

The G20 Food Systems Agenda

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine have significantly affected the global food supply system, heightening food insecurity and worsening famine worldwide. These crises triggered a significant food shortage and economic downturn, leading to considerable job losses, pushing millions into poverty and denying them the resources necessary for supporting healthy and nutritious meals. Substantial increases in food, energy and fertiliser costs have intensified the cost of living. The OECD and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) forecast that least developed countries and net food-importing developing nations will face a decline in their food import purchasing power from 2024–2033 due to persistent cost-of-living pressures, as the decrease in international prices for certain primary food commodities has not led to a reduction in domestic retail prices.¹ The goals of eradicating global hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition by 2030, as advocated by Agenda 2030, are substantially jeopardised.

The Ukrainian war affected global commodity markets and agricultural trade dynamics. Many developing countries, particularly in Africa, rely on Russia and Ukraine for a significant portion of their wheat and fertiliser resources. The war has led to commodity prices surging because of reduced export capacity and high fertiliser costs, consequently threatening global food security. While commodity prices have stabilised since 2022, food inflation has remained high. Rising commodity prices have contributed to higher inflation rates in many African countries, eroding purchasing power and exacerbating poverty levels.²

In numerous developing countries, agriculture and food systems are crucial for economic development, structural transformation, employment creation and food security. Thus, food systems are essential for achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 12 (Responsible Production and Consumption).

The evolving G20 agriculture and food systems agenda

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Saudi Arabian G20 presidency organised a virtual Extraordinary Agriculture Ministers Meeting on 21 April 2020, wherein G20 members committed to preventing any unjustified restrictive measures that could lead to excessive fluctuations in international food prices and threaten the food security and nutrition of substantial portions of the global population. In November 2020, G20 agriculture and water ministers released a [communiqué](#) emphasising the importance of responsible investments in agriculture and food systems. Similarly, the G20 [Riyadh Statement to Enhance Implementation of Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems](#) has attempted to establish short-term, country-specific objectives to facilitate the reduction of global per capita food waste and loss by 5% by 2030. It emphasises the need for responsible and sustainable investment in agriculture and food systems to strengthen global food security, support smallholder

¹ OECD and UN Food and Agriculture Organization, [Agricultural Outlook 2024–2033](#) (OECD-FAO, 2024).

² African Development Bank, [“Africa's Economic Performance and Outlook”](#), in *African Economic Outlook 2023: Mobilizing Private Sector Financing for Climate and Green Growth in Africa* (AfDB, 2023).

farmers and promote resilience against challenges such as climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Subsequently, Italy emphasised food security as a crucial element of its 2021 G20 presidency through the [Matera Declaration on Food Security, Nutrition, and Food Systems](#). The Matera Declaration emphasises that food security and sustainable food systems are crucial for eliminating hunger, fostering social cohesion and reducing socio-economic inequalities both between and within nations. The declaration emphasises the importance of strengthening diverse food systems at global, regional and local levels, and promotes improved rural-urban linkages to facilitate the achievement of zero hunger, particularly through effective initiatives aimed at empowering women and youth within the rural-urban continuum. The global community is urged to establish sustainable, inclusive and resilient food systems in accordance with SDG 2 (Zero Hunger). It is also urged achieve food security objectives by investing greater resources in food systems and intensifying efforts to ensure that all individuals have access to sufficient and safe food.

Following the Matera Declaration on 19 November 2021, the G20 Italian presidency established the [G20 Platform on SDG Localisation and Intermediary Cities](#) to leverage the potential of local governments to promote regional and national development goals associated with the SDGs. The platform aims to prioritise policies and instruments that support SDG localisation, including interventions that bolster sustainable local food systems. This encompasses food technology (employing scientific methodologies throughout the food supply chain) and mitigating their susceptibility to climate change in accordance with SDG 13 (Climate Action) and the Paris Agreement.

Under the Indonesian G20 presidency in 2022, leaders acknowledged ongoing global food security challenges and sought to enhance resilience against several crises, including the global repercussions of the war in Ukraine. They concurred with the accords facilitated by Türkiye and the UN, including the Black Sea Grain Initiative (first signed on 22 July 2022 by Ukraine, Russia, Türkiye and the UN) for the secure shipping of grain and food from Ukrainian ports, as well as the Memorandum of Understanding between the Russian Federation and the UN Secretariat, aimed at facilitating the unimpeded flow of Russian food goods and fertilisers to international markets. These initiatives sought to improve the transit of grains, food goods and fertilisers from Ukraine and the Russian Federation to mitigate tensions and prevent global food insecurity and starvation in developing countries. The Black Sea Grain Initiative ended in July 2023, by which time it had enabled the safe transport of more than 33 million tonnes of grain and additional commodities. This involved delivering a significant amount of grain to support humanitarian initiatives worldwide.

