



Tracking the Role of the African Development Bank in Reshaping African Agriculture

AF SA

ALLIANCE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN AFRICA

Foreword

Africa's food systems are undergoing rapid change. Farmers and communities are navigating soil degradation, climate pressures, shifting markets, and declining biodiversity, yet they continue to play a central role in sustaining our continent's food security and cultural heritage. Understanding how public finance shapes these systems is therefore essential.

This report provides an important analysis of the African Development Bank's agricultural investments and their implications for communities, ecosystems, and national priorities. The findings show that while AfDB mobilises significant resources for agriculture, much of this financing continues to support models that rely on synthetic inputs, monocropping, and corporate value chains. At the same time, the report highlights limited support for agroecological approaches, local seed systems, and diverse food economies that many African farmers depend on.

The interviews included here offer valuable insights. Communities often experience consultation without meaningful influence. They report challenges related to land acquisition, orientation, compensation, crop choices, market volatility, and labour burdens. These accounts underline the importance of aligning development investments with local realities, cultural practices, nutrition needs, and gender dynamics.

At the same time, the report identifies practical opportunities. AfDB has the experience, technical capacity, and mandate to support ecological and climate-resilient food systems. By strengthening transparency, improving participation, and expanding investment in diversified, low-input farming systems, the Bank can play an important role in advancing food sovereignty and climate resilience across the continent.

AFSA shares this report in the spirit of partnership. We hope it will encourage further discussion on how agricultural finance can strengthen ecological resilience, support farmer innovation, and contribute to sustainable and just food systems in Africa.

Million Belay

General Coordinator, Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)

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Executive Summary

Between 2019 and 2025, the African Development Bank (AfDB) emerged as one of the most influential institutions shaping the direction of African agriculture. Through sovereign loans, grants, and an expanding private-sector portfolio, the Bank channelled billions of dollars into value chains, staple-crop production, irrigation, agro-industrial zones, and large agribusinesses. This study examines how those financial flows are structured and assesses the extent to which AfDB's investments support agroecological, inclusive, and climate-resilient food systems.

Using the Agroecology Coalition Tool (ACT), financial data, project documentation, and key-informant interviews, the study finds that AfDB's agricultural financing continues to be dominated by industrial, input-intensive models. Fertiliser subsidies, hybrid seed packages, mechanisation, and monocrop value chains remain at the centre of most operations. While nearly half of agricultural approvals are now labelled "climate finance," the underlying production model still prioritises Green Revolution technologies and large-scale infrastructure framed as "climate-smart."

Private-sector investments have expanded significantly since 2021, particularly through loans and guarantees to large agribusinesses such as ETG, Zambeef, and DAL Group. These operations reinforce vertically integrated, corporate-driven value chains and often lack transparency regarding sub-projects or ecological impacts. Sovereign lending remains the backbone of the portfolio, especially in food-crisis years, but similarly gravitates toward productivity-focused interventions: irrigation schemes, staple-crop intensification, and agro-industrial processing hubs.

Across the 20 projects assessed, agroecological alignment is consistently low. Only a handful—such as initiatives in The Gambia, Liberia, and Burkina Faso—integrate elements of diversification, women's inclusion, or local resilience. None reach high ecological alignment, and major flagship programmes such as TAAT and the Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones (SAPZ) score at the lowest end due to their uniform, top-down, technology-driven design.

At the same time, the study identifies meaningful opportunities for reform. AfDB's climate commitments, social safeguards, and decentralisation initiatives—if aligned with concrete ecological indicators and stronger farmer participation—could help shift the portfolio toward more resilient and locally rooted systems. Interviewees stressed that communities often experience "consultation without influence." Strengthening participation, transparency, and ecological metrics would significantly enhance the Bank's impact.

The findings suggest that AfDB holds the financial leverage and institutional reach to support a just agricultural transition in Africa—but realising this potential requires moving beyond industrial input delivery and toward diversified agroecological systems that regenerate ecosystems, support local markets, and centre farmer agency.



Only a handful—such as initiatives in The Gambia, Liberia, and Burkina Faso—integrate elements of diversification, women's inclusion, or local resilience.

Key Takeaways

01

Industrial financing dominates AfDB's agricultural strategy

Sovereign lending accounts for most agricultural approvals, and private-sector finance has grown sharply since 2021. Across both windows, investment remains heavily focused on fertilisers, hybrid seeds, mechanisation, irrigation, and industrial processing.

02

Climate finance is expanding but tied to the same high-input model

Nearly half of agricultural investments are labelled as climate finance, yet most "climate-smart" projects replicate Green Revolution approaches. Few integrate biodiversity, soil regeneration, or ecosystem-based adaptation.

03

Corporate value chains are strengthened through non-sovereign lending

Large agribusinesses and logistics firms receive substantial financing, shaping regional food systems around supermarket-oriented supply chains. Smallholders are positioned primarily as suppliers rather than co-designers.

04

Agroecological alignment remains limited

None of the 20 assessed projects achieve high agroecological scores. Only a small group show moderate alignment, often due to social inclusion rather than ecological transformation. Flagship programmes such as TAAT and SAPZ score very low.

05

Transparency and participation gaps persist

Private and intermediated finance provide limited visibility into sub-projects, beneficiaries, and ecological outcomes. Consultation is common, but community influence on project design is minimal.

06

Clear opportunities for a strategic shift

AfDB could significantly strengthen its contribution to resilient food systems by:

- embedding meaningful farmer and civil society participation
- improving transparency around private-sector and intermediated lending
- linking climate finance to measurable ecological indicators
- supporting territorial markets and locally rooted crop diversification
- scaling proven community-driven agroecological initiatives

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACCF - Africa Climate Change Fund

ACT - Agroecology Coalition Tool

ADF - African Development Fund

AfCFTA - African Continental Free Trade Area

AfDB - African Development Bank

AEFPF - African Emergency Food Production Facility

CGIAR - Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

CREW - Climate-Resilient Wheat Value Chain Development (Ethiopia)

DFI - Development Finance Institution

ETG - Export Trading Group

E&S - Environmental and Social

GAFFSP - Global Agriculture and Food Security Program

GCA - Global Center on Adaptation

GCF - Green Climate Fund

IFAD - International Fund for Agricultural Development

IFC - International Finance Corporation

IRM - Independent Review Mechanism (AfDB)

JICA - Japan International Cooperation Agency

LoCAL - Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility

NSO - Non-Sovereign Operation

OCP-Africa - Office Chérifien des Phosphates (Africa)

PAASIFEJ - Sustainable Agriculture Empowerment Programme (Morocco)

PPP - Public-Private Partnership

SAPZ - Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones

SADFONS - Smallholder Agriculture Development and Food Security Project (Liberia)

SDR - Special Drawing Right

SEWPP - Sudan Emergency Wheat Production Project

TAAT - Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation

TAAT-S - TAAT Savannas Programme (Ghana)

TSF - Transition Support Facility (AfDB)

UA - Unit of Account (AfDB's internal currency)

UNCDF - United Nations Capital Development Fund

WFP - World Food Programme



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An african farmer harvesting Sukuma wiki (Brassica species) from her garden.

(Photo by Rohit Dey on Unsplash)

Background and Rationale

Africa's agricultural transformation is unfolding amid urgent challenges of food insecurity, climate impacts, and growing inequality. The African Development Bank (AfDB) has positioned agriculture as a core driver of growth under its Feed Africa strategy (2016-2025), emphasising technology adoption, value-chain development, and agro-industrialisation. This approach prioritises productivity gains through inputs, mechanisation, and large enterprise platforms.

Development Finance Institutions (DFIs), including AfDB, now play a decisive role in shaping African food systems. They channel billions into logistics, processing, input distribution, irrigation, and formal retail. This financial architecture has accelerated the consolidation of corporate value chains, often led by multinational conglomerates. While these investments expand market infrastructure, critics argue they risk concentrating power, marginalising smallholders, and obscuring accountability across borders.

Concerns around AfDB's Dakar II "Feed Africa" initiative highlight the risk of reinforcing a Green Revolution model centred on land expansion, standardised seed systems, and high-input monocultures. This raises questions about whether current financing pathways can deliver food security while strengthening biodiversity, farmer autonomy, and ecological resilience.

At the same time, research challenges the widespread assumption that financing for agroecology is scarce. Evidence suggests that redirecting existing agricultural finance could support ecological practices, local markets, and community-led innovation at scale.

This study therefore examines AfDB's agricultural financing between 2019 and 2025 to understand:

- how funds are allocated,
- who benefits,
- which models are being prioritised, and
- whether current investments align with agroecological, food sovereignty, and climate justice principles.

The goal is to provide a clearer, evidence-based picture of how AfDB financing is reshaping African agriculture, and of the opportunities for a more equitable and ecologically grounded approach.

Overview of DFIs and Their Mandates

Development Finance Institutions (DFIs) are publicly backed lenders created to invest in sectors and regions considered too risky for commercial finance. Their mandates extend beyond profit generation to include poverty reduction, private-sector development, and improved social and environmental outcomes (Faye et al., 2013). In agriculture, DFIs such as the African Development Bank (AfDB), the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC), and other regional lenders finance the entire value chain—from inputs and primary production to processing, logistics, and retail.

DFIs justify their interventions through "additionality": long-term financing, political risk mitigation, technical support, and social and environmental safeguards that commercial banks typically do not offer. They also promote innovation, rural infrastructure, and risk-management tools aimed at improving smallholder participation and resilience (Mamun & Várallyai, 2025).

However, DFIs face persistent challenges, including the high risks of agricultural lending, limited monitoring capacity, and weak governance frameworks. These tensions reflect their dual role as both financiers and policy influencers. Within Africa, the AfDB's mandate and regional focus make it the most prominent DFI shaping agricultural development trajectories on the continent.

The AfDB's Role in Agricultural Transformation

The African Development Bank (AfDB), established in 1964 to promote economic and social development, has become a central driver of Africa's agricultural transformation (Ikpe, 2020). Historically focused on infrastructure and industrialisation, the Bank has increasingly integrated agriculture into its broader vision of structural transformation and regional integration. Its "High 5" priorities—particularly Feed Africa and Integrate Africa—place agriculture at the centre of efforts to expand markets, strengthen value chains, and enhance competitiveness.

The Feed Africa strategy (2016-2025) emphasises productivity gains through improved seeds, irrigation, mechanisation, and value-chain development (AfDB, 2016). It also promotes agro-industrialisation and regional market integration aligned with continental frameworks such as Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The AfDB distinguishes itself from global multilaterals through its regional mandate and its blend of finance, policy advice, and analytical work. This dual role enables it to promote "developmental regionalism," using finance to strengthen cross-border infrastructure and harmonised value chains (Nyadera et al., 2022).

As a result, AfDB now plays an outsized role in shaping African food systems and in determining the balance between productivity, commercialisation, climate resilience, and inclusion.



Context of the African Green Revolution and Industrial Agriculture Financing

The Green Revolution for Africa (GR4A) was designed to boost productivity through hybrid seeds, synthetic fertilisers, pesticides, and tightly managed value chains, drawing inspiration from earlier Asian and Latin American experiences (Moseley et al., 2015). Within this framework, smallholders are repositioned as commercial producers linked to input suppliers and processors. Over the past decade, AfDB’s agricultural portfolio has increasingly aligned with this model, emphasising agribusiness development and public-private partnerships (PPPs) as core pathways for rural transformation.

This approach is shaped by a development logic that prioritises scale, capital intensity, and market integration. Critics argue that such financing frameworks risk marginalising smallholders and indigenous ecological practices, while concentrating decision-making among large firms that operate across multiple countries (Bassett & Munro, 2022; Park 2025). These concerns are reflected in analyses of AfDB’s Dakar II “Feed Africa” initiative, which highlight risks associated with land expansion targets, standardised seed regimes, and high-input monocultures (AFSA 2024/2025).

Alternative systems—such as intercropping, agroforestry, seed saving, and pastoralism—often sit outside these formal financing models because they do not align easily with commercial scalability or investor-driven metrics. This places AfDB at a strategic junction: it is expected to drive rapid productivity gains and attract private investment, even as ecological and equity considerations become increasingly urgent.



AfDB is expected to drive rapid productivity gains and attract private investment, — even as ecological and equity considerations become increasingly urgent.

Relevance of Agroecology, Food Sovereignty, and Climate Justice

Agroecology promotes farming systems that rebuild soil health, enhance biodiversity, and reduce dependence on costly external inputs, drawing on both ecological science and traditional knowledge (Altieri et al., 2012). It challenges the industrial model's focus on input intensification and short-term productivity, instead emphasising long-term ecosystem resilience and farmer agency (Ekumah, 2024).

Food sovereignty complements agroecology by asserting the right of communities to determine their own food and agricultural systems. It protects farmer-managed seeds, prioritises territorial markets, and centres cultural and democratic control—an approach that research shows often produces more equitable outcomes than top-down modernisation (Gliessman, 2020).

Climate justice highlights the unequal burdens imposed by climate change and the disproportionate vulnerability of communities that have contributed least to global emissions. Agroecology contributes to climate mitigation and adaptation through carbon sequestration, diversification, and resilience-building (Sisodiya, 2023). Climate justice further requires that adaptation finance prioritise smallholders, pastoralists, and indigenous communities who are both frontline actors and knowledge holders.

