

Key Takeaways ATLAS and OCP Group panel on “**Empowering African farmers through a shared vision for sustainable agriculture and customized support**”, September 2, 2025, African Food Systems Forum

Participants: H.E. Dr. **Ibrahim Mayaki**, Co-Chair of ATLAS and Special Envoy for Food Systems, African Union, former Prime Minister of Niger; Dr. **Donald Madukwe**, Head of Agronomy and Strategic Partnerships, OCP Africa; **Aisha Hadejia**, Partner, Sahel Consulting; Dr. **Mamou Ehui**, Executive Director, Global Phosphorus Institute (GPI); **Sonya Hoo**, Managing Director & Partner, Boston Consulting Group (BCG); **Augustin Grandgeorge**, Head of ATLAS initiative, Paris Peace Forum.

Dr. Mayaki opened the session by reframing the narrative around African farmers, emphasizing that farmers are not the source of Africa's poverty but the key to its prosperity. He highlighted that **80% of the food consumed in Africa is produced by smallholder farmers**, who are also the first financiers of the continent's agri-food systems, yet they have been treated as passive recipients of aid rather than powerful engines of growth. He traced the evolution of African agricultural policy from Maputo (2003) to Malabo (2014) to Kampala (2025), noting the **consistent focus on increasing investments in agri-food systems**. While the Malabo Declaration called for 10% of government budgets to be allocated to agriculture, only 10-14 countries out of more than 50 achieved this target. The Kampala Declaration maintains the 10% target and introduces the **ambitious goal of mobilizing \$100 billion annually for agri-food systems transformation, a target that ATLAS is designed to support**. Dr. Mayaki emphasized the importance of "**national domestication**" of continental frameworks, ensuring coherence between continental, regional, and national investment strategies. He also stressed that while financing instruments such as patient capital and blended finance are critical, strong institutions and **governance structures are essential** to channel these investments effectively. He concluded by identifying three essential pillars for farmer empowerment: rights to resources (secure and fair access to land, water, and inputs); power in the market (fair prices, access to strong markets, and infrastructure to enable trade); and voice in decisions (strengthening farmer organizations to influence government policies and investment mechanisms)

Augustin Grandgeore provided the institutional context for the ATLAS initiative. He explained that **African agrifood systems are central to solving many Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and yet remain heavily underinvested. ATLAS, launched at the Paris Peace Forum in November 2023, aims to bridge this investment gap by promoting a collective platform for advocacy, coordination, and accountability. He described how the 2x30 Challenge launched at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2025, aims to double agrifood investment in Africa by 2030, from \$50 billion to \$100 billion annually. He also introduced the ATLAS Investment Barometer, a tool designed to track capital flows and ensure transparency in financing commitments.

Dr. Madukwe presented OCP Africa's approach to transforming African agriculture through customization, tailored support that addresses the specific needs of farmers in their local



contexts. Despite Africa holding significant arable land and the potential to close up to 50% of the SDGs gaps, over half of the world's extreme poor live in Africa, 60% of Africans suffer from acute food insecurity, and food imports consume over 70% of the continent's GDP. **OCP Africa champions a farmer-centric approach built on three interconnected pillars: technical support** (customized agronomic advice and inputs); **financial access** (affordable credit and insurance); and **technology deployment** (quality seeds and fertilizers suited to local soil conditions). Key interventions include the OCP School Lab, a mobile laboratory conducting soil testing and training in good agronomic practices, enabling farmers to invest in the right nutrients at the right time. Beyond that, OCP develops blends with essential micronutrients to improve crop yields and food quality. The Agri Booster Initiative bundles financing, training, inputs, and market access through partnerships. OCP leverages the 4R principles of nutrient stewardship (right product, right time, right place, right rate) to deliver value to farmers. Through demonstration plots since 2023, OCP has showcased significant results: in Tanzania, farmers achieved yield increases of over 50% in potatoes and up to 30% in cereals; in Ethiopia, specific fertilizer blends for acidic soils improved efficiency; and across Senegal, Ghana, and other countries, **farmers using customized fertilizers recorded substantial yield increases**. Dr. Madukwe concluded that precision nutrient management is essential to close nutrient gaps and strengthen food systems, emphasizing that partnerships are key to building resilient agriculture.