Under the Indian G20 presidency in 2023, the [New Delhi Leaders' Declaration](#) emphasised the importance of improving access to, availability of and effective utilisation of fertilisers and agricultural inputs. The G20 members committed to augmenting assistance for developing countries to address food poverty by fostering investments in inclusive, sustainable and resilient agricultural systems. During the Indian presidency, a notable achievement was the [G20 Deccan High-Level Principles on Food Security and Nutrition](#), which acknowledged the 'unique role of G20 members' as primary agricultural producers, consumers and exporters, as well as their responsibility to develop integrated policy responses.

In 2024, Brazil assumed the G20 presidency and took on a leadership role in shaping global priorities. One of its major initiatives was the establishment of the [Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty](#), in response to increasing food insecurity and economic disparities worldwide. The initiative aims to address rising food insecurity, poverty and economic inequalities worsened by global crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and Russia-Ukraine conflict. It underscores Brazil's historical commitment to social development and food security while aligning with broader global efforts to eradicate hunger and poverty.

Food systems-related initiatives outside the G20

Beyond the G20's attempts to address global food security and sustainable agriculture, several international organisations and initiatives have shaped food systems worldwide. These include emergency food aid, sustainable agricultural development and research-driven technologies for long-term food security.

The FAO, the worldwide food and agriculture policy leader, is a major player in this area. Through the Committee on World Food Security and the Food Systems Summit Action Tracks, the FAO sets international food production standards, supports agricultural development and fights food insecurity. These programmes have brought governments, researchers and civil society together to build sustainable and equitable food system policies. For long-term food security, the FAO has promoted sustainable agriculture and land and water management.

The World Food Programme (WFP) is another major participant in global food systems that focuses on emergency food aid and hunger alleviation. The WFP, the world's largest humanitarian organisation, feeds millions of people afflicted by war, natural catastrophes and economic crises. In addition to emergency responses, it undertakes long-term programmes, such as school feeding programmes, to enhance nutrition for low-income children and strengthen local agricultural markets. The [Hunger Monitoring System](#) examines global food insecurity trends and forms a policy.

The [International Fund for Agricultural Development \(IFAD\)](#), which invests in agriculture to alleviate poverty and develop rural areas, is another significant food system actor. IFAD targets smallholder farmers, who make up a large part of world food production. The organisation helps farmers adapt to climate change, increase productivity and access markets with financial and technical assistance. Through agricultural finance and rural entrepreneurship, IFAD helps ensure food security in some of the world's most vulnerable regions.

The multi-stakeholder funding platform [Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme \(GAFSP\)](#) helps low-income countries enhance their agricultural productivity and food access with financial and technical assistance. The GAFSP works with governments, farmers and agribusinesses to improve food production and distribution through public and private sector agriculture initiatives. This effort strengthens food systems in chronically food-insecure regions through targeted finance and strategic collaboration.

Scientific research and innovation drive agricultural transformation and the [Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research \(CGIAR\)](#) is a leader in this field. CGIAR research centres worldwide have developed climate-resilient crops, sustainable farming methods and food security strategies. The organisation has made advances in drought-resistant crops, irrigation systems and livestock management. The CGIAR promotes food security and agricultural sustainability by scientifically solving global agricultural problems.

[Africa's Alliance for a Green Revolution \(AGRA\)](#) has improved agricultural output, market access and financial inclusion for smallholder farmers. AGRA promotes rural livelihood policies and improved seeds, fertilisers and farming methods to transform African agriculture. The programme works with governments, corporate sector entities and development organisations to improve continental food systems.

After the [UN Food Systems Summit \(UNFSS\)](#) was held on 23 September 2021, the Food Systems Summit Coalition became a worldwide food system change platform. This coalition works with governments,

civil society and the commercial sector to improve the sustainability, resilience and inclusivity of food systems. The partnership addresses food loss and waste, sustainable supply chains and fair access to healthy food. The UNFSS is not a regularly scheduled event, such as the UN Climate Change Conference (COP), but rather a high-level event convened as needed to address urgent food system challenges. The UN also convenes a stocktaking moment related to the UNFSS every two years.

Synergies between the G7 and G20 food security priorities

Italian G7 outcomes

The Italian presidency of the G7 in 2024 aimed to establish or scale up a variety of initiatives to solve global food problems. The goal was to work more horizontally than in the past with partners in Europe and the Global South in order to mobilise public and private financial resources. Although the G7 has significant potential to reach consensus and mobilise significant financial resources in order to address global food challenges, the increasingly polarised global order necessitates effective coordination with other policy processes, such as the G20 or the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's Paris Agreement. In comparison to the G7, the G20 provides greater levels of representation for the needs of the Global South.