Taken together, agroecology, food sovereignty, and climate justice offer a coherent framework for evaluating agricultural investment.



The foreground ecological sustainability, equity, and local agency, and provide critical benchmarks for assessing whether AfDB's financing models support or constrain a just transition in African food systems (AFSA, 2025).

Agroecology – contributes to climate mitigation and adaptation through carbon sequestration, diversification, and resilience-building (Sisodiya, 2023)





A farmer planting young onion seedlings into prepared soil in Gabon Africa.

(Photo by Fajar Magsyar on Unsplash)

Methodology

Objectives and scope

This study examines how the African Development Bank (AfDB) financed agriculture between 2019 and 2025 and assesses the extent to which these investments align with agroecological principles. It maps financial flows by instrument, channel, subsector, and geography, and evaluates project design using the Agroecology Coalition Tool (ACT). Stakeholder perspectives collected through key informant interviews contextualise and validate the findings.

Study period and inclusion criteria

Projects were included if they:

- Were approved or active between 1 January 2019 and 31 December 2025;
- Had budgets exceeding USD 1 million; and
- Fell within AfDB's agricultural scope, including inputs, production, processing, storage, logistics, irrigation, SME finance, and climate/resilience programmes with agricultural components.

Data collection

Desk review

A structured desk review was conducted covering:

- AfDB project appraisal reports, completion reports, Environmental and Social (E&S) documents, Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) notes, annual reports, Feed Africa strategy materials, and climate finance windows;
- co-financier sources (IFC, EIB, AFD/Proparco, FMO, DFC), including IATI records and Early Warning System disclosures;
- selected national and UN agency implementation documents; and
- peer-reviewed and grey literature on DFI agricultural financing, climate finance, and agroecology in African contexts (e.g., Rock & Park 2020; AFSA 2025; Mamun & Várallyai 2025).

All sources were catalogued in a central database with traceable links.

Financial flow data

For each operation, the following were extracted:

- **Instrument and channel** (sovereign vs. non-sovereign; loans, grants, guarantees, equity; direct lending vs. intermediated finance);
- **Use of funds / subsector** (inputs, irrigation, primary production, processing, logistics, retail systems, advisory services, climate finance windows);
- **Geography and scale** (country/region, commitment amounts, co-financiers, disclosed beneficiaries).

Amounts stated in AfDB's Unit of Account (UA), equivalent to the IMF's Special Drawing Right (SDR), were converted to USD using annual AfDB or IMF SDR-USD averages. Multi-year projects used the approval-year rate for consistency.

Key informant interviews

Five semi-structured interviews were conducted using purposive sampling to capture diverse perspectives (policy research, programme implementation, development finance, and civil society). Snowballing was used to identify additional candidates. Interviews followed a common guide focusing on:

- Financing patterns,
- Transparency,
- Participation and safeguards,
- Climate framing, and
- Evidence needs.

Interviews were audio-recorded with consent or documented in detailed notes. Identities are anonymised.

Data analysis

Financial flow analysis

Projects were categorised by subsector, instrument, channel, and region. Commitment amounts were aggregated and cross-checked. Co-financing arrangements and patterns in intermediated vs. direct lending were mapped. Discrepancies were resolved by returning to source documents.

Agroecology alignment assessment.

The Agroecology Coalition Tool (ACT) was applied to each project using 13 principles spanning ecological practices, socio-economic dimensions, and knowledge systems. Scores ranged from 0-26 (0-10 = low alignment; 11-20 = moderate; 21-26 = high). Heavy reliance on synthetic inputs, monocropping, or exclusion of women/smallholders triggered penalties. ACT scoring drew on project documents, E&S assessments, and secondary literature. Scoring sheets were quality-checked by two reviewers.

Qualitative analysis and triangulation

Interview transcripts/notes were coded using both deductive categories (financing channels, transparency, participation, climate framing) and inductive themes emerging from the conversations. Insights were triangulated with desk-review findings and ACT scores to identify consistent patterns and explanatory mechanisms.

Limitations and considerations

- **Public data gaps:** intermediated finance and private-sector operations often lacked transparency, limiting visibility on sub-projects and beneficiaries.
- **Document heterogeneity:** project documents varied in depth and structure, complicating comparisons.
- **Currency and timing effects:** SDR-USD conversion introduces approximation; assumptions were standardised and documented.
- **Interview scope:** only five interviews were completed; diverse but not exhaustive.
- **Attribution vs. contribution:** patterns are descriptive; causal claims require project-level impact evaluations.

Intermediated finance and private-sector operations — often lacked transparency, limiting visibility on sub-projects and beneficiaries.

Ethics, data management, and quality assurance

All interviewees provided informed consent, and identities are stored separately from transcripts. Extraction sheets, documents, and scoring files are archived with an audit trail. The analysis followed established standards for qualitative and mixed-methods research.



Farmers carefully tending young rice seedlings in a vast rice plantation.

(Photo by Guru Moorthy Gokul - Unsplash)

Results

Between 2019 and 2025, the African Development Bank emerged as one of the continent's most influential agricultural financiers.

This section presents the findings of the study by combining financial flow analysis, agroecological assessment, and qualitative insights from key informant interviews. It traces how AfDB agricultural financing was structured between 2019 and 2025, where resources flowed, and what these patterns reveal about the Bank's evolving approach to food and agriculture systems.

The analysis begins with a portfolio-wide overview of AfDB's financial flows, distinguishing between sovereign and non-sovereign operations and mapping allocations across regions, subsectors, and co-financing arrangements. This includes examination of large agribusiness loans, climate-tagged operations, and the growth of intermediated finance. The section then evaluates how these investments align with agroecological principles using the Agroecology Coalition Tool (ACT), which scores projects across ecological, socio-economic, and knowledge-system dimensions.

Insights from key informant interviews (policy analysts, implementers, development finance specialists, and civil society actors) are used to interpret these patterns, particularly around transparency, participation, climate framing, and the balance between industrial and ecological approaches. Triangulation across data sources allows us to identify convergences—for example, the expansion of high-input, climate-smart projects—and divergences, such as discrepancies between project documentation and likely on-the-ground implementation.

These findings offer a comprehensive picture of how the AfDB's agricultural financing is shaping the continent's food systems and the extent to which current investment pathways support or hinder the transition toward equitable, resilient, and ecologically grounded agriculture.

AfDB Financing Overview (2019-2025)

Between 2019 and 2025, the African Development Bank (AfDB) emerged as one of the continent's most influential agricultural financiers.

Its portfolio blended sovereign loans, grants, guarantees, and an expanding non-sovereign window, mobilising billions in co-financing from multilateral and bilateral Development Finance Institutions (DFIs). These investments aimed to raise productivity, integrate markets, and strengthen resilience, yet they also reflected persistent tensions between industrial and ecological models of agricultural development.

AfDB's financial flows reveal several defining patterns. Sovereign lending consistently dominated the portfolio, typically representing 70-80% of annual approvals, though private-sector lending expanded significantly after 2021 (AfDB 2023a; 2024a; 2025a).

Agriculture accounted for roughly 8-10% of the Bank's total financing each year, with large spikes during food security crises—particularly in 2022, when the African Emergency Food Production Facility mobilised USD 1.5 billion in response to global supply disruptions.

Geographically, financing was concentrated in West and East Africa, which together drew more than half of all agricultural approvals. West Africa saw major increases linked to regional corridors, staple crop programmes, and Nigeria's large-scale Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones (SAPZ) initiative. East Africa's portfolio reflected a mix of value-chain investments, climate adaptation programmes, and crisis-response operations, including wheat production support in Sudan and drought-related interventions in the Horn of Africa.

A growing share of AfDB's agricultural portfolio was labelled as climate finance—reaching 49% of total Bank investments by 2024 (AfDB 2025a). However, many of these operations relied heavily on high-input packages, mechanisation, and large-scale irrigation promoted under a “climate-smart” banner. Co-financing with IFC, EIB, Proparco, FMO, and DFC intensified this trend, especially in non-sovereign operations targeting major agribusinesses such as the Export Trading Group (ETG), DAL Group, and Zambef (AFSA 2025; Rock & Park 2020).

Across the portfolio, the overriding pattern is clear: AfDB financing prioritised productivity, market integration, and industrial commercialisation. While these investments generated infrastructure and logistical improvements, they offered limited support for diversified, low-input, community-led systems central to agroecological transformation. This tension underpins the detailed analysis in the sections that follow.

Note: In this section, UA (Unit of Account) refers to the AfDB internal accounting currency, defined in the Bank's charter as equivalent to the IMF's Special Drawing Right (SDR).

As the functional and presentation currency for AfDB's financial statements, all income, expenses, assets, liabilities, and capital subscriptions are recorded in UA, which aggregates transactions across member-country currencies. Its value relative to the U.S. dollar (USD) fluctuates daily with the SDR, calculated from a weighted basket of five major currencies (USD, Euro, Yuan, Yen, and Pound Sterling). Since many AfDB projects are denominated in UA but implemented in USD or local currencies, understanding the UA-USD link is essential for interpreting project costs, financing structures, and real obligations (AfDB, 2020a).

Non-sovereign operations drive the Bank’s agricultural industrialisation agenda, targeting large agribusinesses, processors, logistics firms, and regional value-chain actors.

Sovereign vs. Non-Sovereign Financing

Between 2019 and 2025, AfDB’s agricultural portfolio remained predominantly sovereign, though non-sovereign operations (NSOs) grew in strategic importance. In 2019, NSO lending reached UA 1.56 billion (21% of approvals), before falling sharply in 2020 to UA 0.55 billion (11%) as the Bank shifted toward sovereign emergency support during the COVID-19 crisis (AfDB 2021).

After 2021, NSO activity rebounded. By 2022, NSO commitments rose to UA 1.4 billion—more than double the 2020 level—and approached the 2019 peak (AfDB 2023a). Growth was concentrated in industry, agribusiness, and value-chain development, reflecting the Bank’s push to expand private-sector engagement in middle-income countries such as Nigeria, Egypt, and Morocco.

Sovereign lending nevertheless continued to dominate. Throughout the period, sovereign operations accounted for roughly 70-80% of total approvals, rising above 80% at the height of the pandemic. By 2024, sovereign commitments reached UA 5.74 billion, compared with UA 1.65 billion in NSO lending (AfDB 2025a).

Sovereign guarantees also expanded sharply, increasing from near-zero in 2020 to more than UA 1.7 billion in 2023 as governments faced deteriorating fiscal space and rising debt burdens.

Overall, the financing structure reflects a familiar pattern:

- **sovereign lending anchors the portfolio**, especially in low-income and fragile states, while
- **non-sovereign operations** drive the Bank’s agricultural industrialisation agenda, targeting large agribusinesses, processors, logistics firms, and regional value-chain actors.

Despite recent growth in private-sector operations, the agricultural portfolio remains heavily shaped by public-sector lending—setting the context for how AfDB balances state-led programmes with expanding corporate-led transformation.

Agricultural Allocations

Between 2019 and 2025, agriculture represented roughly 8-10% of AfDB’s annual approvals, with major surges during food security crises. In 2022, agricultural commitments reached UA 1.34 billion under the Feed Africa priority—a 48% increase from 2021—driven largely by the African Emergency Food Production Facility (AEFPF), which mobilised USD 1.5 billion to support wheat, maize, and rice production across multiple regions (AfDB 2022a; 2024a).

AfDB's agricultural financing spans the full value chain, but allocations are heavily concentrated in large agribusiness, processing, logistics, and retail-related infrastructure.

Since 2019, the Bank has financed major conglomerates such as DAL Group in Sudan (UA 177 million for food manufacturing), Ghana Cocoa Board (UA 28 million in trade finance), and Export Trading Group (ETG), which received more than USD 350 million for logistics and trading operations (AFSA 2025; Rock & Park 2020). Other investments supported fertilizer distributors (e.g., Meridian), commodity processors (e.g., SUCDEN), and warehousing and cold-chain operators.

These patterns reflect AfDB's strategic focus on agro-industrialisation and value-chain integration. Non-sovereign operations primarily target vertically integrated firms with regional reach, reinforcing commercial supply chains and supermarket distribution networks. Sovereign lending complements this by financing input subsidy programmes, irrigation schemes, agro-industrial parks, and rural infrastructure under the Feed Africa framework.

While these investments aim to strengthen competitiveness and reduce post-harvest losses, critics note that they overwhelmingly favour corporate actors and input-intensive models, with limited direct support for small-scale farmers or locally rooted food systems (AFSA 2025). Even sovereign projects—though broader in scope—tend to prioritise productivity and market linkage goals over ecological or farmer-led approaches.

Overall, AfDB's agricultural allocations remain geared toward industrial value chains and commercial agriculture, with comparatively little investment in diversified, low-input systems or agroecological transformation.

Other DFI Contributions

Alongside its own resources, the AfDB frequently co-finances agricultural and agribusiness investments with other major Development Finance Institutions (DFIs), including the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the European Investment Bank (EIB), Proparco (AFD Group), British International Investment (BII), the Netherlands Development Finance Company (FMO), and the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC). Since 2019, these DFIs have collectively channelled more than USD 3 billion into Africa's agri-food sector, largely focused on agrochemicals, logistics, processing, and formal retail systems (AFSA 2025; Rock & Park 2020).

