



AGRA Independent Evaluation Management Response

FEBRUARY 2022

This document presents AGRA's management response to the Mathematica independent evaluation of AGRA - Partnership for Inclusive Agricultural Transformation in Africa.

1. Introduction

AGRA was established in 2006 with a remit to catalyze a farming revolution in Africa, underpinned by the belief that African farmers can change their lives with improved food security and incomes if only they had access to the opportunities; finance, inputs such as seeds and knowledge; and to markets. The importance of this approach was reflected in the dependence of at least 65% of Africans on agriculture, with about 90% of farmers smallholders.

We support the change needed in African farming systems, by complementing government efforts to develop the sector, and by working to develop a vibrant SME sector in agriculture.

We have been supported in our efforts by our partners, who have contributed \$1 billion in funding since our inception 15 years ago, averaging \$67 million per year, which we have invested across 18 countries – equating to, on average, \$3.7 million per country per annum. We are one player in the larger system of agricultural transformation. Our financial support represents less than 0.1%¹ of the estimated food and agriculture investment needs for Africa.

AGRA's work can be viewed in two phases. In our first phase (2006-2016)², we focused on three critical areas:

- **Training and Capacity Building:** Training and building skills and capabilities critical to taking on the challenges posed by our agricultural sector. We bolstered the work of more than 700 experts at MSc and PhD level, many of whom are now leading institutions or conducting vital research, while equipping 14 universities to drive this work forward.
- **Crop improvement:** Seed breeding and marketing programs that led to the creation of 680 locally adopted, improved crop varieties that each yield between three and five times more than traditional, unimproved varieties. Two thirds of these crop varieties have since been commercialized and are changing the lives of millions of farmers.

In 2006 there were just two nationally owned seed companies across Africa. Today, thanks to our support, there are 110 local seed companies operating across the Eastern and Western Africa agroecological zone bringing to market 381 new varieties of locally grown staple crops, like beans, groundnuts, maize, millet, sorghum, cassava, and cowpeas, to name just a few.

- **Building retail network of inputs shops close to farmers:** A retail network of 35,000 small 'Mom and Pop' shops set up to sell inputs from SMEs direct to the farmers, making them readily available in their local communities and removing previous barriers to growth. By 2016, our AGRA-supported shops were reaching 15 million farmers across 18 countries.

During our second phase (2017-2021), we focused on three different areas:

- **Mitigating System and Market Failures:** Confronting both market and system failures that continue to prevent farmers from accessing input markets despite the efforts of AGRA, as well as other organisations, to make seed and other inputs available to farmers. These range from farmers only able to access old varieties of seed – perhaps 40 years old – that are totally inadequate for their farms; to the breakdown of extension systems (knowledge provision for farmers); to high losses after harvest (30% plus). Perhaps most urgently now, farmers struggle

¹ The annual donor funding gap for Africa is calculated to be \$8.2 billion, mostly for 'on farm' investment, and a larger amount needed from government expenditure. Should the funding gap be met, a much larger private sector investment would be expected to be unlocked. (Ceres2030 "Ending Hunger, Increasing Incomes, and Protecting the Climate: What would it cost donors?" 2020)

² <https://agra.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/AGRA-Corporate-Strategy-2017-2021.pdf>

with bringing surplus to market – massively reducing incentives for farmers to invest in adoption of yield-improving technologies and better farming practices.

- **Support to Government Implementation Capabilities:** Enhancing the efforts of governments to strengthen their abilities to implement farmer-facing programs, which included reforming critical policies, coordinating partners as well as supporting the design and implementation of innovative programs.
- **Developing Strategic Partnerships for Scale:** Forming partnerships to extend our work beyond our resources. This led to partnerships with governments, bilateral parties at county level, and many other organisations that work within the agricultural sector. We focused on raising the visibility of our Continental Forum, the AGRF, and using the platform to give visibility to our partners and the work they do but also as a useful knowledge, opportunity, and alignment platform.

