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Integrating the Food Systems Diagnostics Approach to the Kampala CAADP Domestication Process: Lessons from the Malawi Case Study

By Greenwell Matchaya and Paul Guthiga

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Editorial

Since its adoption by the African Union (AU) in 2003, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) has been Africa's primary policy framework for agricultural transformation, wealth creation, food security, economic growth, and prosperity. It guides the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD), Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and Member States in driving agricultural transformation toward a self-reliant and productive Africa.

The recently adopted **Kampala CAADP Declaration** on ***"Building Resilient and Sustainable Agri-food Systems in Africa"*** and the associated **CAADP Strategy and Action Plan (2026-2035)** will build on the success and deepen the progress achieved after two decades of CAADP implementation, during which Africa significantly improved in economic and agricultural growth, poverty reduction, nutrition outcomes, and agricultural trade expansion. The next 10-year cycle of CAADP implementation must further deepen its focus to incorporate lessons while responding to emerging issues to accelerate sustainable food system transformation within a context of climate change and multifaceted stressors and shocks.

The longevity and continued success of CAADP can be attributed to its credibility as a shared framework designed to guide Member States toward agricultural transformation and economic growth. Driven by the CAADP principles and values, with emphasis on African ownership and mutual accountability, alongside review and benchmarking, data and analytics have been central to CAADP's evidence-based planning and implementation approach. As Africa prepares for the implementation phase of the Kampala CAADP Declaration, which comes into force on January 1, 2026, evidence and robust data analysis will continue to remain indispensable to the successful implementation on the ground. This is the rationale behind AKADEMIYA2063's ***Kampala Policy Brief Series***.

The purpose of the policy briefs is to serve as reference documents for policy analysts and planners across AU Member States as they prepare their programs in response to the Kampala CAADP Declaration. The policy briefs will provide a synthesis of a large body of research tackling topics of strategic relevance to Africa's development agenda in parallel with key issues to be addressed during the new phase of CAADP implementation to provide insights, analyze emerging ideas, review cross-cutting thematic areas, and propose policy recommendations that can be replicated for sustainable impact.

The evidence presented in the Kampala Policy Brief Series is derived from published research and data by AKADEMIYA2063's scientists and collaborators across Africa and outside the continent. These lessons are made accessible to policymakers, non-state actors, and other practitioners at continental, regional, and national levels, as well as development partners, to support the implementation of CAADP 2026-2035. In addition to packaging the lessons and insights into comprehensive yet accessible knowledge products, AKADEMIYA2063 is facilitating policy dialogue through webinars. During these sessions, the findings are presented to a broad range of stakeholders to guide programmatic interventions supporting the implementation of the Kampala CAADP Agenda.

Executive Summary

This brief explores the integration of a food systems diagnostics approach[1] developed in 2021 to support countries in developing agrifood system transformation interventions under the framework of the ongoing Kampala CAADP domestication process. The diagnostic tool was developed for Ghana, Rwanda, and Malawi to understand the status of the countries' food systems and, drawing on the diagnostic analysis, to develop suitable polices, programs, and investment cases. The brief specifically utilizes the case of Malawi to demonstrate the potential benefits of building on these food system diagnostics in domesticating the Kampala Declaration. Aligned with the Food System Transformative Integrated Policy (FS-TIP) methodology, the assessment combined qualitative stakeholder consultations with quantitative analysis of 22 supra-indicators aligned with the five UN Food Systems Summit action tracks. The process involved extensive engagement with government ministries, farmer organizations, civil society, and technical experts, supported by policy mapping and thematic evaluations.

The diagnostic revealed significant challenges, including poor dietary diversity, widespread undernutrition, limited infrastructure, high post-harvest losses, gender inequity, and policy fragmentation. Agricultural productivity and environmental sustainability were found to be critically low. Recommendations include adopting a coordinated food systems approach, promoting diversified and nutrient-rich food production, investing in storage and processing infrastructure, improving food safety regulation, and ensuring inclusive access to land, credit, and markets. The brief recommends the inclusion of several steps for adaptation to strengthen the Kampala CAADP domestication process.

1The food system diagnostics approach was developed as part of the **Food System Transformative Integrated Policy (FS-TIP)** Analysis Toolkit in the context of the UN Food Systems Summit 2021 with contributions from African Population and Health Research Center, AKADEMIYA2063, AGRA, Boston Consulting Group, International Food Policy Research Institute, International Development Research Centre, The Rockefeller Foundation, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, Wageningen University, and the World Food Programme.

Introduction

The recently adopted Kampala Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Declaration and its Strategy and Action Plan (2026-2035) set out to address existing and emerging challenges and incorporate lessons learned over two decades of CAADP implementation, toward building resilient and sustainable agrifood systems across Africa. To achieve this, the Kampala Agenda must further deepen its focus to respond to emerging issues and meet the needs of sustainable food systems transformation in a context of accelerating climate change and multifaceted stressors and shocks. As the continent prepares for the implementation phase of the Kampala Declaration, which comes into force on January 1, 2026, evidence and robust data analysis will be indispensable to the successful implementation of the new CAADP Agenda.

AKADEMIYA2063 has developed a Kampala domestication package that encompasses the following components: (1) Developing Kampala Policy Brief Series to avail wide range of evidence to stakeholders (2) Hosting Kampala Webinar Series to disseminate evidence generated by the policy briefs (3) Conducting Kampala CAADP Diagnostics in selected countries (4) Participating in Kampala CAADP Stakeholder Dialogues and Domestication Events; (5) Mobilizing Kampala CAADP Technical Networks; (6) Developing a NASIP 3.0 Toolkit for Kampala Domestication and (7) Developing the Kampala CAADP Results Framework and Indicators.