The IFC has been the dominant private-sector agribusiness financier in the region, approving 54 agriculture-related projects in Sub-Saharan Africa between 2019 and 2024. Average IFC project sizes reach USD 40 million, with several exceeding USD 150-200 million—including USD 230 million for Ecom Agroindustrial Corp. and USD 150 million for the Olam Group. By contrast, AfDB's non-sovereign agribusiness investments totalled around USD 884 million over the same period, typically ranging from USD 50-100 million per project.

AfDB's agricultural allocations remain geared toward industrial value chains and commercial agriculture, with comparatively little investment in diversified, low input systems.

DFI collaboration tends to amplify industrial, input-intensive models of agricultural transformation, reinforcing consolidation in African food systems and crowding out investment in agroecological or community-led alternatives.

FMO and Proparco play complementary roles, often joining syndicated loans and blended finance facilities. A notable example is the USD 394 million syndicated loan for ETG in 2024, arranged by FMO and the Eastern and Southern African Trade and Development Bank (TDB), with participation from DEG (KfW), FinDev Canada, Proparco, and the OPEC Fund—alongside AfDB’s earlier investments (Hanson 2024).

These partnerships reveal a coordinated DFI push to expand industrial agriculture and regional value chains. While AfDB is a significant partner, its contributions often serve to de-risk or scale investments designed by larger global DFIs, particularly in the financing of major trading houses, processors, and logistics firms.

Overall, DFI collaboration tends to amplify industrial, input-intensive models of agricultural transformation, reinforcing consolidation in African food systems and crowding out investment in agroecological or community-led alternatives.

Trends and Hotspots

Between 2019 and 2025, AfDB’s agricultural and rural development financing showed consistent geographical and thematic hotspots, with West and East Africa receiving the largest shares of approvals. These patterns were shaped by regional crises, policy priorities, and the Bank’s expanding agenda on climate adaptation and food security.

West Africa was the largest recipient. In 2022, approvals reached UA 2.25 billion—37% of total AfDB lending and a 75% increase from the previous year—driven by major multi-country programmes, Nigeria’s agro-industrialisation agenda, and food security operations in countries such as Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire. Roughly 27% of West Africa’s 2022 approvals were allocated to agriculture and rural development (AfDB 2023a; 2024a).

East Africa was the second major hotspot, receiving UA 1.67 billion in 2022 (27% of approvals). Investments focused on regional corridors, staple crop value chains, climate adaptation, and emergency food production. Crisis-response projects—such as Sudan’s wheat production initiative and drought-related programmes in the Horn of Africa—highlight the region’s recurring climate and food security vulnerabilities.

North Africa received about 15% of annual approvals (UA 882 million in 2022), with Egypt and Morocco accounting for most of the portfolio through large infrastructure and policy-based lending. Southern Africa received 16% (UA 954 million), dominated by industrialisation and recovery operations, including major credit lines to institutions such as the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA). Central Africa remained comparatively underfunded, receiving less than 10% annually, though AfDB prioritised support for transition states and regional integration initiatives there.

recovery operations, including major credit lines to institutions such as the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA). Central Africa remained comparatively underfunded, receiving less than 10% annually, though AfDB prioritised support for transition states and regional integration initiatives there. Across regions, two thematic hotspots intensified:

- **climate adaptation**, driven by the expansion of climate finance windows and the Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program; and
- **food security**, especially after 2020, with large-scale seed, fertiliser, and irrigation programmes funded under the African Emergency Food Production Facility.

By 2024, nearly half of AfDB's total investments (USD 5.5 billion) were classified as climate finance, though much of this funding relied on high-input "climate-smart" models rather than ecosystem-based approaches (AfDB 2025a; AFSA 2025).

These hotspots illustrate the Bank's dual priorities of climate resilience and staple crop productivity—yet also underscore how these priorities continue to be pursued primarily through industrial and input-intensive models rather than agroecological pathways.

Supermarketization and Retail Investments

A defining trend in AfDB and wider DFI agricultural financing has been the rapid "supermarketization" of African food systems. DFIs have increasingly funded the infrastructure that underpins formal retail expansion, including cold storage, warehousing, transport fleets, and wholesale distribution hubs (AFSA 2025; Rock & Park 2020).

AfDB's private-sector portfolio illustrates this shift. The Bank has channelled substantial financing to large trading and processing firms—especially the Export Trading Group (ETG), which received more than USD 364 million between 2019 and 2022—to expand silos, storage depots, and distribution centres across more than 40 countries. This infrastructure strengthens the back-end of supermarket supply chains and consolidates ETG's role as a continental intermediary linking farmers to formal retail markets (Park 2025).

Other DFIs have similarly supported supermarket growth, including direct investments in chains such as Naivas and Quick Mart in Kenya. ETG has also been involved in retail recapitalisation efforts, for example stepping in when Choppies Kenya faltered in 2019, with backing from DFI-linked working capital (Park 2025). AfDB typically justifies these investments as a means to reduce post-harvest losses, improve food safety, and create jobs.

They are also integrated into its agro-industrialisation agenda through the Feed Africa strategy and related initiatives such as the Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT) and Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones (SAPZ).

However, critics note that the expansion of formal retail may marginalise informal traders—who currently dominate African food distribution—and create market conditions that pressure smallholders with volume, quality, and compliance standards that are difficult to meet (AFSA 2025; Rock & Park 2020). These systems tend to reinforce consolidation and buyer power in ways that risk weakening local markets and shortening the space for agroecological, diverse, and culturally rooted food networks.

In practice, supermarketization reflects the broader tension in AfDB’s agricultural strategy: modernisation and efficiency gains come at the cost of increasing corporate concentration and diminishing space for localised, farmer-led food systems.

Climate-Smart vs. Industrial Projects

Between 2019 and 2025, AfDB significantly expanded its climate finance portfolio, with nearly half of all Bank-wide approvals in 2024 classified as climate finance (AfDB 2025a). In agriculture, this included investments in drought-tolerant crops, sustainable land management, early warning systems, and digital climate advisory tools. Flagship initiatives such as the Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program and the Climate Action Window sought to scale adaptation finance and strengthen resilience.

Despite this shift, a large share of AfDB’s climate-tagged agriculture portfolio remains closely intertwined with high-input, industrial models. Many “climate-smart agriculture” operations rely on hybrid seeds, fertilisers, mechanisation, and large-scale irrigated monocultures. Notable examples include the 2022 Emergency Food Production Facility and several climate-smart seed distribution programmes in the Sahel and Horn of Africa. Similar patterns are seen in climate-resilience projects co-financed with the Green Climate Fund (GCF), where climate framing sits atop Green Revolution-style interventions (AFSA 2025).

Private-sector climate operations also reinforce industrial models. Large agribusiness loans—including to ETG, Olam, and DAL Group; often incorporate climate-smart components such as energy-efficient processing or GHG accounting, but rarely integrate ecosystem-based practices such as agroforestry, soil regeneration, or input reduction.

Meanwhile, projects explicitly centred on agroecological or nature-based adaptation remain modest and underfunded relative to large irrigation schemes, commercial crop estates, and mechanisation programmes. Land-use change, intensified water extraction, and habitat disruption associated with these industrial investments have triggered multiple community complaints to the AfDB’s Independent Review Mechanism (IRM), underscoring the risks of merging climate objectives with large-scale commercial agriculture.

Initiatives such as the Transformation of African Savannahs Initiative (TASI) exemplify the tension: promoted as climate-smart and modernising, yet dependent on monocultures and ecosystem clearing that undermine long-term resilience (Rock & Park 2020).

The overarching pattern is clear: AfDB has expanded its climate finance, but its climate-smart agriculture portfolio continues to be dominated by industrial, input-intensive models that offer limited support for agroecological transformation.



A large agricultural sprayer moves across a vast green field.

(Photo by Roger Starnes Sr
– getty Images)

Analysis of 20 AfDB Agricultural Projects: Financial Flows and Agroecological Alignment

This section presents a detailed assessment of 20 AfDB-funded agricultural projects approved or active between 2019 and 2025. These projects were selected to reflect the diversity of the Bank's agricultural portfolio; spanning sovereign and non-sovereign operations, input supply programmes, irrigation schemes, agribusiness finance, agro-industrialisation initiatives, and climate-related interventions.

For each project, the analysis draws on AfDB appraisal documents, environmental and social assessments, completion reports, co-financier data, and relevant external literature. Each case was evaluated using the Agroecology Coalition Tool (ACT), which scores ecological practices, social inclusion, and knowledge systems across 13 principles (0-26).

Across the 20 cases, several patterns become evident. Most projects prioritise productivity, commercialisation, and value-chain integration, relying heavily on synthetic inputs, mechanisation, and large-scale infrastructure. These features consistently drive ACT scores into the low alignment range. Only a small number of projects demonstrate moderate agroecological potential, typically where diversification, community participation, or soil and water management are more central to the design. No project achieved high alignment.

The case studies that follow provide a structured review of each project's objectives, financing structure, activities, agroecological score, and key risks. Together, they reveal how AfDB's investment choices shape agricultural development pathways and the continuing gap between climate-smart rhetoric and agroecological transformation.



Summary Table of 20 AfDB Agricultural Projects (2019-2025)

Moderate alignment across AfDB projects comes from participation and governance, not from ecological transformation.

Project Name	Financial Flow	Agroecological Alignment	Duration	Project Focus
1) Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility (LoCAL) - Benin & Lesotho	USD 997,524 grant from AfDB's ACCF via UNCDF (2019)	Moderate (12/26) - community participation, governance, and resilience are strong; limited ecological evidence (soil health, biodiversity monitoring).	2019 - Ongoing	Focus on local adaptation finance through municipalities; supports small-scale irrigation & water infrastructure; foundation for future climate-fund access.
2) Enhancing Climate Finance Readiness (Bandama Basin) - Côte d'Ivoire	USD 429,422 Adaptation Fund grant (2020-22) + USD 6 million full project (2022) implemented by IFAD	Low (8/26) - strong on institutional capacity; minimal ecological practices or metrics.	2017 - 2029 (incl. full project)	Built climate-finance readiness; strengthened policy frameworks; ecological integration to be defined in later phases.
3) Agriculture and Food Security Project (GAFSP) - The Gambia	USD 16 m initial grant + USD 12 m (2022) + USD 16.08 m (2024); ADF/GAFSP trust fund	Moderate (13/26) - social inclusion and diversification are strong; ecological integration is limited.	2021 - 2024	Targets 5 regions; 18,000 smallholders (52% women, 50% youth); school-feeding linkages and income generation (USD 750k).
4) Smallholder Agriculture Development & Food Security (SADFONS) - Liberia	USD 19.08 m (ADF + GAFSP + Gov. co-finance)	Moderate (14/26) - social equity & connectivity strong; ecological monitoring absent.	2021 - Ongoing	Focus on rice/cassava; 6 processing centres; targets 4 counties; women and cooperative inclusion.

Agro-industrial and value-chain projects consistently score low on agroecological alignment despite large financial flows.

Project Name	Financial Flow	Agroecological Alignment	Duration	Project Focus
5) Climate-Resilient Wheat Value Chain Development (CREW) - Ethiopia	USD 94 m (AfDB 54 m + Netherlands 20 m + OCP-Africa 10 m + GoE 10 m + GCA 0.3 m)	Moderate (12/26) - resilience and gender fairness noted; monocrop focus limits biodiversity.	2024 - 2029	Supports 500k households (2.3 m people); targets 1.62 m tonnes additional wheat; four regions (Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali).
6) Sustainable Agriculture Empowerment (PAASIFEJ) - Morocco	€100 m (USD 116 m) sovereign loan (2025)	Moderate (10/26) - strong on social inclusion; weak ecological practice integration.	2025 - Ongoing	Focus on women & youth agripreneurs; aligns with Green Generation 2020-2030; expands irrigation and value-chain access.
7) Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones (SAPZ) - Nigeria	USD 2.2 b multi-donor package (AfDB 1 b + IsDB, IFAD, GCF + Gov.) (2021)	Low (9/26) - industrial, monoculture model; limited ecosystem safeguards.	2021 - Ongoing	7 states + FCT; focus on agro-industrial hubs & processing; 500k jobs (30% adaptation jobs per GCA).
8) ETG Value Chain Enhancement - Zambia & Malawi	USD 60 m AfDB loan + JICA co-finance (2021)	Low (8/26) - market connectivity strong; ecological safeguards weak.	2021 - Ongoing	Expands soy processing plants; contract farming model with smallholders; risks monocropping and input dependence.

Climate finance is being channelled into high-input, infrastructure-heavy agricultural models.