Recognizing the need to better align and coordinate our many stakeholders, ensure complementarity of efforts and fast track a continental learning agenda in a complex sector, five development partners agreed to support AGRA’s mission, leading to the formation of the Partnership for Inclusive Agriculture Transformation in Africa (PIATA).

As AGRA approached the end of the second phase of our strategy in 2021, our PIATA partners selected Mathematica to conduct an independent, evidence-based, data-driven review of our work, our approach, and our results over the previous five years.

Our PIATA partners wanted the review to answer the essential question: Has AGRA made progress towards the goal that it was established to achieve: **to help catalyze a sustainable, enabling environment for smallholder farmers in Africa to thrive?**

AGRA works for smallholder farmers in Africa

We consider smallholder farmers to be those who manage farms from less than one hectare to 10 hectares (ha), but we do consider vulnerability / poverty issues as well. In eight out of 11 countries supported by AGRA, our farmers own or work with an average of 2.56 ha, of which an average of 1.46 ha is cultivated. When Ghana, Mali and Burkina Faso are taken into account (reflecting much larger farm sizes nationally), our average rises to 5.4 ha, of which 3.5 ha are cultivated.

2. Management comments on the overall findings of the evaluation

Has AGRA made progress towards the goal that it was established to achieve: **to help catalyze a sustainable, enabling environment for smallholder farmers in Africa to thrive- a small holder farming revolution?**

To catalyze a farming revolution in Africa, underpinned by our belief that African farmers can change their lives with improved food security and incomes, it became **clear to AGRA that farmers need a viable business environment. We needed to** provide the building blocks of farming such as high yielding seeds, fertilizers, extension / knowledge, and finance; as well as to improve access to markets for their produce. This would then drive yield improvements, food security and better incomes.

AGRA has drawn two key findings from this evaluation that frame our work over the last five years of implementing the PIATA Program.

The first finding is that “AGRA fulfilled its intended role of catalyzing agricultural development through improved policies and increased investment” in the context of the PIATA work where Mathematica states that “PIATA was successful in developing key policy reforms, mobilizing investment, and

reaching farmers with extension and seeds”. This finding is an important reflection of how we have built upon the first ten years of our work to build models and tools that can deliver a step change for farmers - the training experts, setting up business from scratch in remote areas or support to breeding of new crop varieties. Under the auspices of PIATA, we have focused on ensuring that these tools and infrastructure work for farmers, we achieved our results by focusing on three interrelated areas:

- a. reforms to policies; of the 72 policies under reform, 54% are already being implemented and contributing to businesses and systems growth,
- b. supporting the extension and distribution systems that encouraged hundreds of MSMEs to invest in taking services to new farmers. This allowed us to reach 10.1 million farmers versus an initial target of nine million, and
- c. supporting government in resourcing farmer facing programs. The flagships we designed in Ghana, Kenya, and Burkina Faso, for example, attracted millions of dollars and tackled issues specific to each country, improving the livelihoods of millions of farmers.

The second finding is that, despite AGRA's success in building a more viable business environment, encouraging investment, and exceeding our farmer reach targets, the results at the farmer outcome level were mixed. This led to the suggestion that “AGRA did not achieve its headline goal of increased incomes and food security for nine million smallholders, despite reaching over 10 million smallholders through its systems development work”.

This finding is an expected outcome and a true reflection of the realities that farmers, AGRA, and other institutions that support farmers today live with daily. It underscores the need, building on the outcomes of the UN Food Systems Summit, to understand the complex issues that farmers face in the farming landscape especially external factors that impact farmers and their place as small farming enterprises. We must therefore rethink our models and focus our support, and that of our partners, on building resilience and adaptation specifically for smallholder farmers.