The panel, moderated by **Ms. Sonya Hoo** from BCG, explored the core elements of sustainable agriculture in the African context and the types of support farmers need to thrive. **Ms. Aisha Hadejia** emphasized that **sustainable agriculture must be defined by Africans for Africa**, noting that for agriculture to be sustainable, it must be environmentally sustainable (good for the planet), economically viable (good for business), and socially equitable (fair and inclusive, without widening inequality). In Africa, the conversation must go beyond yield increases and climate resilience to include dignified jobs, stability, and livelihoods. She stressed the **importance of context-specific solutions**, noting that a farmer in Senegal has very different needs than a farmer in Nigeria, and that designing for farmers as a monolithic block will continue to deliver solutions that don't scale.

Regarding tailored support for different farmer segments, **Ms. Hadejia** noted that smallholder farmers need access to affordable inputs, localized information (such as pest identification and weather forecasts), and small-ticket financing that doesn't push them into debt. Mid-scale commercial farmers require working capital to scale their operations, while women farmers face additional structural barriers, including lack of collateral, limited access to land, and invisibility. **Support for women must include gender-sensitive lending models** (such as lending groups and village savings), **leasing arrangements, and mentorship**. What all segments have in common is the need for an integrated system of delivery that bundles finance, knowledge, and market access.

Dr. Madukwe emphasized that technology without adoption is merely an academic exercise, and to ensure adoption, support must be bundled through partnerships. OCP Africa's Agri Booster initiative brings together multiple partners, including input providers such as Syngenta for seeds and chemicals and microfinance institutions to create a unified delivery system for farmers. The key is to **co-create solutions with farmers**, understanding their pain points before



designing bundles. For example, if farmers receive fertilizers too late in the season, the entire bundle fails, so timely delivery and alignment with farmers' needs are critical. Bundling must also extend to engaging government and extension services. Finance ministers do not operate in a vacuum, they respond to leadership priorities, so advocacy must target top leadership to ensure that agri-food systems transformation is at the core of national planning processes.

Dr. Mamou Ehui, Executive Director of the Global Phosphorus Institute (GPI), highlighted the **critical role of phosphorus in soil health and sustainable intensification**. She noted a significant paradox: while Africa holds more than 70% of global phosphorus reserves, over 70% of African soils are phosphorus-deficient, which undermines soil health and agricultural productivity. GPI addresses this challenge through four pillars: science-based diagnosis (generating accurate data and insights to inform the right solutions); context-specific solutions (promoting tailored interventions that reduce nutrient losses, currently, more than 54% of nutrients applied to soils are lost to emissions or runoff rather than being absorbed by crops); investment in soil health (making the economic case to donors and development partners that investing in soil fertility is the foundation for sustainable agriculture); and partnerships (collaborating across sectors to ensure sustainable phosphorus management benefits farmers, policymakers, and ecosystems). **For farmers, success means having the right nutrients** at the right time, in the right place, at an affordable price, leading to higher yields and improved livelihoods. For policymakers, success means having reliable data to inform evidence-based policies, while for partners, success means adopting a holistic approach that puts smallholder farmers at the center of the value chain.

The session underscored several critical messages for advancing African agri-food systems transformation. First, farmers must be at the center: they are not passive recipients of aid but powerful engines of growth and the first financiers of Africa's agri-food systems, so investing in farmers is investing in prosperity, stability, and food security. Second, customization is key—one-size-fits-all approaches do not work, and tailored support, whether in the form of fertilizers, financing, or training, must address the specific needs of farmers in their local contexts. Third, integrated delivery systems are essential: finance, knowledge, inputs, and market access must be bundled together through partnerships, as no single actor can deliver transformation alone. Fourth, soil health is foundational—investing in soil fertility through precision nutrient management and sustainable phosphorus use is critical to increasing yields, reducing environmental harm, and ensuring long-term agricultural resilience. Fifth, scale through partnerships: public-private partnerships, farmer organizations, and multi-stakeholder platforms like ATLAS are essential to achieving the scale and impact needed to transform African agriculture. Sixth, governance and accountability matter, strong institutions, leadership alignment, and accountability mechanisms are necessary to channel investments effectively and ensure that farmers have the rights, market power, and voice they need to succeed. Finally, peace and stability are prerequisites: sustainable agriculture cannot thrive in contexts of conflict and insecurity, so addressing these root causes is essential for long-term transformation.