Project Name	Financial Flow	Agroecological Alignment	Duration	Project Focus
9) ETG Sustainability-Linked Value Chain Loan - 14 Countries	USD 75 m AfDB SLL + USD 394 m syndicated loan (FMO, TDB, Proparco etc.) (2024)	Moderate (12/26) - ESG incentives added; farm-level ecological change unclear.	2024 - 2027 (extendable 2 yrs)	KPI-linked loan on GHG, reforestation, gender; targets 600k farmers (25% women); limited on-farm transition evidence.
10) Zambeef Expansion & Smallholder Support - Zambia	USD 32 m AfDB risk-sharing guarantee (2023) for USD 100 m plan	Moderate (11/26) - market inclusion good; ecological depth low.	2023 - 2028	Integrates 86k smallholders; crop & livestock expansion; risks input dependence & land pressure.
11) TAAT Phase I (Feed Africa) - 34 Countries	USD 40 m ADF grant (2018-24) via IITA/CGIAR	Low (0/26) - input-intensive Green Revolution model.	2018 - 2024	13 m households reached; focus on hybrid seeds & fertilizers; 12 m tonnes extra food produced.
12) TAAT Phase II (Expansion Program) - Multinational	USD 27.41 m ADF/TSF grant (2022) + €5 m Germany	Low (8/26) - minor social improvements; still input-driven.	2022 - Ongoing	Targets 40 m farmers; focus on digital extension & "climate-smart" inputs; weak ecological framework.
13) Emergency Wheat Production (SEWPP) - Sudan	USD 73.8 m AfDB crisis grant implemented by WFP (2023)	Low-Moderate (10/26) - resilience strong; monocrop focus limits sustainability.	2023 - 2025	170k farmers; 645k tonnes wheat produced; Integrated Pest Plan; digital vouchers for inputs.

Private-sector and corridor investments prioritise scale, logistics, and corporate integration over farmer-led systems.

Project Name	Financial Flow	Agroecological Alignment	Duration	Project Focus
14) Emergency Food Production (ZEFPP) - Zimbabwe	USD 25 m ADF grant under AEFPP (2022)	Moderate (12/26) - fairness & diversity improved; ecology weak.	2022 - 2024	180k farmers (45% women, 13.5% youth); sunflower seed multiplication; nutrition training.
15) Competitive & Resilient Cereal Development (PARC-Céréales) - Morocco	€199 m (USD 193 m) sovereign loan (2022)	Moderate (13/26) - policy coherence good; ecological integration low.	2022 - 2030 (target)	Aims to cut cereal imports by 20%; 50% productivity rise; aligned with Green Generation Strategy.
16) Integrated Livestock Value Chain (PDCVIE-BF) - Burkina Faso	USD 39.45 m sovereign loan (2023)	Moderate (14/26) - resilience & participation good; weak soil & biodiversity focus.	2023 - 2028	Targets 4 regions; livestock intensification; feed crop expansion; Category A safeguard project.
17) Agropastoral Development, Digitization & Market Access (PADDAMAG) - Guinea	USD 27.75 m sovereign loan (2023)	Moderate (13/26) - strong inclusion & digital connectivity; limited ecological scope.	2023 - 2028	Focus on maize/soy feed systems; digital finance platforms; Category 2 environmental risk.
18) Mkhondvo-Ngwavuma Water Augmentation (MNWAP Phase I) - Eswatini	Sovereign loan (AfDB 2021) - cost unspecified	Moderate (14/26) - resilience & social safeguards strong; ecological depth limited.	2021 - Ongoing (multiphase)	Builds Mpakeni Dam; 4,600 ha irrigation; expected 100k beneficiaries & jobs; resettlement plans included.

No AfDB project reaches high agroecological alignment, even where resilience and participation improve.

Project Name	Financial Flow	Agroecological Alignment	Duration	Project Focus
19) Regional Resilient Rice Value Chains (REWARD) - West Africa (13 Countries)	Mixed sovereign loans + USD 9.44 m ADF grant to AfricaRice (2025)	Moderate (16/26) - strong resilience & co-creation; ecological metrics absent.	2025 - 2030 (est.)	Supports 11k farmers (45% women, 60% youth); digital weather tools; 47k jobs created.
20) TAAT-Savannahs (TAAT-S) - Ghana	Integrated within SAPIP (USD 56.32 m total) under AfDB/MoFA (2018 -)	Low (7/26) - input-intensive model; monocropping & fertilizer reliance.	2018 - Ongoing	Focus on maize & soy; cluster development linking poultry feed chains; limited biodiversity management.



Agricultural machines
spraying a vast crop field.

Photo Credit: [James Baltz](#)
on [Unsplash](#)

Project-by-Project Assessment (2019–2025)

1. Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility (LoCAL) - Benin and Lesotho

Financing: USD 997,524 ACCF grant managed by AfDB

Implementer: UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), in collaboration with national and local governments

ACT Score: 12/26 (Moderate)

Risk Score: Not specified

Project Overview: Approved in September 2019, this ACCF-funded initiative supports Benin and Lesotho in strengthening their ability to access global climate finance through UNCDF’s Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility (LoCAL). The programme aims to build national and local institutional readiness for climate adaptation, develop project proposals aligned with each country’s Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and pilot local-level adaptation actions.

Activities and Results: As a grant-based enabling mechanism, the project focused on capacity-building rather than direct large-scale investment. Funding supported the development of “bankable” climate adaptation projects, improved institutional engagement with mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund, and piloting of community-based adaptation measures. Activities included support for climate-resilient farming and small-scale irrigation, improved water-retention infrastructure, and climate-proofing of community assets such as wells, rural roads, and bridges (UNCDF, 2024). Local governments were central actors, with resources designed to flow directly to small-scale adaptation priorities identified at the community level.

Agroecological Performance: With an ACT score of 12/26, LoCAL shows moderate alignment. It performs strongly on participation, governance, and resilience by empowering communities to shape local adaptation responses and by linking finance allocations to performance. However, agroecological depth remains limited. While the LoCAL model could support soil conservation, agroforestry, water harvesting, and other ecological practices, the documentation presents no measurable evidence of input reduction, biodiversity enhancement, ecological monitoring, or co-created agroecological transitions. The project’s emphasis is mainly institutional—strengthening planning and finance systems—rather than transforming agroecosystems.

Risks: Direct ecological risks are low given the programme’s readiness and governance focus. The primary concern is the gap between institutional preparation and on-the-ground ecological outcomes. Without clear ecological indicators or requirements for farmer-led practice development, future LoCAL-funded projects may advance procedural readiness without achieving tangible improvements in soil health, biodiversity, or climate-resilient production systems.

Conclusion: LoCAL effectively strengthens institutional readiness and community-led adaptation planning, but its agroecological contribution remains indirect and dependent on how future climate finance is deployed at the local level.

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2. Enhancing Climate Finance Readiness [Bandama Basin, Côte d’Ivoire]

Financing: USD 429,422 Adaptation Fund grant via the Africa Climate Change Fund (ACCF) + USD 6 million full project (2022)

Implementers: Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development; later the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

ACT Score: 8/26 (Low)

Risk Score: Not specified (institutional readiness project)

Project Overview: This ACCF-funded initiative supported Côte d’Ivoire in strengthening institutional and technical capacity for climate adaptation in the Bandama Basin. Managed by the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, the project developed strategic tools, enhanced institutional readiness, and prepared adaptation project proposals aligned with national priorities. This groundwork enabled the approval of a USD 6 million Adaptation Fund project—“Increasing Rural Communities’ Adaptive Capacity and Resilience to Climate Change in the Bandama Basin”—implemented by IFAD as the Multilateral Implementing Entity. Full implementation, delayed until May 2025, is expected to continue through 2029.

Activities and Results: The readiness grant focused on policy and planning processes: institutional capacity-building, climate adaptation strategies, and formulation of project proposals. The subsequent USD 6 million full-scale project expands the scope to “climate-smart” agriculture, water management, diversified livelihoods, and institutional strengthening across rice, cassava, and cocoa value chains (Lasprilla, 2024). As a readiness-focused intervention, ZEFPP did not fund field implementation but laid the institutional foundation for future adaptation investments.

Agroecological Performance: With an ACT score of 8/26, the project demonstrates low agroecological alignment. It performs reasonably well in policy support, institutional planning, and participation—appropriate for a readiness initiative—but ecological depth is minimal. Documentation lacks evidence of agroecological practices such as reduced input use, biodiversity enhancement, soil-health management, or farmer-led co-creation. Agroecological pathways for rice, cassava, and cocoa remain undefined, and ecological monitoring indicators are not detailed. **Risks:** As an institutional project, direct environmental risks are limited. However, the main concern is structural: the gap between readiness activities and future ecological outcomes. Without embedding soil-health metrics, biodiversity indicators, or farmer-driven practice design into the full-scale project phase, there is a risk that communities gain procedural capacity without translating it into tangible ecosystem resilience.

Conclusion: The project strengthens Côte d’Ivoire’s climate finance readiness, but the absence of ecological metrics or agroecological practices risks limiting future adaptation efforts to governance reforms rather than ecosystem-based resilience.

The project performs well on institutional planning, but documentation lacks evidence of reduced input use, biodiversity enhancement, soil-health management, or farmer-led co-creation.

3. Agriculture and Food Security Project [The Gambia]

Financing: USD 16 million African Development Fund (ADF) grant via the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), later supplemented by USD 12 million (2022) and USD 16.08 million (2024)

Implementer: Ministry of Agriculture, Government of The Gambia

ACT Score: 10/26 (Low-Moderate)

Risk Score: Not specified

Project Overview: Launched in 2021, The Gambia's Agriculture and Food Security Project aims to improve production, nutrition, and resilience across five regions with high poverty and food insecurity: Central River, Upper River, North Bank, Lower River, and West Coast. Financed through multiple GAFSP grant tranches under the African Development Fund, the project targets smallholder farmers—particularly women and youth—in areas with strong production potential but persistent vulnerability.

Activities and Results: The project supports the cultivation of climate-resilient local staples including groundnuts, maize, millet, cowpea, findi, and rice. Investments include input distribution, technical advisory services, Farmer Field Schools, and expansion of nutrition-sensitive programming. Reported results show yield increases in rice (2.0 → 2.5 t/ha) and maize (1.8 → 2.0 t/ha), alongside expanded home-grown school feeding coverage from 131,900 to 203,900 pupils—half of them girls. The project also distributed deworming supplements and strengthened vegetable, poultry, and egg production. By 2024, it aimed to reach 18,000 farmers (52% women, 50% youth) and generated an estimated USD 750,000 in farmer income (AfDB, 2024a).

Agroecological Performance: With an ACT score of 13/26, the project shows moderate agroecological alignment. It performs strongly on inclusion, nutrition-sensitive value chains, short supply chains, and participatory learning through Farmer Field Schools. Promotion of multiple local crops and an explicit focus on food sovereignty and social values aligns with agroecological principles of diversity and community well-being.

However, ecological integration remained shallow. Diversification was supported, but production gains continued to rely on synthetic inputs, with no documented strategies for input reduction, organic soil management, or biodiversity enhancement. Farmer engagement centred on adoption rather than co-creation, and ecological monitoring indicators were absent. The programme thus reflects a hybrid approach—advancing local foods and equity while remaining anchored in input-driven productivity frameworks.

Risks: Continued reliance on external inputs heightens vulnerability to fertiliser price volatility and threatens long-term soil health. Limited attention to biodiversity, nutrient cycling, or resource governance reduces resilience to climate variability. Without deeper ecological design, productivity improvements may be difficult to sustain.

Conclusion: The project strengthens local food systems, nutrition, and social inclusion, but its ecological transformation remains partial, requiring future integration of soil health, biodiversity, and farmer-led sustainability practices.

Social inclusion and diversification are strong, but ecological integration remains limited.

4. Smallholder Agriculture Development and Food Security Project (SADFONS) [Liberia]

Financing: USD 19.08 million (African Development Fund + Global Agriculture and Food Security Program + Government of Liberia)

Implementer: Ministry of Agriculture, Government of Liberia

ACT Score: 14/26 (Moderate)

Risk Score: B - Moderate, localised, manageable (Environmental & Social Risk Rating)

Project Overview: SADFONS is a national food security initiative designed to raise smallholder productivity, improve incomes, and strengthen nutritional outcomes across four counties in Liberia. Supported through blended financing from the African Development Fund and the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program, the project aims to bolster rural livelihoods in areas marked by high poverty and food insecurity. It combines value-chain development with institutional strengthening, including targeted support to the Ministry of Agriculture to improve long-term service delivery.

Activities and Results: The project developed an integrated seed system—breeder, foundation, and certified seed production—covering approximately 7,000 hectares. It also financed six new processing and aggregation facilities for rice and cassava, expanded training and extension services, and invested in storage and post-harvest improvements. These activities were coupled with nutrition interventions and targeted support for vulnerable households. SADFONS placed particular emphasis on inclusion, seeking to expand market access and production opportunities for women and youth while reinforcing the role of farmer groups and local organisations.

Agroecological Performance: Agroecologically, SADFONS performs moderately. Its strengths lie in social inclusion, community engagement, and the integration of nutrition with production. However, the ecological dimension remains weak. The project relies heavily on external inputs and yield-intensification models, and the documentation provides little evidence of soil-health regeneration, biodiversity protection, or farmer-led experimentation. No ecological monitoring indicators—such as soil organic matter, erosion control, or agro-biodiversity—were embedded in the project design, leaving its long-term ecological impact largely unmeasured.