Areas for consideration include:

- Technology adoption requires a learning curve with a lag time between access and adoption and achieving impact at scale. AGRA has reached 83% promoted technology adoption across six countries studied in the last year, with adoption of improved varieties at 49%, adoption of inorganic fertilizer at 75%, adoption of organic fertilizer at 44%, pest management practices at 65% and adoption of post-harvest practices at 48%. This is a strong performance that must be built upon and supported to continue to grow.
- The evaluators point to farmers' binding constraints, such as the ability to afford both seeds and fertilizers. Some farmers cannot buy inputs at all due to a lack of financing. AGRA's support focused on providing extension, demonstration on seeds and fertilizers use and support to proximity of and choices of inputs in village shops (agrodealers) – but we do not fund individual farmer's access to inputs.
- The evaluation was very clear that in a few of our geographies, farmers lacked markets and financing. This was partly a result of our focus on more remote geographies under this strategy, which we chose to include more small holders. We are aware of this constraint and will prioritise this issue in our next strategy.
- Farmers across Africa have experienced declining yields due to external shocks. Climate change has brought drought, extreme weather events, and degraded land but also unforeseen hazards, such as Fall Army Worm and Locusts. These external shocks have been magnified by COVID-19 over the past two years, which impacted agricultural SMEs especially those in markets in many unexpected ways. The combination of all these challenges has contributed to an increase in food insecurity across Africa.

Overall, the evaluation recognises that AGRA had “notable successes” at scale in reaching farmers; we set out to take known knowledge and yielding increasing varieties of seeds off the research shelf and into hands of millions of farmers through functional SMEs - at the time of the evaluation, we had

directly reached 10.1 million farmers while further supporting 19.1 million indirectly. This was against an initial target of nine million farmers directly, and 21 million farmers indirectly.

Direct reach meant that we were able to directly influence how SMES and VBAs provided services to farmers through a combination of small seed packs, field days, agronomic trainings and access to seeds and fertilizers through agrodealers. We empowered VBAs to support farmers on good agronomic practices, to demonstrate the performance of different inputs and to connect farmers to retail shops and other input businesses.

We view our indirect farmer reach as the benefit that comes to farmers through our work in policy reforms and or system/national level interventions such as investment programmes, SME partnerships etc. When implemented well, these programs have the potential to impact people at huge scale. For example, our work supporting the seed sector in Rwanda helped the country move from importing improved seed to producing seeds locally. With a population of 3.2 million small holder farmers, a 35% uptake of improved seed positively impacts the lives of one million farmers – even if AGRA does not directly work with them through supported VBAs or Agrodealers.

3. Management comments on findings by individual evaluation questions

Mathematica sought to answer six evaluation questions. In this section, we present the top-level findings of each question along with a brief comment to create context.

Evaluation question: Is there evidence that AGRA’s work on policy has changed how policies are developed and executed in target countries?

“AGRA was successful in accelerating policy reforms...”

AGRA has accelerated policy reforms through nationally led and prioritized initiatives. We have also helped to build stakeholder participation in policymaking, which is crucial to achieving better and functioning policies. The review confirmed that 72 policy reforms had been initiated across 11 countries because of our work, of which 54% - 39 in total – are currently being implemented.

Each reform is different. The e-voucher subsidy reform in Kenya addressed the government’s wish to reform the country’s input subsidy system into an effective, efficient, private sector-led and government-enabled input distribution system. E-vouchers addressed major inefficiencies in subsidizing inputs, with initial data suggesting that yields of farmers using the vouchers increased between 10 and 80%. 1.1 million farmers were targeted by the program in 2021.

In Ethiopia, support to the government to reform high import taxes on agricultural machinery led a significantly streamlined mechanization tax regime - just 8 months after the reform was initiated. Simplification of taxation regimes directly led to an increase in the sale of mechanized equipment by 33% over the last two years.

While we recognize that implementing policy is the responsibility of governments, regulatory bodies and legislatures, our complementary support has been shown to increase the urgency and the likelihood that a reformed policy is actually implemented.

“...although it did not prioritize building policy making capacity.”