Prior to the Italian presidency, the G7 implemented numerous measures to mitigate hunger and facilitate the transformation of agri-food systems. The primary initiatives were the [L'Aquila Food Security Initiative](#), established in 2009, the [New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa](#), established in 2012, and the [Global Alliance for Food Security](#), established in 2022. While these initiatives represented significant efforts to mitigate food insecurity and enhance agricultural investments from the private sector in low- and middle-income countries, they also faced substantial criticism. The primary criticisms originated from major donors (France exited the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in 2018). Furthermore, small-scale producers and farmers' organisations in the Global South raised concerns regarding transparency in decision-making processes, insufficient co-design and instances of land grabbing by large transnational corporations.

The Italian presidency built on past G7 food systems initiatives by launching new programmes and strengthening existing ones, such as the [Apulia Food Security Initiative](#), the [Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils](#) and the [Public-Private Initiative on Coffee](#). Despite these efforts, G7 projects remain hampered by intrinsic flaws such as insufficient financial commitments to meet all agreed-upon aims and insufficient cooperation with more representative bodies, including the G20.

The Italian G7 presidency placed the transformation of sustainable agri-food systems on its policy agenda. Supporting food security in Africa was recognised as a priority, and the government strove to encourage and build synergies between G7 activities via its [Mattei Plan for Africa](#).³ Furthermore, Italy expanded on existing projects (such as the US-led 2023 Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils or the Technical Cooperation Collaborative established by the COP28 [Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems, and Climate Action](#)) and fully supported the [G20 Global Alliance Against Hunger](#)

³ Italian Government, "[Relazione sullo stato di attuazione del Piano Mattei](#)", October 10, 2024.

[and Poverty](#). Nonetheless, it is unclear how any of these measures will be carried out, given that G7 leaders have not made concrete financial commitments to operationalise the Apulia Food Systems Initiative.

Canada's G7 agricultural initiatives

In 2025, Canada assumed the G7 presidency. While the presidency has focused on a number of priorities, including inclusive growth, international trade, maritime security and peace, there are areas of convergence related to the G20's agricultural and climate change agendas.

The G7 Ministers of Agriculture convened in Syracuse on 27–28 September 2024 to reaffirm their commitments to enhancing the productivity, resilience and sustainability of agricultural and food systems, as well as to advancing food security and nutrition. The ministers noted some of the G7 agriculture contributions to the development of agriculture and food systems in Africa.

Canada supports a variety of food systems-related initiatives of relevance to Africa, including:

- The [Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme \(CAADP\)](#), which seeks to eradicate hunger and diminish poverty and malnutrition by fostering economic growth through agriculture-driven development. The ministers commended the AU's continuous efforts to formulate the post-Malabo 2026–2035 CAADP strategy and action plan, and the ratification of the Kampala CAADP statement in 2025. They also welcomed the G7 initiative on [Strengthening Seed Certification Capacity](#) in Africa led by the OECD, the Africampus project led by the CGIAR and the G7 Apulia Food Systems Initiative.
- Canada has made a CAD⁴ 10 million contribution to the [Africa Fertiliser Financing Mechanism](#), which serves as the primary financing mechanism for the AU Fertiliser Action Plan. The contribution aims to improve productivity by promoting efficient and sustainable use of fertilisers and soil amendments, as well as promoting soil health innovations and women's leadership in the agricultural input supply chain.
- The [Building Equitable Climate-Resilient African Bean and Insect Sectors](#) project, funded by the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture and the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology, aims to promote the use of organic, chitin-rich insect-based frass bio-fertilisers as a cost-effective alternative to inorganic chemical fertilisers for bean farmers.
- The [Green Economy of Ghana](#) project, led by Ashesi University and the Ghana Climate Innovation Centre, aims to promote climate-smart agriculture and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by partnering with private sector businesses such as EMFED Farms, HJA Africa and Deco Sustainable Farming. The project supports organic fertiliser production and improves access and affordability of organic and inorganic fertilisers.

⁴ Currency code for the Canadian dollar.

Priority areas outlined by the Agriculture Working Group and the Task Force on Food Security under the South African G20 presidency

South Africa has been actively addressing food security both domestically and through its leadership roles in international organisations.

Domestic initiatives

In his policy address to Parliament in July 2024, SA President Cyril Ramaphosa emphasised the government's commitment to revitalise the economy and ensure inclusive growth. He outlined plans to rejuvenate industries, develop infrastructure and seize green energy opportunities. These initiatives aim to tackle high unemployment, poverty and inequality, thereby enhancing the food security of marginalised communities.