Risks: Several risks emerge clearly from the project documentation. Input dependence could expose farmers to future cost increases and undermine soil fertility over time. The absence of ecological monitoring creates uncertainty regarding land degradation or biodiversity loss in intensified production zones. Land and resource governance safeguards are not clearly articulated, raising concerns about equitable access to seed systems, post-harvest facilities, and irrigation sites. Institutional fragilities—particularly in extension services—pose further risks to sustaining gains once external support tapers off. While categorised as Environmental & Social Risk Rating “B,” meaning risks are expected to be manageable, these documented gaps nonetheless affect the project’s resilience.

Conclusion: SADFONS delivers important gains for food security and rural inclusion—but without stronger ecological safeguards and reduced input dependence, its benefits may prove less resilient than intended.

Social equity and connectivity are strong, but ecological monitoring is absent.

5. Climate-Resilient Wheat Value Chain Development (CREW) [Ethiopia]

Financing: USD 94 million (USD 54m ADF grant; USD 20m Netherlands; USD 10m OCP-Africa; USD 10m Government of Ethiopia; USD 0.3m Global Center on Adaptation)

Implementer: Ministry of Agriculture, Government of Ethiopia, in partnership with AfDB, Netherlands, OCP-Africa, and GCA

ACT Score: 12/26 (Moderate)

Risk Score: B - Moderate, manageable environmental & social risk

Project Overview: Launched in May 2024, CREW is one of the AfDB's largest agricultural investments in Ethiopia, designed to shift the country from a net wheat importer to a self-sufficient producer and potential exporter. The programme targets 500,000 smallholder households in Afar, Amhara, Oromia, and Somali regions and is expected to benefit up to 2.3 million people, half of them women. Implementation is led by the Ministry of Agriculture with support from AfDB, the Netherlands, OCP-Africa and the Global Center on Adaptation.

Activities and Results: CREW centres on deploying heat-tolerant wheat varieties and scaling irrigated wheat cultivation in lowland areas. It also provides climate advisories and farmer training on sustainable production. Infrastructure investments include rehabilitating and constructing irrigation systems, strengthening post-harvest and market facilities, and supporting mechanisation. Productivity gains from three to four tonnes per hectare are projected to generate an additional 1.62 million tonnes of wheat, contributing to improved food security, income stability, and resilience in drought-prone communities (AfDB, 2024c).

Agroecological Performance: With an ACT score of 12/26, CREW demonstrates moderate alignment with agroecological principles. Its strengths lie in policy coherence, gender inclusion, and resilience-building through climate-adapted seed systems and irrigation development. However, ecological practice depth is limited. The project's focus on expanding a single-crop wheat system aligns more closely with conventional intensification than with diversified ecological redesign. Documented references to soil health, organic matter improvement, erosion control, or participatory co-creation lack measurable indicators, and biodiversity conservation beyond wheat is not clearly articulated.

Risks: Assigned a Risk Rating B, CREW faces moderate but manageable environmental and social risks. Expanding a monocrop wheat system may narrow agrobiodiversity and reinforce dependence on fertilisers and certified seed. Limited ecological monitoring creates uncertainty about soil and water impacts, while intensified irrigation may pressure water resources in fragile lowland environments.

Conclusion: CREW strengthens wheat productivity and climate resilience, but its single-crop, input-intensive model limits its potential for deeper ecological transition.

CREW strengthens wheat productivity and climate resilience, but its single-crop, input-intensive model limits its potential for deeper ecological transition

PAASIFEJ promotes inclusion and climate resilience, but its limited ecological scope restricts its contribution to a transformative agroecological transition.

6. Sustainable Agriculture Empowerment Program (PAASIFEJ) - Morocco

Financing: €100 million sovereign loan (approx. USD 116.4 million) from the African Development Bank

Implementer: Ministry of Agriculture, Government of Morocco, with AfDB Country Office support

ACT Score: 10/26 (Moderate)

Risk Score: Not specified in available documentation

Project Overview: Approved in July 2025, PAASIFEJ supports Morocco’s Green Generation 2020-2030 Strategy and national programmes on solidarity agriculture and youth entrepreneurship. Implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture with AfDB support, the programme aims to strengthen food security, improve smallholder climate resilience, and expand economic opportunities for women and youth.

Activities and Results: Financing supports new agricultural production and service infrastructure, expanded irrigation in drought-affected areas, and the promotion of “climate-smart” practices. The programme also strengthens value-chain integration and market access to help women and young entrepreneurs participate in more profitable rural activities. Its overarching focus is to connect marginalised groups to higher-value agri-food markets and build a more resilient and inclusive sector (AfDB, 2025c).

Agroecological Performance: PAASIFEJ’s ACT score of 10/26 reflects moderate alignment. Strongest dimensions include policy coherence, gender inclusion, and participation—consistent with its emphasis on social equity and climate resilience. However, ecological transformation is limited. The programme does not outline agroecological practices such as intercropping, rotations, organic soil management, or biodiversity conservation, nor does it include soil-health indicators or participatory co-creation mechanisms. Its approach remains primarily infrastructural and institutional rather than ecological.

Risks: The documentation provides no formal risk rating. The lack of ecological monitoring or soil-health indicators limits visibility on long-term environmental impacts, particularly in drought-prone regions where irrigation expansion may increase water-resource pressures. Without defined ecological safeguards, sustainability outcomes remain uncertain.

Conclusion: PAASIFEJ promotes inclusion and climate resilience, but its limited ecological scope restricts its contribution to a transformative agroecological transition.

7. Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zones (SAPZ) Program [Nigeria]

Financing: USD 2.2 billion blended programme (approx. USD 1 billion AfDB; co-financed by Islamic Development Bank, IFAD, Africa Growing Together Fund, Green Climate Fund, Government of Nigeria)

Implementer: Government of Nigeria, coordinated with AfDB and multi-donor partners

ACT Score: 9/26 (Low)

Risk Score: Not specified

Project Overview: Launched in 2021 under the AfDB's Feed Africa strategy, the SAPZ Program is one of the Bank's largest agricultural transformation initiatives. Operating in seven states and the Federal Capital Territory, it aims to establish integrated agro-industrial hubs linking production, processing, and markets, while reducing post-harvest losses and generating up to 500,000 jobs—30% of which are designated as climate-adaptation jobs (GCA, 2025).

Activities and Results: The programme finances major infrastructure, production systems, and institutional reforms. Allocations include USD 298.8 million for hub infrastructure and management, USD 193.3 million for production and productivity, USD 9.17 million for policy and institutional support, and USD 37.94 million for programme management (Tsiga et al., 2025). The SAPZ model focuses on creating industrial “green zones” where agribusinesses can cluster and link directly to farmers. Despite early delays related to coordination and infrastructure bottlenecks, AfDB and partners describe the programme as a scalable model for agro-industrial transformation using public-private partnerships and adaptive management mechanisms.

Agroecological Performance: SAPZ's ACT score of 9/26 reflects low agroecological alignment. While climate-smart language appears in documentation, the model is fundamentally built around large-scale mechanisation, monoculture value chains, and industrial processing. No evidence is presented of input-reduction strategies, soil-health regeneration, biodiversity conservation, or farmer-led co-creation. The programme mirrors Green Revolution-style intensification, prioritising high-input efficiency over ecological resilience.

Risks: The lack of ecological indicators raises concerns about land conversion, soil degradation, water overuse, and pollution, particularly where safeguard enforcement is weak. Social risks include potential exclusion of smallholders unable to meet industrial hub requirements and intensified land and resource governance pressures as value chains consolidate.

Conclusion: SAPZ accelerates agro-industrial development at scale, but its high-input, mechanised model lacks ecological safeguards and risks deepening smallholder marginalisation.

Agro-industrial processing and export-oriented value chains drive the project, while ecological safeguards remain weak.

Smallholders function mainly as contract suppliers within a vertically integrated model that promotes monoculture soybean production and dependence on synthetic inputs.

8. Export Trading Group (ETG) Value Chain Enhancement Project (Southern Africa : Zambia and Malawi)

Financing: USD 60 million AfDB private-sector loan, co-financed by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) under its Private-Sector Investment Finance programme

Implementer: Export Trading Group (ETG)

ACT Score: 8/26 (Low)

Risk Score: Not specified

Project Overview: Approved in March 2021, the ETG Value Chain Enhancement Project supports the expansion of agro-processing and regional value-chain integration in Zambia and Malawi. The investment is part of a broader Southern Africa Agriculture Value Chain Enhancement initiative, aiming to strengthen food security and increase smallholder participation in high-value commodity markets. ETG, a major regional agribusiness, leads implementation.

Activities and Results: The financing package supported the construction and operation of soybean-focused processing plants, expansion of warehousing infrastructure, and strengthening of ETG's regional supply chains. ETG sourced raw materials primarily from smallholder farmers, offering input packages, guaranteed offtake, and technical advisory services. The processed outputs—including soy meal, edible oils, and fortified foods—were intended to serve Southern African markets, with the investment framed as a boost to rural incomes and a step toward modernised agro-industrial systems (JICA, 2021).

Agroecological Performance: ETG's ACT score of 8/26 reflects low agroecological alignment. The programme strengthens connectivity and market access but is fundamentally commodity-driven and input-intensive. It prioritises production efficiency and export competitiveness, with no evidence of soil regeneration practices, biodiversity conservation, nutrient recycling, or farmer-led co-creation. Smallholders function mainly as contract suppliers within a vertically integrated model that promotes monoculture soybean production and dependence on synthetic inputs.

Risks: The project documentation outlines no ecological safeguards, raising concerns about soil degradation, water contamination from agrochemical use, and loss of agro-biodiversity. The contract-farming model exposes farmers to market volatility and the risk of exclusion if they cannot meet quality or volume requirements. Reliance on external inputs and corporate-driven supply chains may also deepen dependency on external capital and technologies, undermining long-term resilience.

Conclusion: The ETG project expands processing capacity and market linkages, but its input-intensive, monoculture-based model lacks ecological safeguards and heightens risks for smallholders and local environments.

9. ETG Sustainability-Linked Value Chain Loan (Africa - 14 Countries)

Financing: USD 75m AfDB sustainability-linked loan (USD 65m AfDB capital + USD 10m Agri-Food Catalytic Financing Mechanism, capitalized by Global Affairs Canada); followed by USD 394m syndicated SLL arranged by FMO and TDB with DEG (KfW), FinDev Canada, OPEC Fund, Proparco, ILX

Implementer: Export Trading Group (ETG)

ACT Score: 12/26 (Moderate)

Risk Score: Not specified

Project Overview: Approved in October 2024, the AfDB's USD 75 million sustainability-linked loan (SLL) supports ETG operations across 14 African countries, including West, East, and Southern Africa. The programme finances upgrades to ETG's processing, packaging, and storage facilities, expansion of regional distribution networks, and working capital for input supply and crop procurement. The loan introduces a performance-based structure linking financial incentives to environmental and social targets. The SLL ties Interest margins to performance on decarbonisation, reforestation and zero-deforestation, gender inclusion, and farmer extension services.

Activities and Results: ETG committed to engaging 600,000 smallholder farmers by 2027—at least 25% women—and to providing training on sustainable agricultural practices (TechAfrica, 2024). In November 2024, the AfDB facility was followed by a larger USD 394 million syndicated sustainability-linked loan arranged by FMO and TDB with multiple development finance partners. This financial package supports ETG's working capital and value-chain expansion across Africa, again tying annual ESG assessments to KPIs on deforestation, reforestation, women's participation, smallholder inclusion, and greenhouse-gas reduction.

Agroecological Performance: With an ACT score of 12/26, the loan performs moderately, mainly due to strong connectivity, institutional alignment, and market integration. The SLL structure embeds corporate sustainability commitments and expands smallholder inclusion in regional value chains. However, the ecological depth of the intervention remains limited. There is no documentation of concrete agroecological practices—such as intercropping, agroforestry, soil fertility regeneration, organic matter recycling, or input-reduction strategies—within ETG's supply chains. The “sustainability-linked” design emphasises corporate-level reporting and compliance, rather than transformation of production systems on the ground.

Risks: The absence of farm-level ecological strategies creates uncertainty about environmental outcomes. Without clear fertiliser or pesticide-reduction plans, soil-health or biodiversity indicators, or mechanisms for farmer co-creation, sustainability KPIs risk remaining procedural rather than transformative. Smallholder suppliers may also be exposed to compliance pressures and market volatility without corresponding support for ecological resilience.

Conclusion: The SLL strengthens ESG accountability and value-chain integration across 14 countries, but offers limited evidence of on-farm ecological transition or reduced input dependency within ETG's supply chains.

The sustainability-linked design strengthens corporate accountability, but prioritises reporting and compliance over transformation of production systems on the ground.

10. Zambeef Expansion and Smallholder Support Project [Zambia]

Financing: USD 32m AfDB local-currency risk-sharing guarantee supporting Zambeef's USD 100m expansion plan; guarantee covers USD 25m Stanbic Bank Zambia loan + USD 7m interest/fees

Implementer: Zambeef Products Plc

ACT Score: 11/26 (Moderate)

Risk Score: Not specified

Project Overview: Approved in 2023, AfDB's risk-sharing guarantee enables Zambeef to access long-term local-currency financing for its five-year, USD 100 million expansion programme. By absorbing part of the commercial lending risk, the Bank aims to catalyse private agribusiness investment while reducing Zambeef's exposure to foreign exchange volatility. The project seeks to expand the company's crop and livestock operations while integrating tens of thousands of smallholder farmers into its supply chains.