Through our work, we recognize and appreciate that every government’s policy making capacity is complex and unique, involving many different factors. Many have limited ability to recruit additional civil servants with the requisite skills or simply don’t have the resources, capacity, or experience in marshalling the complex skills necessary to deal with the myriad needs of public reform.

With our available resources, we chose a results-based approach that simultaneously creates the opportunities that allows the sector to grow while highlighting the necessary skills and gaps, that must be addressed to enable governments to sustainably advance capacities. Where policies have been

implemented, we have been able to demonstrate that the return on such investments is high, particularly in the case of leveraged investments from SMEs.

We have also completed a capacity needs assessment for each of our partner governments to develop bespoke plans to address their individual requirements for the medium- and longer-term horizons in capacity.

Evaluation question: How has AGRA’s support for building state capability affected governments’ abilities to plan, coordinate, and drive investment?

“Governments have made some advances in developing National Agriculture Implementation Plans (NAIPs) and coordinating flagships across AGRA...”

Mathematica noted the role that we have played in this area, while highlighting the necessity of ‘strong and continued national government commitment’ in ensuring success. Unsurprisingly, they emphasized that continued success is contingent on such support enduring.

We have many examples of successful initiatives across our work, including helping to crowd in and align donor and public funding through flagship investment programs in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, and Tanzania. The Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) initiative in Ghana, a flagship we designed at the request of the Ghanaian government, has helped to leverage an estimated \$260 million in public and donor funding and reached 1.74 million farmers. In Burkina Faso, the AGRA investment in support to a government-led flagship leveraged \$540 million towards rice self-sufficiency.

“... yet they [governments] lack basic technical and managerial capacity.”

The lack of consistent government capacity is a challenge faced by development agencies across all sectors. AGRA’s work in agriculture is no exception. Lack of capacity is why we target support to governments. To further address this major challenge, we plan to build our support for government capacity through stronger and more ambitious partnerships with other agencies who have complementary approaches and skills. We also plan to integrate civil society and smallholders in the policy development process. These activities are critical to ensure long-term viability and support beyond AGRA’s capacity-building efforts.

Evaluation question: How successful has AGRA been in engaging the private sector as a partner?

“AGRA has been successful in forging private sector partnerships and engagements.”

Supporting and meeting the needs of African smallholder farmers and giving them the opportunity that others take for granted, requires a strong, home grown and owned private sector. Strengthening and catalyzing a viable environment for local SMEs is a core priority of AGRA’s work

We have supported more than 1,200 African-based private sector companies in their capacity building, while directly connecting 120 with investors and financiers. We have many examples of our success in this area, from nurturing and growing seed enterprises to small retail shops in remote village and, more recently, the Agribusiness Dealroom. The Dealroom has worked with 319 private sector companies and more than 800 SMEs to strengthen private sector organizational capacity, foster vertical and horizontal market linkages, and facilitate access to finance.

Building on our work with the private sector is a priority for us as we move into the next phase of our strategy. We plan to develop further our successful engagement models, leveraging millions of dollars in private funding while encouraging investors and financiers to participate. Such partnerships are also designed to future-proof our work as they are not impacted by changes in government. We believe it is critical to further leverage public and private funding to boost extension access, a successful rural retail network and the overall success of PIATA.

Evaluation question: To what extent have AGRA partnerships supported scaling business models toward increased investments and toward improving productivity of smallholder farmers?

“AGRA has helped develop and scale profitable mechanization models... but unclear pathways to profitability remain for other AGRA-supported business models.”

It is certainly true that more time is needed to build and test profitable models, particularly in the digital space where mechanization is proving profitable. We concur with Mathematica’s view that “longer-term private sector engagement with farmers at scale will depend on whether AGRA can help surface and expand models” across all areas of its work. We will sharpen focus in the areas in which we have a comparative advantage. A good example of this is our work promoting SMEs in seeds and the recently created seed Center of Excellence, to continue advancing a viable seed industry.

