt an integrated approach requiring our urgent collective efforts.

Main Points

- As leaders on the continent, we find ourselves at a crucial juncture, approaching the end of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) period 2030. The imperative is clear: we must prioritize adaptation in our food systems. With less than seven agricultural seasons remaining to meet the development aspirations of our people, this urgency demands our unwavering attention and concerted action.
- Africa's resilience has been tested repeatedly, notably in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and various economic and climatic shocks. Our people have shown remarkable resilience. It is our duty to reciprocate this resilience with strategic investments that further prepare our communities for the challenges posed by a changing climate.
- I am proud to see commitments from countries within the region align with this. In Kenya, for example, the new administration is leading a transformative initiative to plant 15 billion trees for nature to be a climate solution. This visionary plan not only focuses on restoring Kenya's vital water towers and increasing agroforestry cover but also creates job opportunities for the youth through tree nurseries. Simultaneously, by

promoting the growth of fruit trees, the initiative seeks to enhance smallholder farmer incomes, exemplifying Kenya's commitment to climate resilience, sustainable development, and youth empowerment. We must also allow natural biodiverse forests to recover in ways that support biodiversity for the well being of local communities, in the long term.

- Shifting our focus to Tanzania, we have seen a nation that has made remarkable strides in just five years. Transitioning from a net importer to a net rice exporter, Tanzania's achievement is extraordinary. The rice production has surged from less than 0.5 million metric tonnes to an impressive 3.2 million metric tonnes. This success story can be primarily attributed to Tanzania's commitment to adopting improved varieties and implementing sound agronomic practices.
- Let us forge ahead with a vision that intertwines the threads of climate resilience, sustainable development, and agro-industrialization, ensuring that the growth we achieve today becomes the legacy of a thriving and resilient East Africa for generations to come.
- Also, to meet the evolving needs of our agricultural sector, we must prioritize proven innovations and technologies that ensure the sustainability and resilience of our food systems. The untapped potential of our youth population is also an opportunity, as they can drive inclusive growth and transform the continent's food system. The BBT program of Tanzania is one of such initiatives to emulate.
- Just as we've witnessed the transformative power of digital technologies in reaching underserved communities through digital finance, these innovations can also be utilized to build resilience in our food systems. By leveraging the lessons learned from past challenges, investing wisely, and embracing the potential of our youth and digital technologies, we can forge a path toward a more resilient and prosperous future for our nations.

- In our role as leaders, an opportunity awaits us —enabling us to impact millions through strategically developing and implementing targeted policies and initiatives. We can usher in a transformative era by fostering innovation and actively attracting private sector investments into our food systems.
- Recognizing climate change is an ever-evolving field, we must continuously invest in research and development to address the diverse and frequent vulnerabilities unique to the EAC region. We can only devise context-specific solutions that address the complexities of our varied farming and agri-business systems through this concerted effort.

We have to Build on our success.

- Our region/continent is not without success stories. We have seen that we can achieve increased yields with the right policies.
- In the African Region, we have seen intentional investment in irrigation to curb the effects of climate change and reduce the reliance on rain-fed agriculture, which is attributed to an increase of four to ten times in the agriculture budget. Expanding irrigation onto currently underperforming rainfed croplands is crucial to meet future food demand without further agriculture expansion and associated encroachment of natural ecosystems. It's a climate adaptation solution to alleviate heat and water stress to crops and reduce climate variability and extremes. Two outstanding examples are building series of Dams for flood mitigation and as irrigation water reservoirs and nature-based conservation agriculture solutions I have seen in Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania.

- Rwanda, a nation that has undergone a transformative shift in its agricultural landscape over the last ten years, from being initially reliant on imported improved seeds, Rwanda has undergone a remarkable change. Through strategic collaborations with AGRA and other partners, Rwanda has not only scaled up the production of these crucial seeds within its borders. Still, it has also wholly substituted all previously imported seeds. Farmers in Rwanda now have convenient and cost-effective access to locally produced seeds, marking a significant step towards agricultural self-sufficiency and sustainability. The above examples are only glimpse which I have seen firsthand but many best practices can be cited.
- The work that AGRA and many other partners are doing across the continent to bridge the research-private sector and farmer gap is a case in which we need to continue investing.
- However, I must emphasize the importance of agro-industrialization for the future of our region and continent at large. Our agricultural potential has long been acknowledged, but it is time for us to harness this potential to drive economic growth and sustainable development.

My Call to action

- I'd like to applaud governments' efforts in creating food system pathways. Still, I also encourage prioritising affordable investments and pre-requisite infrastructure as the future we ought to build.
- I believe in the inherent resilience and potential of our beloved continent, Africa. While we face significant challenges, the African continent has a wealth of initiatives and opportunities that, if strategically harnessed, can significantly contribute to addressing food security challenges.

- The East Africa Community Region can emerge as a frontrunner in implementing the resolutions from the Nairobi Africa Climate Summit and the Africa Food Systems Forum. However, this will require a deliberate, concerted effort and collaborative approach.
- Firstly, it is imperative for member states within the East Africa Community to align their national climate and food systems strategies with the resolutions put forth in these critical summits (forums). This alignment will facilitate a region-wide synergy, ensuring that our collective actions amplify the impact of individual efforts.
- Harnessing the rich diversity of our region, particularly the insights and perspectives of local communities, youth, and women, is equally crucial. By integrating their voices into policy frameworks and implementation strategies, we can ensure that our initiatives are inclusive and reflect our communities' diverse needs and challenges.
- In essence, our success in becoming leaders in implementing these resolutions hinges on our ability to forge unity, share knowledge, and integrate the wisdom of our communities into every facet of our action plans.
- The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) provides a crucial foundation with its at least 10% annual agricultural budget allocation. By ensuring that member countries honour this commitment, we can invest in modernizing agriculture, supporting smallholder farmers, and enhancing productivity across the value chain.
- The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is equally a game-changer. We can create a more resilient and interconnected food supply chain by fostering regional trade and collaboration. This initiative can enhance market access for smallholder farmers, reduce post-harvest

losses, and promote the exchange of agricultural best practices among member states.

- We must intentionally integrate a value chain approach, remarkably increasing our focus on commercial and industrial products for the market within EAC and AfCTA and beyond. This is where our countries will be able to compete competitively.
- However, I am not saying that we need to do this alone, nor should we. We need to foster regional partnerships and knowledge exchange platforms that will enable the sharing of best practices and innovative solutions in climate resilience and sustainable food systems.
- Collaborating with international organizations, donor agencies, and private sector entities can bring in expertise, technology, and investment to boost our economic, social, and agricultural development. We can leverage access to funding, transfer knowledge, and implement sustainable practices through these partnerships.
- With a few days to COP28, I am inspired by the commitments in the eminent declaration across the EAC region but nudge leaders to commit to a framework that holds all actors accountable to their duties while prioritising investments across one health for people, planet, and crops and livestock.
- Together, we can navigate the challenges ahead and ensure our nation's prosperous and resilient future.

Thank you, and God bless you all.