Activities and Results: The guarantee supported expansion across Zambeef's vertically Integrated value chains, including grain cultivation, feed milling, flour processing, meat and dairy production, and retail distribution. Zambeef aims to double production capacity and integrate approximately 86,000 smallholders and out-growers by sourcing maize, livestock, and other raw materials directly from rural communities (FMO, 2024). The anticipated outcomes include increased domestic and regional food supply, job creation, strengthened farmer market linkages, and alignment with AfDB's agenda for industrialised agriculture and private-sector-led food security (Zambeef, 2023).

Agroecological Performance: With an ACT score of 11/26, the project shows moderate alignment, largely due to its strengths in market integration, inclusion, and adherence to certain environmental and social standards, including biosecurity, energy efficiency, and greenhouse-gas reduction initiatives. Improved milling, processing, and cold-chain infrastructure bolsters farmer connectivity and regional competitiveness.

However, deeper agroecological alignment is limited. Zambeef's model is anchored in intensified monoculture production of maize, soy, and wheat, alongside large-scale livestock operations dependent on industrial feed and mechanisation. Project documentation provides no evidence of input-reduction strategies, soil fertility regeneration, biodiversity conservation, or participatory co-creation with farmers.

Risks: Ecological risks include continued dependence on synthetic fertilisers and pesticides, potential soil degradation, and antibiotic overuse in feedlots. Large-scale livestock and monocrop expansion may also heighten water and land pressures. Social risks relate to land/resource governance challenges and the possibility that smallholders may face exclusion or dependency if unable to meet procurement standards set by the company.

Conclusion: The Zambeef guarantee expands Industrial crop-livestock value chains and smallholder market access, but its input-intensive, monoculture-based model offers limited ecological transformation and carries notable environmental and social risks.

Corporate-led livestock and processing investments reinforce land and feed dependencies rather than diversified farming systems.

11. TAAT Phase I (Feed Africa) (Africa - 34 Countries)

Financing: USD 40 million African Development Fund (ADF) grant

Implementer: International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), with CGIAR centres and national research institutions

ACT Score: 0/26 (Very Low)

Risk Score: Not specified

Project Overview: Launched under the AfDB's Feed Africa initiative, the Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT) Phase I programme aimed to accelerate agricultural modernisation across 34 African countries. Led by IITA with multiple CGIAR partners, TAAT sought to rapidly disseminate agricultural innovations across nine commodity value chains—maize, rice, cassava, wheat, sorghum, millet, beans, sweet potato, and livestock—supported by enabler compacts on soil fertility, water management, and policy reform (AfDB, 2020b).

Activities and Results: Financing was directed toward scaling what AfDB termed “climate-resilient technologies,” including improved seeds, fertiliser optimisation, mechanisation, and digital advisory tools. Implementation relied on demonstration plots, innovation platforms, and regional seed systems designed for “technology delivery at scale” (IFDC, 2020). By 2024, TAAT reported reaching over 13 million farming households and contributing to an estimated 12 million tonnes of additional annual food production across participating countries (Foy et al., 2024).

Agroecological Performance: TAAT Phase I scored 0/26 on the ACT, reflecting very low agroecological alignment. The programme was centred on yield maximisation and uniform input packages characteristic of Green Revolution intensification. There was no evidence of promoting biodiversity conservation, soil regeneration, nutrient recycling, or farmer-led co-creation. Smallholders were treated primarily as technology adopters rather than partners in solution design, contradicting agroecological principles of diversity, circularity, and knowledge co-creation. TAAT's approach reinforced dependency on external inputs, certified seed systems, and standardised technologies.

Risks: While the programme boosted short-term production, the long-term ecological and social risks are considerable. Heavy reliance on fertilisers, agrochemicals, and monocropping increases vulnerability to commodity price fluctuations, pest outbreaks, and climate shocks. Uniform cropping models reduce genetic diversity and undermine ecosystem resilience. The absence of mechanisms to incorporate indigenous knowledge, diversify production systems, or reduce external input dependence signals a model of agricultural modernisation that may exacerbate environmental degradation and social inequities.

Conclusion: TAAT Phase I delivered significant productivity gains at scale, but its top-down, input-intensive model is fundamentally misaligned with agroecological transformation and carries substantial long-term ecological and social risks.

TAAT Phase I delivered productivity gains at scale, but its top-down, input-intensive model is fundamentally misaligned with agroecological transformation.

TAAT Phase II expanded reach and introduced incremental social improvements, but continued to privilege technology diffusion over systemic agroecological transformation.

12. TAAT Phase II: TAAT Expansion Program

Financing: USD 27.41m AfDB grant (via Transition Support Facility and African Development Fund), including €5m from Germany through the TSF Donor Contributions Window

Implementer: International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), with CGIAR centres and national research institutions

ACT Score: 8/26 (Low)

Risk Score: Not specified

Project Overview: Approved in July 2022, TAAT Phase II builds on the initial USD 40 million Phase I investment by expanding technology-delivery systems across Africa, with a stated ambition to reach more than 40 million smallholder farmers. The programme targets low-income and fragile states and is positioned as a major scaling effort under AfDB's Feed Africa initiative. Implementation continues to be led by IITA and CGIAR partners.

Activities and Results: Phase II financing aims to scale access to what AfDB terms "climate-smart agricultural technologies," including improved crop varieties, input packages, digital extension services, and farmer training platforms. The programme strengthens private-sector partnerships and expands innovation platforms designed to accelerate dissemination of agricultural technologies across key value chains (Ojoko, 2025). Its operational focus remains on rapid delivery of standardised technologies rather than localised adaptation.

Agroecological Performance: TAAT Phase II scored 8/26 on the ACT, indicating low agroecological alignment. While it shows modest improvements over Phase I—particularly in gender inclusion, dietary diversity, and promotion of climate-adapted seed varieties—the programme continues to prioritise input-intensive technology dissemination. Biodiversity gains are limited to varietal diversification within a small set of staple crops. Soil health is framed mainly through productivity rather than ecological regeneration, and the programme does not incorporate meaningful biodiversity conservation or nutrient-recycling strategies.

Knowledge transfer remains largely top-down: farmers are positioned as recipients of predefined technologies rather than co-creators of locally adapted ecological practices. No evidence is provided of input-reduction strategies, soil-health monitoring frameworks, or participatory governance mechanisms beyond targeted inclusion programmes.

Risks: The programme's emphasis on standardised input packages reinforces dependency on external fertilisers, chemicals, and certified seeds, increasing vulnerability to market shocks and climate risks. The absence of ecological monitoring or co-creation mechanisms limits adaptive capacity and heightens the risk of soil nutrient depletion and reduced agro-biodiversity. Scaling uniform production models across fragile landscapes may exacerbate environmental degradation in the long term.

Conclusion: TAAT Phase II introduced incremental social improvements and expanded reach. However, it continued to promote a modernization paradigm that privileges efficiency and technology diffusion over systemic agroecological transformation.

13. Emergency Wheat Production Project (SEWPP) [Sudan]

Financing: USD 73.8 million AfDB crisis-response grant

Implementer: UN World Food Programme (WFP)

ACT Score: 10/26 (Low-Moderate)

Risk Score: Not specified (PVMP applied)

Project Overview: Launched in the context of Sudan’s escalating conflict, SEWPP is a USD 73.8 million emergency intervention designed to prevent the collapse of national food systems disrupted by import shortages and conflict-related agricultural losses. Implemented by the UN World Food Programme with AfDB financing, the project builds on earlier TAAT wheat initiatives (2018-2021) and focuses on stabilising wheat production in the face of acute national shortages.

Activities and Results: SEWPP distributed certified “climate-resilient” wheat seed and synthetic fertilisers to approximately 170,000 smallholder farmers across Gezira, Kassala, River Nile, White Nile, and Northern states (AfDB, 2023c). The project reports highly significant results: national wheat output doubled within two years, producing 645,000 metric tonnes—roughly 22% of national demand—and directly supporting Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and conflict-affected households. Additional interventions included digital voucher systems, strengthened extension services, and support with harvesting machinery. To mitigate environmental and health risks, SEWPP incorporated a Pest and Vector Management Plan (PVMP) outlining crop rotation, biological control, seed treatment, and regulated pesticide use under Sudanese law and AfDB safeguards (WFP, 2024).

Agroecological Performance: SEWPP scored 10/26 on the ACT. It performed well in fairness and connectivity thanks to strong gender inclusion, digitalised input delivery, and integration of smallholders into storage and processing systems. However, the project remained firmly centred on monocrop wheat intensification and productivity gains through synthetic inputs. Agroecological principles—including diversity, recycling, soil ecosystem health, and co-creation—were largely absent. Farmer participation focused on adopting standardised input packages rather than shaping locally adapted solutions.

Risks: While the PVMP introduces safeguards around pesticide use, broader ecological risks persist. The model reinforces dependence on external fertilisers, pesticides, and certified seed, heightening vulnerability to future price shocks and supply disruptions. The absence of organic soil fertility strategies, biodiversity enhancement, or input-reduction pathways increases the risks of soil degradation and reduced long-term resilience. As a single-crop intervention deployed in fragile conflict settings, SEWPP also risks entrenching structural dependencies rather than diversifying livelihood bases.

Conclusion: SEWPP was reportedly effective as an emergency stabilization measure but failed to embed long-term agroecological resilience. It delivered short-term food gains at the cost of structural dependency and ecological fragility.

SEWPP was effective as an emergency stabilisation measure, but failed to embed long-term agroecological resilience.

ZEFPP delivered gains in inclusion, nutrition, and modest diversification, but its input-intensive design limits its contribution to long-term agroecological resilience.

14. Emergency Food Production Project (ZEFPP) [Zimbabwe]

Financing: USD 25 million African Development Fund (ADF) grant
Implementer: Government of Zimbabwe, with FAO technical support
ACT Score: 12/26 (Moderate)

Risk Score: Not specified

Project Overview: Launched in 2022 under AfDB’s African Emergency Food Production Facility (AEFPF), ZEFPP aims to stabilise food production and strengthen smallholder resilience nationwide. Implemented by the Government of Zimbabwe with FAO support, the project targeted approximately 180,000 smallholder farmers between 2022 and 2024, with a specific emphasis on engaging women and youth.

Activities and Results: ZEFPP focused on distributing certified seed and synthetic fertiliser, complemented by extension support, farmer training, and measures to expand input and credit access. The programme also promoted limited diversification through the multiplication of the locally bred Msasa sunflower variety. Fourteen multiplication sites were established across Masvingo, Chisumbanje, and Chiredzi, covering 120 hectares and involving 243 farmers (45% women, 13.5% youth) (FAO, 2025). Training sessions introduced “climate-smart practices” and strengthened seed system management. Assessments from FAO and AfDB noted shifts among some farmers from single-crop dependence toward more diversified production, supporting nutrition and resilience outcomes.

Agroecological Performance: With an ACT score of 12/26, ZEFPP demonstrates moderate alignment. It performs strongly in fairness, social values, and connectivity through its gender and youth inclusion targets, strengthened seed systems, and improved access to agricultural information and finance. Its diversification benefits—though limited—align with agroecological principles related to empowerment, diversity, and strengthened local food systems. However, ecological depth remains weak. The project is primarily input-driven, relying on hybrid seed and synthetic fertilisers, with little evidence of input-reduction strategies, soil regeneration efforts, or biodiversity conservation beyond the Msasa sunflower initiative. Farmer participation centres on adopting prescribed technologies rather than co-creating locally adapted practices, and the project lacks ecological monitoring indicators such as soil organic matter or erosion control.

Risks: The continued reliance on hybrid seed and fertiliser-based production increases vulnerability to input price volatility and resource constraints. Soil degradation risks may be exacerbated without organic nutrient management or erosion-control practices. Limited diversification and the absence of ecological monitoring reduce the programme’s ability to adapt to environmental shocks or track long-term sustainability outcomes.

Conclusion: ZEFPP delivered gains in inclusion, nutrition, and modest diversification, but its input-intensive design limits its contribution to long-term agroecological resilience.

15. Competitive and Resilient Cereal Development Support Programme (PARC-Céréales) [Morocco]

Financing: €199m (USD 193m) AfDB sovereign loan under the African Emergency Food Production Facility (AEFPF)

Implementer: Ministry of Agriculture, Morocco

ACT Score: 13/26 (Moderate)

Risk Score: Not specified

Project Overview: Approved in September 2022, PARC-Céréales supports Morocco's response to severe drought, global input price shocks, and disruptions linked to the Ukraine-Russia conflict. Implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture as sector budget support, the programme aims to stabilise cereal supply in the short term while strengthening long-term sectoral resilience. It aligns with Morocco's Green Generation 2020-2030 strategy and broader national goals of reducing cereal import dependency.

Activities and Results: Financing focused on two core objectives: emergency food security and systemic sector reform. Key activities included distributing improved wheat and barley seeds, deploying climate adaptation measures in drought-affected regions, and investing in storage, logistics, and market systems. The programme also advanced governance and policy reforms intended to improve efficiency and strengthen value-chain integration. Expected outcomes include a 50% increase in cereal productivity, a 20% reduction in cereal imports by 2030, and higher rural incomes through enhanced market participation (NAP, 2022).