The SME integration platform (consortia), along with the Dealroom@AGRF and the Agro dealer model, which have each grown consistently over the past four years, show great potential for further development. They have achieved significant success since inception, but we recognize that better technical assistance and an ability to curate and support them more closely will only help future growth.

Mathematica found that AGRA “maintains a strong focus on women and youth in its partnership work”, particularly through the recent acquisition of the VALUE4HER platform. This relatively new initiative is Africa’s first digital marketplace for women in agribusiness. It will support up to 5,000 female-led agribusinesses over the next five years in their efforts to access markets, both domestic and international; to strengthen their knowledge and skills; and to level the playing field for female entrepreneurs.

Evaluation question: In AGRA’s area of operation, how effective has AGRA been in driving integrated approaches to systems development?

“Overall, AGRA had success in strengthening extension services and input markets through consortia.”

Our decision to invest around \$45 million developing a platform, comprising small and medium private sector companies and non-governmental organizations (consortia), in seven countries has proven to be successful. The consortia model enabled us to leverage millions of private sector resources, deliver a package of integrated services to smallholder farmers at scale.

Our network of 33,000 Village-Based Advisors (VBAs) proved vital in establishing and maintaining links between micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, such as seed companies, Agro dealers, and farmers. Through a mixture of individual on-farm and village-wide demonstrations, VBAs drove farmers’ adoption of new technologies and best practices. This has led to increased yields in some countries, ranging from 6% in Ghana to 70% in Tanzania. Many of these farmers are now producing a marketable surplus.

While we are proud of the success achieved to date, we recognize that the longer-term sustainability of these consortia will be dependent on levels of profitability generated for the farmers and investing businesses. We believe this to be both desirable and achievable, as it may attract new partners or lead to existing partners expanding their work.

“Consortia had less success supporting output and finance markets.”

We agree with this finding. Our efforts in this area were restricted by a lack of resources available for investment. Mathematica found that we partially addressed some of the challenges faced by our consortia in this area through technical and financial support to farmers’ organizations and SMEs. AGRA’s experience and work by different partners has shown that linking increased crop production with better processing and marketing arrangements can have a sustained impact on farmers’ incomes. As we design our new strategy, we will pay careful attention to these findings.

Evaluation question: What has been the overall impact of the PIATA program?

"PIATA was successful in developing key policy reforms, mobilizing investment, and reaching farmers with extension and seeds."

Mathematica's evaluation reinforces our view that a functional private sector ecosystem, especially of local SMEs, set in a viable business environment, is critical to helping smallholder farmers access the inputs that can change their lives through better productivity.

By strengthening the systems that farmers depend upon to do their work through building a more viable business environment for thousands of SMEs, we have supported access to inputs for millions of farmers, many of whom saw an increase in their yields.

Policy reforms that we drove forward, and saw through implementation, had a direct impact on millions of farmers. These created an enabling environment that allowed local SMEs to thrive and offer their services directly to farmers. Indeed, agricultural financial policy reform in Burkina Faso and Kenya demonstrated an outsized impact on SME growth, by tackling the high risks historically inherent in farming and the cost of finance in those countries.

Our VBA network, alongside a network of village retail shops, have created opportunities for tens of thousands of businesses in new geographies. They reached millions of farmers offering advice on good farming practices, access to learning, demonstrations and better access to inputs, particularly improved seeds, which are vital to boost yields and better farmer resilience.

Our integrated approach to solving systems challenges led to the stronger and faster formation or expansion of thousands of businesses, especially input businesses. Establishing viable seed companies in several countries has given farmers myriad choices and access to higher quality seeds.

We created strong synergies between policy and systems development work, although – in line with the findings – we agree that there is considerable “untapped potential” for more synergies, particularly if we can address the resource limitations that have to date constrained our work on output market access and input finance.

We know that the farmers we support find it particularly hard to access fertilizer on credit and to sell their crops profitably. It is vital that we work to overcome these challenges, relieving unnecessary pressures on farmers who constantly face external shocks, such as drought, natural hazards and COVID, over which we currently have little control.

