POLICY BRIEF

Lead the Transition : Biofertilisers & biostimulants for Africa's food sovereignty

Primary Focus : Champion a continental shift from synthetic fertilisers to biofertilisers and biostimulants.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Africa's dependence on imported synthetic fertilisers is a triple threat — to economic stability, soil and environmental health, and food sovereignty. Price volatility, foreign currency drain, and degraded soils are undermining productivity and resilience.

The African Union's Fertilizer and Soil Health Action Plan (2023–2033) already calls for increased domestic production and use of organic, biological, and recycled nutrient sources. This brief proposes going further : **make biofertilisers and biostimulants (B&B) the foundation of African soil fertility strategies** — with synthetic fertilisers phased down and replaced.

Senegal, as host of the 2025 African Food Systems Forum, is uniquely positioned to lead this continental shift.

1. The Current Fertiliser Crisis

1.1. Price and supply shocks

- Global fertiliser prices spiked by up to **300% between 2021 and 2023** due to COVID-19 disruptions and the Russia–Ukraine conflict.
- Senegalese farmers now pay around **20,000 CFA** (~€30–35) for a 50 kg bag of urea or NPK, compared to ~12,000 CFA pre-2020.
- Africa consumes only **18 kg/ha** on average, far below the Abuja target of 50 kg/ha, and Senegal's average is just **9 kg/ha**.

1.2. Import dependence

- Most African countries import nitrogen and potash fertilisers ; even with some phosphate production, the continent remains vulnerable to currency shortages and external shocks.
- Senegal's fertiliser import bill runs into tens of billions of CFA annually, draining foreign exchange reserves.

1.3. Soil degradation

- Heavy reliance on synthetics without organic matter replenishment depletes soil carbon and microbial life, leading to declining yields and fertiliser "addiction".

Why Biofertilisers & Biostimulants ?

2.1. Advantages over synthetics

- **Economic sovereignty :** Domestic production uses local feedstocks (composted biomass, agricultural residues, beneficial microbes), keeping value in the national economy. Reduce exposure to volatile global input markets and currency shocks.
- **Soil regeneration :** B&B restore microbial life, improve nutrient cycling, and build soil organic carbon — boosting productivity without ecological harm.
- **Climate resilience :** Healthy soils retain more water, withstand drought, and sequester carbon through organic matter build-up.
- **Public health :** Reduce water contamination and chemical exposure.
- **Job creation :** Manufacturing, distribution, quality testing, and advisory services can be dominated by SMEs, especially youth- and women-led enterprises.

2.2. Market opportunity

- Global biofertiliser market expected to grow at over **12% annually**, reaching USD 4–5 billion by 2030; Africa is a largely untapped market.
- AfCFTA provides a platform for harmonised standards and regional trade. Senegal and other early movers can capture export markets.

What are biofertilisers ?

Biofertilisers are living fertilisers made from beneficial microorganisms. They are produced locally by fermenting natural products such as manure, forest soil, molasses or whey. They provide the soil and plants with easily assimilable microbes, enzymes, vitamins and minerals. In agroecology, they restore soil life, remineralise, improve the nutrient cycle, photosynthesis and crop resilience. Produced locally at low cost, they offer a regenerative alternative to synthetic fertilisers and reduce dependence on inputs.

What are biostimulants ?

Natural substances or microorganisms that stimulate physiological processes in plants rather than directly providing nutrients. Derived from algae extracts, humic acids, amino acids, inoculates or hydrolysates, they improve nutrient absorption, promote root growth, strengthen stress tolerance and support soil-plant-microbe interactions. In agroecology, they complement biofertilisers to maintain yields, adapt to climate change and protect ecosystems while reducing chemical inputs.

3. Policy Alignment : AU Commitments

- **AU Fertilizer & Soil Health Action Plan (2023–2033) :** Explicitly includes biofertilisers and biostimulants in Integrated Soil Fertility Management.
- **Nairobi Declaration (2024) :** Heads of State commit to tripling fertiliser use by 2033 including biofertilisers and biostimulants, and scaling local production.
- **AfCFTA :** Opportunity to harmonise registration and quality standards for bio-inputs.

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4. Senegal's Leadership Opportunity at AGRF

4.1. National actions

- Announce a **Biofertiliser Transition Plan** to replace 50% of synthetic use by 2030.
- Redirect the **40 billion CFA fertiliser subsidy budget** toward B&B production and soil health packages.
- Invest in composting, microbial inoculant production, and feedstock supply chains.

4.2. Regional role

- Establish Senegal as a **West African hub** for biofertiliser manufacturing, quality testing, and training.
- Lead harmonisation of biofertiliser standards in ECOWAS and AfCFTA.

5. Policy Recommendations for Africa

1. **Repurpose subsidie**s toward B&B-based soil health packages.
2. **Finance local manufacturing** with concessional loans, guarantees, and SME funds.
3. **Upgrade quality infrastructur**e for microbial product testing.
4. **Strengthen extension system**s to integrate B&B into advisory services, reaching 70% of farmers by 2030.
5. **Adopt biological soil health indicators** (microbial activity, organic carbon) in monitoring frameworks.

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6. Implementation Roadmap

2025–2026 (Kick-off)

- Tax and regulatory reform for B&B inputs.
- Launch national B&B SME fund.
- Begin public procurement of B&B for government-supported farms.

2027–2029 (Scale)

- AfCFTA-wide mutual recognition of biofertiliser standards.
- Expand public-private partnerships for B&B R&D.

2030–2033 (Consolidate)

- Tie input support to verified soil health gains.
- Integrate B&B into climate and nutrition strategies.

7. Expected Outcomes

- **Jobs :** 1,000+ B&B SMEs, 40% youth-/women-led.
- **Soil health :** Increase land under sustainable soil management from 8% (2021) to 30% by 2033.
- **Import savings :** Reduce synthetic fertiliser imports by 50% by 2030.
- **Climate :** Lower nitrous oxide emissions; higher soil carbon stocks.

8. Risks & Mitigation

- **Quality concerns :** Build accredited labs and harmonise standards.
- **Farmer uptake :** Bundle B&B with market access, training, and short-term yield benefits.
- **Policy fragmentation :** Use AfCFTA and AU frameworks to harmonise across countries.

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