G20 presidency

Assuming the G20 presidency in November 2024, South Africa prioritised inclusive economic growth and food security. Ramaphosa stated that the country intends to advance the G20's efforts toward sustainable global economic development, ensuring that no one is left behind. A key focus was to bring the development priorities of Africa and the Global South to the forefront of the G20 agenda. Under the South African G20 presidency, the Agriculture Working Group under the Sherpa Track has identified the following priorities:

- Priority 1: Promotion of policies and investments that drive inclusive market participation towards improve food and nutrition security.
- Priority 2: Empowering youth and women in agrifood systems.
- Priority 3: Fostering Innovation and technology transfer in agriculture and agro-processing.
- Priority 4: Building climate resilience for sustainable agricultural production.

South Africa has also established a task force on food systems, which is working with technical partners to develop a set of three studies under its G20 presidency:

- analysing macroeconomic factors and key drivers impacting global commodity price volatility, domestic food prices, affordability and accessibility of food;
- exploring the feasibility of various commodity price stabilisation techniques at regional and global levels; and
- exploring the food security policy instruments and food systems approaches that are most effective, sustainable and climate resilient at national, regional and global levels.

Meeting of Agricultural Chief Scientists

The Meeting of Agricultural Chief Scientists is an annual assembly of the G20 nations' leading agricultural scientists, established in 2012. Its primary objective is to collaboratively address global challenges in agriculture and nutrition through coordinated research efforts and the development of joint solution strategies. In 2025, under South Africa's G20 presidency, several significant events have been organised to align African agricultural priorities with the G20's global initiatives. These events underscore South Africa's commitment to fostering international collaboration in agricultural research and innovation, with the aim of addressing both regional and global food security challenges.

BRICS engagement

While chairing BRICS in 2023, South Africa emphasised partnerships for accelerated growth and sustainable development. The BRICS nations adopted the Beijing Declaration, which includes the [BRICS Strategy on Food Security Cooperation](#), aiming to enhance collaboration in supply chains and strengthen food security among member countries. Under the 2025 Brazilian BRICS chairmanship, the Rio de Janeiro Declaration emphasised the importance of supporting enhanced food security and expressed support for the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty launched under the Brazilian G20 presidency.

AU initiatives

The AU has committed to implementing a Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, recognising the need to end hunger and malnutrition as part of the UN Agenda 2030 and the AU Agenda 2063. The AU has [several initiatives](#) to improve food systems in Africa, including CAADP, the Food Systems Resilience Programme and the Africa Common Position on Food Systems. Recently, the [Kampala Declaration](#), a 10-year strategy adopted to support the next phase of implementation for CAADP, shifted Africa's agricultural policy to focus on sustainable and inclusive agri-food systems, setting ambitious goals for resilience, investment and governance by 2035.

SADC initiatives

South Africa, as a member of SADC, has been actively involved in regional efforts to enhance food security. [The 2015–2025 SADC Food and Nutrition Security Strategy](#) aims to significantly reduce food and nutrition insecurity in the region by 2025. This strategy focuses on improving access to adequate and nutritious food, promoting sustainable agricultural production and enhancing disaster preparedness.

In 2022, the [SADC Regional Vulnerability Assessment and Analysis Programme](#) reported that child malnutrition will remain a significant concern, with stunting rates averaging above 25% in most member states. The report emphasised the need for continued efforts to address both acute and chronic food insecurity in the region. South Africa's leadership within SADC includes supporting initiatives such as the Regional Strategic Food Reserve, which aims to serve as a buffer against food shortages and price volatility. In addition, the country collaborates with regional partners to promote sustainable agricultural practices and improve food distribution networks. Through these collaborative efforts, South Africa has contributed to strengthening food security across the SADC region, aligning with its broader commitment to sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Conclusion

The G20 functions as a crucial platform to address global development issues. As an international forum, it can effectively mobilise agreements and formulate feasible funding solutions to combat global hunger. The G20 is well positioned to address complex global issues related to climate, sustainability and the reform of international finance institutions, although it is occasionally impeded by geopolitical conflicts arising from the diverse interests of its members. South Africa has an opportunity to advance global efforts to address food security through its G20 presidency, but in order to achieve these goals it will require partnerships and effective diplomacy. It will also be important to draw on and align with other global processes addressing issues of relevance to food systems, including the Committee on World Food Security and the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty, and related forums, such as the Nutrition for Growth Summit and Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development.

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About SALLA

SALLA is an independent, non-government think tank whose key strategic objectives are to make effective input into public policy, and to encourage wider and more informed debate on international affairs, with particular emphasis on African issues and concerns.

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