"PIATA's impact on inclusive finance, output markets was mixed."

This is an important finding. It reflects AGRA's greatest challenge: how can we help millions of smallholder farmers transform their businesses and livelihoods across the continent sustainably? Mathematica points to “remaining farmer constraints in access to extension, seeds and fertilizer on credit, and profitable output markets”³. It argues that such challenges must be overcome to see a strong influence on “transformation”. As Mathematica notes, we were only able to make limited investments in finance and markets.

Access to finance remains an important bottleneck to achieving an inclusive agricultural transformation. AGRA's investments in extension, access to improved inputs and inclusion in agribusiness platforms (consortia) are the requisite building blocks to start working on access to external finance for agricultural production. Through our financial institution partners across the agricultural finance value chain, we must focus on reducing the perception of costs and risks in funding smaller SMEs and rural financial institutions. Innovative approaches include:

- De-risking facilities (guarantee funds, technical assistance, incentive scheme) that give confidence to financial sector players to invest in agriculture. AGRA supports setting up such

³ p36 evaluation report

schemes with blended facilities (GIRSAL, MAIC, and others) and promoting them to enhance usage of the de-risking facilities.

- Agricultural specific products, models, and tools that financial sector players can adopt, and the building of a private sector driven sustainable Business Development Services ecosystem that makes SMEs bankable. AGRA has developed three innovative lending models for input, equipment and warehouse finance that will be scaled through our network of agri-friendly partner financial institutions in the 11 countries.
- Delivery channels that make it possible to reach the small-scale producers profitably through self-help groups, community banks and other rural financial intermediaries. Digitization of these delivery channels will reduce the cost and risk of delivering financial services.

Farmers need to produce a marketable surplus and have a known market. Therefore, AGRA needs to tighten its focus on shaping key markets and trade flows through policy and partnerships. Improved partnership with market institutions and platforms can provide a much clearer signal to farmers about what to produce. AGRA will also consider targeted interventions and partnerships in:

- Food market quality standards for safe and nutritious food.
- Agri-food SME capacity, access of food processors and traders to access finance, technologies, supply chain and sourcing models.
- Support to governments in developing national and regional food trade.

4. Management response on recommendations

Mathematica put forward eight recommendations, following its review of our work. In the following section, we provide our initial responses. These responses will be expanded further in our ongoing strategy development and country-operational plans throughout 2022.

Recommendation 1

More fully leverage data and partners to meet stakeholders' binding constraints

ACCEPTED

As we design our next strategy, AGRA will

- 1) Engage with governments and other stakeholders to strengthen measurement and evaluation systems for KPIs at different levels of investment
- 2) Build in more systematic use of analytical and data tools
- 3) Strengthen support to governments to generate data and to participate in continental monitoring processes, such as the Biennial Review, which is used by African countries to track progress against targets
- 4) Collaborate in partnerships with key organizations, such as IFPRI, MAFAP, BFAP and local think tanks, to support data and evidence building for policy decisions and investment planning

Recommendation 2

Develop a sustainability, scaling, and exit strategy for all key areas of work

ACCEPTED

We recognize that some of our work takes time to demonstrate results, and partners must be positioned to continue the work beyond our programmatic involvement. We will ensure that, from the inception of projects, we strengthen the ability of our partners, such as government departments or implementing partners, to scale models that have a proven ability to deliver while phasing out or exiting those that do not. We have already implemented this strategy. We recently launched the

Center for Seed Excellency, which champions the development of improved seed systems and strengthens the seed value chain across countries.

We will target our work to align better with national government's priorities, with explicit and common objectives and a clearly defined exit strategy for our investments.

We will work with private sector, government, and domestic donors to scale successful models and approaches to new geographies and more remote communities through bespoke flagship programs. These initiatives will include local coordination and accountability mechanisms to further strengthen exit mechanisms and the sustainability of investments.