Agroecological Performance: PARC-Céréales achieved a moderate ACT score of 13/26. It performs strongly on policy support, connectivity, and social inclusion, particularly through improved governance, expanded opportunities for women and youth, and alignment with national resilience strategies. These features create enabling conditions for climate adaptation and sectoral stability. However, the programme shows limited ecological integration. Documentation provides no evidence of agroecological practices such as intercropping, soil regeneration, organic fertility management, biodiversity conservation, or participatory co-creation. Resilience is framed mainly through economic and policy reforms rather than ecosystem-level adaptation. The reliance on improved seed varieties and market intensification reflects a conventional modernisation model rather than a shift toward diversified agroecological systems.

Risks: The absence of soil-health indicators, biodiversity monitoring, or input-reduction strategies raises concerns about the ecological sustainability of cereal intensification. Without measures addressing nutrient recycling, water-use management, or ecosystem regeneration, the programme risks reinforcing input dependence and vulnerability to future climate and market shocks.

Conclusion: PARC-Céréales strengthens governance and market resilience in Morocco's cereal sector, but its ecological foundations remain weak, limiting its contribution to long-term agroecological transformation.

Strong on
governance
and markets,
weak on
agroecological
foundations

16. Integrated Livestock Value Chain Development Project (PDCVIE-BF) [Burkina Faso]

Financing: USD 39.45 million sovereign loan (African Development Bank, 2023)

Implementer: Ministry of Animal Resources, Government of Burkina Faso

ACT Score: 14/26 (Moderate)

Risk Score: A - High (Environmental Category A / Climate Safeguards 1)

Project Overview: The Integrated Livestock Value Chain Development Project (PDCVIE-BF) is a national initiative designed to modernise Burkina Faso’s livestock sector and strengthen rural economies in the agro-pastoral regions of Hauts-Bassins, Cascades, Boucle du Mouhoun, and Sud-Ouest. Financed through a USD 39.45 million sovereign loan from the African Development Bank, the project adopts a value-chain “ecosystem” approach that links breeders, cooperatives, processors, research institutions, and public agencies into a unified system intended to raise production and improve market access.

Activities and Results: Project activities focus on boosting productivity in cattle, small ruminants, pigs, and poultry; expanding processing and market infrastructure through new slaughterhouses, cold-chain logistics, and meat-processing plants; and strengthening institutional capacity for governance and coordination. The project also promotes expanded feed-crop production—particularly maize and soy—drawing on the TAAT-Savannahs model of input packages, mechanisation, and technical support. Together these interventions are expected to increase output, create employment, and improve competitiveness in the domestic livestock industry.

Agroecological Performance: On the Agroecology Coalition Tool, PDCVIE-BF sits in the moderate range. Its strengths lie in participation, institutional connectivity, and the potential for co-creation among diverse actors. It also supports climate adaptation in vulnerable agro-pastoral zones and offers opportunities for income diversification among rural households. However, ecological integration is limited. The design does not include strategies for soil regeneration, biodiversity protection, rotational grazing, or reduced input use, and it embeds no ecological monitoring indicators.

Risks: Because it involves feed-crop expansion, intensive livestock production, and new processing infrastructure, the project is classified as Environmental Category A, indicating high potential for significant negative impacts. Documented risks include increased pressure on land from maize and soy cultivation; soil degradation and higher fertiliser and pesticide loads in feed systems; possible exclusion of pastoralists from grazing and water access; and waste-management challenges associated with slaughter and processing facilities. The absence of soil-health or biodiversity monitoring further heightens uncertainty about its long-term ecological footprint.

Conclusion: PDCVIE-BF improves coordination and market opportunities—but without stronger land, water, and ecological safeguards, livestock intensification may worsen environmental stress and heighten community vulnerability.

PDCVIE-BF improves coordination and market access, but ecological safeguards remain weak.

17. Agropastoral Development, Digitization and Market Access (PADDAMAG) [Guinea]

Financing: USD 27.75 million sovereign loan (AfDB, 2023)

Implementer: Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Government of Guinea

ACT Score: 13/26 (Moderate)

Risk Score: Category 2 - Moderate environmental & social risks

Project Overview: Approved in July 2023, PADDAMAG is a national agropastoral development programme designed to strengthen Guinea's livestock and poultry feed systems, expand market access, and improve financial and digital inclusion for rural producers. Supported by a USD 27.75 million sovereign loan and a total budget of USD 32.15 million, the project operates through three main components: development of irrigation and grazing infrastructure, expansion of feed crop production, and digitalised market and financial services. It is implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock with technical and financial oversight from the African Development Bank.

Activities and Results: The project centres on maize and soybean production for livestock and poultry feed, the construction of feed mills and pastoral infrastructure, and the introduction of digital platforms for extension, credit access, and market integration. Training programmes seek to strengthen climate resilience for smallholders and pastoralists, and a strong gender inclusion component aims to reduce inequalities and increase women's participation in agricultural value chains. In parallel, market infrastructure investments are intended to stabilise prices, reduce losses, and link producers to processors and traders.

Agroecological Performance: On agroecological performance, PADDAMAG sits in the moderate range. It scores well in fairness, participation, and connectivity thanks to its support for producer organisations, youth and women's inclusion, and digital innovations that strengthen institutional linkages. Its focus on improving pastoral resilience in drought-prone areas also aligns with elements of equity and adaptation within agroecological frameworks. However, the ecological scope remains limited. The project documentation provides little evidence of interventions to restore soil fertility, reduce input reliance, or protect biodiversity. Feed-crop systems lack measures for cover cropping, organic matter enhancement, or erosion control, and no ecosystem restoration or biodiversity monitoring is built into the design.

Risks: As a Category 2 environmental risk project, PADDAMAG is expected to have moderate but manageable environmental and social impacts, yet the documentation highlights several concerns. Expanding maize and soy feed systems may increase fertiliser and pesticide use and place additional pressure on land and water resources. Weak articulation of pastoral land governance raises risks around grazing corridor access and water rights, particularly for nomadic and transhumant groups. Without soil-health or biodiversity monitoring, the long-term ecological effects of feed-crop expansion remain uncertain, potentially exposing farmers to declining soil quality and higher production costs over time.

Conclusion: PADDAMAG delivers meaningful gains in inclusion, digitisation, and pastoral resilience — but its limited ecological scope and underdeveloped land governance safeguards constrain its potential for a sustainable agropastoral transition.

Pastoral resilience improves, but weak land and ecological safeguards constrain sustainability

Large-scale irrigation and resettlement dominate the design, raising risks for land, water, and livelihoods.

18. Eswatini - Mkhondvo-Ngwavuma Water Augmentation Program (MNWAP, Phase I)

Financing: Sovereign loan (African Development Bank, 2021)

Implementer: Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise (ESWADE), in partnership with Ministry of Agriculture

ACT Score: 14/26 (Moderate)

Risk Score: Category A - High environmental & social impact

Project Overview: Approved in 2021, the Mkhondvo-Ngwavuma Water Augmentation Program (MNWAP, Phase I) is a large-scale, multi-phase water and irrigation initiative designed to transform agricultural production in Eswatini's Shiselweni Region. Financed through an AfDB sovereign loan and implemented by ESWADE, the programme's centrepiece is the construction of the Mpakeni Dam and associated water-delivery infrastructure, enabling irrigation for 4,600 hectares of drought-prone farmland. Future phases are expected to expand irrigation coverage to 18,000 hectares. The programme also aims to attract agro-industrial processing investments in horticulture, cotton, and food value chains.

Activities and Results: The project finances dam construction, irrigation systems, farmer training, and environmental and social safeguards. A Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) is in place for displaced households, with livelihood restoration support including backyard gardens, poultry and goat rearing, and improved housing. MNWAP is expected to benefit over 100,000 people and create up to 100,000 jobs through expanded irrigation-driven production and value-chain development. It integrates private-sector partnerships in agro-processing, renewable energy, transport, and a "climate-resilient eco-city," positioning the region for long-term commercial agricultural growth.

Agroecological Performance: On agroecological performance, MNWAP scores moderately (14/26). Its strengths include resilience-building through improved water security, strong social safeguards, and the potential for diversified horticultural production under irrigation. However, ecological depth is limited. The project documentation includes no explicit provisions for soil restoration, agrobiodiversity conservation, organic matter management, or integrated pest and nutrient management within irrigated systems. While irrigation enhances productivity and stabilises yields, the ecological transition remains undefined.

Risks: MNWAP carries a Category A environmental and social risk rating, reflecting the scale and complexity of the dam and irrigation infrastructure. Documented risks include displacement of communities and the need for sustained compliance with RAP commitments; altered river flows and potential impacts on downstream ecosystems; intensified agricultural production that could increase fertiliser and pesticide runoff; and long-term land-use change as subsistence farmers shift toward commercial irrigated crops. Without clear ecological safeguards or soil-health monitoring, irrigation expansion may accelerate soil salinisation, degrade water quality, or expose farmers to rising input dependence.

Conclusion: MNWAP promises major gains in water security and rural transformation — but without robust ecological safeguards, large-scale irrigation risks deepening environmental pressures and uneven community impacts.

19. Regional Resilient Rice Value Chains Development Project (REWARD) [West Africa]

Financing: Sovereign loans to ECOWAS member states + USD 9.44 million ADF Climate Action Window grant to AfricaRice

Implementer: AfricaRice with national Ministries of Agriculture

ACT Score: 16/26 (Moderate)

Risk Score: Not specified

Project Overview: Approved in July 2025, REWARD is a regional programme across 13 ECOWAS countries to advance rice self-sufficiency through climate-resilient value chain development. The AfDB supports the initiative through sovereign loans and an ADF Climate Action Window grant to AfricaRice, which leads implementation with national agricultural ministries.

Activities and Results: The project strengthens seed systems for climate-resilient rice, rehabilitates irrigation and storage infrastructure, and trains farmers in practices such as alternate wetting and drying (AWD) and agroforestry integration. The REWARD-Adaptation sub-project finances early warning systems, digital weather advisories, climate monitoring, and four automatic weather stations per country. Expected results include distributing climate-resilient seed to 11,000 farmers, training 12,600 producers and processors, supporting 65 SMEs, and creating 47,000 jobs across the region.

Agroecological Performance: With an ACT score of 16/26, REWARD is among the more agroecology-aligned projects in the AfDB portfolio. It performs well on resilience, connectivity, and co-creation through climate services, digital extension, and broad-based training. Its focus on women and youth strengthens fairness and participation.

However, ecological depth is limited. Beyond improved varieties and climate-smart irrigation, the documentation provides little evidence of input reduction, soil regeneration, biodiversity enhancement, or ecological monitoring indicators.

Risks: No formal risk rating is provided. The lack of soil, water, and biodiversity monitoring introduces uncertainty about long-term ecological impacts, and the absence of farmer-led co-innovation mechanisms may constrain the adoption of more transformative ecological practices.

Conclusion: REWARD advances regional rice resilience and coordination, but without deeper ecological measures, its contribution to long-term agroecological transition remains partial.

Resilience and co-creation are strong, but ecological metrics remain absent.

20. Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation in the Savannah (TAAT-S) [Ghana]

An input-intensive model based on monocropping and fertiliser dependence dominates.

Financing: Integrated within the Savannah Zone Agricultural Productivity Improvement Project (SAPIP), USD 56.32 million total (AfDB + Government + Private sector)

Implementer: Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA)

ACT Score: 7/26 (Low)

Risk Score: Not specified in available text

Project Overview: TAAT-S is a technology-delivery platform operating inside Ghana’s Savannah Zone Agricultural Productivity Improvement Project (SAPIP). The pilot targets the northern savannah ecological zone; around 8 million hectares, or 54% of national land area; with a focus on maize, soybean, and livestock value chains (MoFA, 2025; GNA, 2020). The African Development Bank supports the programme under its Feed Africa strategy, positioning TAAT-S as a model for expanding commercial grain production.

Activities and Results: The programme promotes improved hybrid seeds, fertiliser application, mechanisation, and “conservation agriculture” practices, while expanding irrigation, feeder roads, and warehouse infrastructure. Early pilot phases saw farmers expand cultivated land dramatically; from 5-10 hectares to over 453 hectares; whereas 12 nucleus farmers managed 1,300 hectares by 2019, with projections of reaching 2,500 hectares (MoFA, 2025). TAAT-S also rehabilitated seed-processing centres, trained extension officers, and developed cluster arrangements linking grain production to poultry and feed-mill value chains, establishing vertically integrated agribusiness hubs.

Agroecological Performance: With an ACT score of 7/26, TAAT-S shows low agroecological alignment. The programme is strongly input-driven, promoting hybrid seeds, synthetic fertilisers, and mechanised expansion of maize and soybean monocultures. While it references “conservation agriculture,” the documentation provides no evidence of soil-health regeneration, biodiversity management, or farmer-led innovation. Cluster-based integration with poultry and feed industries reinforces a vertically integrated, high-input grain system. Ecological diversification, nutrient cycling, and agro-biodiversity strategies are absent from the project description.