Recommendation 3

More deeply engage with, and empower, civil society and smallholders

ACCEPTED

We agree that there is significant value in further deepening our engagement with civil society and smallholders. To date, one quarter of our resources are deployed through civil society organizations (CSOs) and NGOs. Our work has empowered at least 20 national CSOs, 17 national farmer organizations, three regional farmer organizations and one continental – the Pan-Africa Farmers Organization. We will strengthen the relationships that made such empowerment possible as well as targeting key actors in country-level consultations for strategy development.

We will also explicitly engage with civil society in country-level strategic planning and in our co-planning with their governments on country-wide operational plans.

Recommendation 4

Consider targeted capacity-building efforts while staying the course with results-oriented policy reforms

ACCEPTED

In our next phase of development, AGRA will work with governments to advocate for and mobilize resources for institutional capacity building. This will be based on the Institutional Capacity Assessments of 11 countries that we conducted in 2019.

We will both roll out and expand our new Center for African Leaders in Agriculture (CALA) to address capacity gaps in leadership for implementation and delivery. We will target all aspects of society: public sector, private sector and civic.

Our methodology will be updated to include targeted capacity strengthening components that address some of the persistent challenges to execution in countries. We will offer bespoke support to underpin results, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

Recommendation 5

Develop criteria to identify and prioritize flagships that have potential for agricultural transformation

ACCEPTED

We will update our flagship development and design processes to reflect the evaluation's findings by the end of Q3 2022.

We will strengthen our flagship identification to include national promotion agencies and other key institutions and partners, in addition to ministries of agriculture.

We will support countries as they align national, flagship programs to analytical and diagnostic data that reflect opportunities for food systems and agricultural transformation. We will act as a critical and supportive friend by constructively strengthening approaches to evidence.

Recommendation 6

Become a more learning-focused organization with less burdensome grantee reporting and more rigorous farmer surveys

ACCEPTED

This is already a work-in-progress. Over the past two years, we have overhauled our entire Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning system, including its performance tracking and impact measurement. We plan to launch an updated learning system that better serves AGRA and our partners for the next strategy.

Other changes planned in 2022 include

- 1 Institutionalization of the Evaluations Policy
- 2 Comprehensive integration of impact and higher-level outcomes measurement
- 3 Macro/context data synthesis through an existing platform
- 4 Field-facing infrastructure for continuous data collection and analysis
- 5 Institutionalization of the Learning Agenda
- 6 Renewed focus on measuring system change and support to country data systems

Recommendation 7

Tackle critical issues facing agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa

ACCEPTED

Farmers and SMEs in sub-Saharan Africa face phenomenal challenges, including climate change and other external shocks, which require a dedicated approach to improve their resilience.

Our new strategy will incorporate food systems thinking across our programs.

Our seed assessment tool (SEEDSAT), which helps to identify deficiencies and inefficiencies and prioritize appropriate seed systems, has already been rolled out to six countries. It will now be deployed more widely as we seek to specifically target seed system strengthening as one way to address the productivity gaps of smallholder farmers.

We will expand our Environmental System Management System (ESMS) to adopt a more systematic approach to managing risk, environmental impact, and sustainability.

We will support governments with national, sub national and local approaches to climate adaption and resilience which will be rolled out over the next five years, with specific indicators to track progress. Our objective is to avoid past development mistakes, and to develop and roll out uniquely African solutions to African problems.

Recommendation 8

Expand gender and youth inclusion efforts

ACCEPTED

We are developing a country-based road map for youth engagement in agriculture, including incentivization policies recognizing the need to increase youth opportunities in farming systems as a sector with huge potential for meaningful employment.

More than one third of all farmers that we directly reached through our partnerships and VBAs were women – 3.5 million out of 10.1 million. We are introducing institutional targets and indicators to ensure that, going forward, at least 40% of our beneficiaries will be women.