Risks: The source text does not explicitly assign an environmental risk rating, but several risks are evident. Large-scale expansion of maize and soy increases pressure on land and may accelerate monocropping, soil nutrient depletion, and fertiliser dependency. The model’s emphasis on mechanisation and hybrid inputs risks excluding smaller producers unable to afford capital-intensive packages. Without biodiversity or soil-fertility monitoring, long-term environmental impacts remain unclear. Integration into feed-mill and poultry value chains may further entrench monocrop systems and market vulnerability.

Conclusion: TAAT-S has driven rapid expansion of commercial maize and soy production—but its input-intensive design, monoculture orientation, and lack of ecological safeguards position it far from an agroecological transition.



Three men lean over a system of irrigation pipes to manage the water flow for their crops in Southern Africa.

Photo credit: Daniel Kawed – Unsplash

Interview Insights

Participation is experienced more as a procedural requirement than a meaningful opportunity to influence decisions.

Five key informants were interviewed for this study, representing policy research, programme implementation, financial analysis, and civil society. Although outreach to AfDB staff and project implementers was unsuccessful, the perspectives gathered offer grounded reflections on how AfDB financing is understood and experienced across different contexts.

1. Transparency: Strong Internal Systems, Weak Public Accessibility

Respondents agreed that AfDB maintains a highly structured governance and reporting framework. One interviewee with insider experience described the Bank as “quite transparent to its governors and executive directors,” noting that financial information and audits are routinely shared within its institutional hierarchy. As they put it, “They are transparent within their systems; the problem is how this information is used, or who engages with it.”

However, another respondent offered a sharply contrasting view, calling AfDB “the least transparent” among DFIs. They argued that some private equity investments “are not listed in any of their disclosure portals,” leaving researchers and affected communities “without third-party confirmation about what they’re doing.” The lack of up-to-date or detailed information, they said, makes it “really hard to get a comprehensive picture.”

Taken together, these perspectives point to a recurring distinction between procedural transparency and practical, public-facing transparency.

2. Participation: Consultation Without Influence

All respondents agreed that community participation rarely shapes project design. One practitioner explained that “communities are often consulted, but their feedback rarely changes the design,” because projects are typically formulated at higher administrative levels before being presented locally. Another summarised this dynamic as: “Ownership usually means government ownership, not community ownership.”

Participation, in other words, is experienced more as a procedural requirement than a meaningful opportunity to influence decisions.



3. Field-Level Realities: Resistance and Misalignment

This gap between institutional design and community experience was most visible in field narratives.

An implementer working on the SAPZ initiative in Nigeria recounted escalating tensions due to delayed compensation for land acquisition: “My team has been driven out two times... attacked on the field by the villagers because government has not paid this compensation.”

They attributed the problem to inadequate communication: “Government has not done a good job of orientation about the projects... and they compensate the people appropriately... this is for their benefits.”

Another practitioner, based in northern Ghana, questioned why donor projects focus on maize and soybean despite their poor nutritional alignment and labour demands: “From the Savannah, traditionally we have been used to eating small grains... those are more proteinous than maize.” They added that maize is not appropriate for many people with diabetes: “Doctors say to avoid maize. They don’t advise patients to eat maize, but small grains.”

The same respondent highlighted gendered labour burdens: “They are not gender-friendly because they involve a lot of labour.” Women who previously managed small-grain production independently now depend on male labour for maize cultivation.

They also described market failures: “Projects rarely secure markets... When products flood the markets, the price goes down... it’s detrimental to their financial status.”

These experiences reveal how production models imposed from above can undermine local diets, gender roles, and livelihoods.

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4. Pathways to Reform: Evidence and Engagement

Despite these challenges, several interviewees believed AfDB can shift when presented with strong evidence. One respondent argued that institutional change is most likely “when there is evidence showing that agroecology or local adaptation works.” They suggested that civil society and farmer organisations should engage the Bank “on the record,” building dialogue around measurable results rather than rhetoric.

Another emphasised that real change must begin with member governments: “The Bank will not fund things against the wishes of countries.”

They noted that “all the action happens in the government,” because national ministries control the pipeline of proposals and far outspend DFIs in agriculture. From this perspective, “DFIs are too small in the bigger scheme of things.”

Their conclusion: when governments adopt agroecology or sustainable approaches, “the financiers respond.”

Transparency
without
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5. Accountability and Early Warning

A consultation with an international accountability organisation highlighted cross-DFI challenges: late disclosure, weak grievance mechanisms, and limited community participation. They described an early warning model that tracks high-risk projects—across several development banks including AfDB—to alert communities before approval. This tool illustrates how community-led monitoring could strengthen AfDB’s accountability and risk management.

Synthesis

Across interviews, respondents depicted AfDB as an institution that is professionally disciplined and internally accountable, yet often opaque, top-down, and culturally misaligned at community level. The qualitative evidence shows a consistent pattern: transparency without accessibility; consultation without influence; production models without cultural or nutritional fit.

At the same time, interviewees identified practical opportunities for improvement—clearer orientation of communities, timely compensation, stronger feedback systems, and evidence-based engagement. Their reflections illuminate both the strengths and the blind spots in AfDB’s current approach to agricultural development.

Discussion

The AfDB occupies an influential position in shaping African agriculture, with a mandate to improve food security, create jobs, and build climate resilience. The findings of this study reveal a consistent pattern across financial flows, project design, stakeholder perceptions, and agroecological scoring. AfDB has mobilised significant resources, yet the portfolio continues to gravitate toward industrial models and corporate value chains, with limited support for diversified, locally rooted systems. This discussion interprets those findings in light of the Bank's strategic documents and wider DFI literature.

Financial flows, intermediaries, and accountability

AfDB's Feed Africa strategy (AfDB, 2025f) prioritises value chain upgrading, agribusiness competitiveness, and private capital mobilisation. As a result, financing is commonly routed through banks, funds, and corporate actors. These structures aim to scale investment and bring agriculture into formal markets, but they also shape who benefits. Intermediated lending can obscure end users, making it difficult for citizens, researchers, or even governments to trace public money or verify development outcomes.

This reflects broader patterns identified in DFI analyses. Ikpe (2020) describes how regional development banks adopt a modernisation logic that channels capital toward commercial circuits. Mamun and Várallyai (2025) similarly note that DFIs tend to favour value chain modernisation over smallholder-led ecological transitions. In AfDB's case, blended finance arrangements, guarantees, and syndicated loans expand available capital but introduce new opacity and risk. Although internal governance is strong, public-facing transparency remains thin, particularly regarding financial intermediaries. This aligns with concerns raised by Watts and Scales (2020), who argue that financialisation distances investors from real-world impacts.

Agroecological alignment and ecological gaps

The assessment of AfDB's portfolio using agroecological criteria found mostly low to moderate alignment. Social inclusion elements were present, but ecological practice change was limited. Soil regeneration, input reduction, biodiversity enhancement, and farmer-led diversification rarely appeared in project designs. Even climate-resilience projects tended to rely on improved varieties and input packages rather than diversified, low-input systems.

This mirrors AfDB's historical focus on regional integration and industrial policy (Ikpe, 2020). Corporate strategy documents emphasise productivity, value chains, and private sector mobilisation (AfDB, 2025f), and this orientation carries through to agricultural operations. The SAPZ programme in Nigeria, for example, prioritised industrial infrastructure rather than ecological transition. The wider DFI evidence base also shows that modern inputs and market access remain the dominant template, while agroecology remains underfunded (Mamun and Várallyai, 2025).

AfDB has mobilised significant resources, yet the portfolio continues to gravitate toward industrial models and corporate value chains, with limited support for diversified, locally rooted systems.

The Integrated Safeguards System (AfDB, 2023d) sets environmental and social standards, but implementation remains uneven. Agroecological indicators such as reduced input use or increased soil organic matter are rarely monitored. The Landscape of Climate Finance in Africa (CPI, 2024) shows that most climate finance flows to mitigation infrastructure rather than adaptation or sustainable land management, contributing to weak ecological uptake.

Participation, community agency, and social license

Interview insights help explain how top-down design affects implementation. Respondents noted that communities are often consulted but rarely influence project design. Where land acquisition or major infrastructure is involved, weak orientation and delayed compensation can create conflict, as seen in the SAPZ case in Nigeria. Production choices driven by donors can also misalign with local diets, nutrition patterns, and gendered labour. The shift from small grains to high-input maize and soybean in northern Ghana illustrates how well-intentioned productivity investments may undermine nutrition, increase labour burdens for women, and expose farmers to market volatility.

These findings point to a deeper issue. AfDB's comparative advantage lies in moving large volumes of capital at scale. However, agroecological transitions require participatory, place-based processes that build soil health, diversify farming systems, and strengthen community autonomy. Current tools and incentives are better suited to finance-driven modernisation than to community ecological change.

Summary of structural challenges

Three challenges emerge across the results:

1. **Weak participation** and limited influence by communities, which undermines social license and increases implementation risks.
2. **Limited public-facing accountability**, especially where funds flow through intermediaries.
3. **Ecological thinness** within an industrial model that prioritises scale and value chain performance over ecosystem outcomes.

These challenges recur because financial, institutional, and strategic incentives are aligned with value chain transformation rather than agroecological resilience. Nonetheless, the findings also reveal clear opportunities for reform that fall within AfDB's mandate and operating model.

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Conclusion

The findings of this study point to a need for recalibration rather than rupture. AfDB has the capacity, credibility, and mandate to play a central role in Africa's agricultural transformation. However, its current structures and incentives tend to reinforce industrial models that produce uneven ecological and social outcomes. A shift is required so that the scale and financial discipline that AfDB applies to infrastructure and agribusiness can also be applied to soil health, biodiversity, community participation, and local food systems.

Transparency and public accountability are essential foundations for this shift. As stakeholder interviews revealed, AfDB is transparent within its internal governance systems, yet opaque to citizens and affected communities. If trust is to be strengthened, information must be published in accessible formats and on time, especially where financial intermediaries are involved.

A second shift concerns ecological integrity. Industrial and agro-industrial investments should continue where they demonstrably benefit smallholders, but AfDB should allocate a protected and growing share of finance to agroecology and territorial markets. Eligibility rules and measurable indicators are needed to ensure that ecological practices move from rhetoric to operational criteria. Clear baselines and milestones for diversity, soil organic matter, and landscape health can help convert ecological intentions into verifiable outcomes.

Finally, implementation should also be grounded in local realities. Farmer organisations, women's groups, and Indigenous authorities should play a central role in co-designing agricultural investments. The aim is not to abandon value chains but to align them with systems that already work on the ground, such as resilient seed systems, diversified rotations, intercrop

Taken together, these shifts would allow AfDB to maintain its strength as a high-capacity financier while ensuring that public capital delivers measurable resilience, equity, and ecological integrity. The policy recommendations that follow set out practical steps to operationalise this approach.

Policy Recommendations for the African Development Bank

1. Establish an Agroecology Transition Window within Feed Africa

Create a dedicated financing window that supports diversified, low-input farming systems, farmer-managed seed systems, agroforestry, and soil regeneration. This would demonstrate scalable ecological models within the Bank's structure.

2. Require ecological performance indicators for all agriculture projects

Adopt a simple set of portfolio-wide metrics such as soil organic matter, on-farm crop and tree diversity, input reduction, and habitat protection. Make these indicators part of appraisal, supervision, and disbursement conditions.

3. Strengthen transparency and traceability across the agricultural portfolio

Publish all sub-loans and beneficiaries of lines of credit and private equity funds. Ensure that intermediated lending meets the Bank's own disclosure standards and that information is accessible to citizens and affected communities.

4. Institutionalise early disclosure and structured community participation

Create an early disclosure system for all agricultural projects at concept and appraisal stages. Require governments to demonstrate community orientation, consultation, and land compensation before the first disbursement of any land-linked project.

5. Align climate and resilience finance with ecosystem-based approaches

Ensure that climate-tagged agriculture projects prioritise diversified rotations, agroforestry, water harvesting, and ecosystem restoration. Avoid classifying high-input monocultures as climate-smart unless supported by clear evidence of resilience benefits.

6. Set clear social and environmental requirements for agribusiness recipients

Condition non-sovereign operations and value-chain investments on land-use neutrality, biodiversity safeguards, and transparent contracting with farmers. Large corporate clients should provide credible restoration or conservation plans as part of due diligence.

7. Protect and strengthen local and informal food markets

Require retail, logistics, and processing investments to support local market access for smallholders. This includes reserving space for small vendors, improving market infrastructure, and ensuring that modernisation efforts do not marginalise territorial food economies.

8. Improve risk management by integrating community feedback and early warning

Strengthen grievance and monitoring systems by partnering with community organisations. Use community feedback to inform project adjustments, risk assessments, and supervision missions.

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ABOUT AFSA

The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) is a continental coalition of civil society organizations dedicated to advancing the causes of food sovereignty and agroecology across the African continent. Our alliance comprises diverse entities, including African food producer networks, African CSO networks, indigenous people's organizations, faith-based organizations, women and youth groups, consumer movements, and international organizations aligned with AFSA's mission. Currently, AFSA is a network of networks with 47 member organizations actively engaged in 50 African countries, impacting approximately 200 million individuals.



WHO IS AFSA?

AFSA brings small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, faith groups, consumers, youth and activists from across the continent of Africa to create a united and louder voice for food sovereignty.

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