COVID-19 has had a particularly negative impact on African SMEs, but especially those owned by women. This prompted our acquisition of VALUE4HER, an agribusiness platform for women with 2,044 registered businesses currently registered and ambitions to grow this number to 5,000. We will

leverage VALUE4HER as a mechanism to support female-led SMEs in agriculture and agribusiness and will roll it out across all the countries in which we operate during 2022.

5. Conclusion

AGRA believes that the evidence is clear: countries that take proactive approaches to building systems that provide inputs and technology to farmers significantly outperform those who do not. In laying out our ambition in 2017, our *'Strategy Overview for 2017-2021'* stated that the more farmers adopt an integrated package of technologies, such as seeds, nutrients, and agronomic practices, the more likely it is that their yields and incomes increase. Similarly, working in partnership with, or in support of, governments and other organizations, as well as improving mechanisms that unlock the power of the private sector, are also likely to improve the yields and incomes of farmers.

We have, as intended, been a catalyst for change in many areas. There is not a quick, one-size fits all solution to this challenge. We recognize that transformation takes time and will require public and private sectors to continue to align resources and capabilities to ensure a sustainable and resilient agricultural system in which smallholders can thrive.

By 2016, AGRA had delivered agricultural technologies, knowledge, and other resources to 15 million farmers across 18 countries.⁴ This work has improved the livelihoods of millions of farmers and their families.

Between 2017 and 2021, with funds averaging \$10 per farmer reached, we prioritized our activities to have the biggest impact, in the shortest time for the greatest number of people, though leveraging investments in public and private sectors. Our consortia platform allowed us to invest in extension and demonstrations while leveraging business investments. We prioritized seed gaps in early generation seed, policies, support to governments and support to village shops to encourage businesses to invest further.

By June 2021 – the time of our evaluation – our work had reached 10.1 million farmers directly, mostly with training in good agronomic practices and participated in demonstrations of seeds and fertilizer impact on yield.

Our 10.1 million farmer direct reach figure exceeded the target of nine million farmers that we set out to reach in 2017, just four years earlier. We also reached 19.1 million farmers indirectly through policy, state capability and partnerships. Indeed, by the end of 2021, we had reached 11 million farmers directly and 26.2 million indirectly as we closed our investments and measured impact.

Sustainable private sector players and capable public institutions that endure and provide the requisite support do not appear overnight. Agricultural yields and farmers' income do not just depend on functioning input and output markets and cannot, by themselves, eradicate hunger on the continent. The deep-rooted constraints facing farmers, together with the increasing effects of external shocks, require AGRA, governments and partners working on the continent to adjust their strategy and address the challenges of adaptation to climate change and resilience for smallholder farmers and local SMEs. Even in the best-case scenario, it would have been impossible to see food security and income gains for ALL 10.1 million farmers we reached directly - because some choose not to adopt, others have no means and some have no incentives, such as a market for their surplus.

As part of our work going forward, we will expand our climate-focused work, seek to provide farmers with access to the technologies such as drought resistant, rapidly growing seeds, and the requisite knowledge to benefit fully from our work, including advice on soil health, biodiversity, and water management,

We are focused on what African farmers need to be successful in their businesses, and AGRA will continue to evolve, acting on the recommendations of our independent evaluators and targeting

⁴ <https://agra.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/AGRA-Corporate-Strategy-2017-2021.pdf>

evidence-based solutions that ensure they enjoy the sustainable, enabling environment that they deserve.

AGRA started with an ambition – an idea – that Africa was not doomed to perpetual poverty, that rural lives could improve, and that an agricultural transformation could drive sustainable development. We at AGRA still believe in this ambition – and the role that we can play in mobilizing the best knowledge and practice, catalyzing change at scale, and ultimately creating a resilient enabling environment that sustainably transforms the lives of smallholder farmers. This evaluation helps us on this challenging journey. We will learn, evolve, and commit to our impact as we work through to 2030 and beyond.





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