Food systems are central to achieving Africa's Agenda 2063, particularly its aspiration for inclusive growth and sustainable development. However, persistent challenges—such as climate change, population growth, and food insecurity—are impeding progress toward eliminating hunger and achieving the Malabo commitment of zero hunger by 2025 (AU 2023). A food system, broadly defined, comprises interconnected actors and activities spanning production to consumption (von Braun et al. 2020).

In Africa, food insecurity remains high and rising. By 2023, the region had the highest percentage of the population facing hunger (20.4 percent), with nearly 295 million people facing hunger (FAO et al. 2024). The complexity of food systems necessitates integrated

diagnostics to pinpoint leverage points for transformation and policy reform (Herforth et al. 2022) and address the high levels of food insecurity.

The Kampala CAADP Declaration adopted an agrifood systems approach to tackle complex challenges comprehensively and coherently. The first step in implementing this approach is to conduct a food systems diagnostic to identify challenges and opportunities. Food system diagnostics analyzes interdependent components and assesses performance and sustainability. They highlight gaps, strengths, and opportunities for transformation (Rockefeller Foundation et al. 2021b). Recent initiatives, notably the Food System Transformative Integrated Policy (FS-TIP) project, have provided tools for such analyses, guiding national strategies in countries like Malawi, Ghana, and Rwanda.

This brief draws on Malawi's experience under FS-TIP to demonstrate how diagnostics can inform policy, identify transformation pathways, and shape national food system strategies in the Kampala domestication process. It focuses on the importance of diagnostics, the Malawi case study, and lessons learned from the process that could enrich and strengthen the Kampala CAADP Domestication process.

1. Concept and Methods for Guiding Food System Diagnostics

A food system is defined as the interconnected networks of actors involved in producing, processing, distributing, and consuming food, with impacts on health, the environment, and the economy (Ericksen 2008). A food systems approach emphasizes integrated, cross-sectoral engagement to tackle global challenges like food insecurity, climate change, and inequality (Rockefeller Foundation et al. 2021a; Bortoletti and Lomax 2019).

Food system diagnostics adopt a systems-thinking approach to reveal interconnections across production, consumption, waste, and socio-environmental dimensions. This holistic analysis facilitates inclusive stakeholder engagement and identifies strategic interventions that bridge scientific evidence with local realities and policy. Diagnostics also help track performance over time by establishing baseline indicators and assessing vulnerability to shocks such as climate change. By using both qualitative and quantitative methods, diagnostics guide countries to identify challenges, prioritize solutions, and monitor transformation using indicators aligned with local and global food system goals. Box 1 shows the type of analysis to be conducted for country-level food system diagnostics developed by the FS-TIP initiative.

Box 1. The type of analysis to be conducted under country food systems diagnostics

Priority Areas	Consumption	Transportation & Processing	Production
Safety, Nutrition, and Health	• Macro- and micronutrient deficiencies by demographic segment (including pregnant and lactating women, first thousand days population, and vulnerable groups) • Most consumed foods by region and income segment • Review of unhealthy food consumption patterns • Incidences of food quality issues	• Gaps/excesses to required total movement and processing of macro- and micronutrients • Extent of fortification for staple foods (flours, edible oils)	• Gaps/excesses to required total optimal amount and mix of production of macro- and micronutrients • On-farm consumption macro- and micronutrient gaps/ mix issues
Economic	• Price of prevalent foods and price of different optimal mixes of macro- and micro-nutrients relative to incomes • Retailer margins by major products • Employment contribu-tions	• Transport and processor margins achieved by the main foods consumed • Structure of food transport and processing (degrees of concentration/ fragmentation) • Employment contribu-tions	• Grower margins achieved by the main foods consumed • Structure of food production (degrees of concentration/ fragmentation of land) by crop
Social	• Structure of food retail (types of informal vs. formal) and consumption (e.g., home, HORECA, etc.) • Role of gender and youth • Community/tribe/reli-gion differences in consumption	• Role of gender and youth in processing employment and leadership	• Role of gender and youth in farming and on-farm employment • Community/tribe/reli-gion differences in production
Environmental	• Waste at point of retail and consumption • Moves towards ad-dressing the need for circular packaging	• Energy used in transport and processing (amount, mix, CO_2/ calorie)	• Water, waste, CO_2 output, and chemical input by crop • Biodiversity of agri-cultural land (incl. extensification and forest loss)

Source: FS-TIP project.

The methodology used to assess Malawi's food system under the FS-TIP initiative involved a structured yet flexible diagnostic process that combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Drawing on the Food Systems Dashboard and informed by the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) framework, the diagnostic applied a multidimensional lens to analyze national food system performance. This was accomplished through a sequence of analytical steps that

included scoping, thematic assessments, stakeholder and policy mapping, synthesis of findings, and national validation.

The analysis was led by a broad coalition of stakeholders, including Malawi's Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Trade, the Farmers Union of Malawi, and Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC). The process benefited from prior food systems dialogues and continuous engagement with national experts. These consultations helped to ground the diagnostics in local realities and ensure relevance to national priorities.

The quantitative aspect of the diagnostic focused on 22 supra-indicators aligned with the five UNFSS action tracks: access to safe and nutritious food, sustainable consumption, nature-positive production, equitable livelihoods, and resilience to vulnerabilities. These indicators were selected based on their relevance to policy, the availability and consistency of data, and the potential for disaggregation by geography, gender, or socioeconomic status. Each supra-indicator was supported by additional leading and lagging indicators to establish causal pathways and provide more detailed insight into food system dynamics.

In addition to data analysis, the diagnostic included a comprehensive review of national policies, programs, and institutional frameworks. This review aimed to evaluate the degree of coherence across various sectoral policies and strategies, and to identify areas where alignment with food systems transformation goals was either strong or lacking. The process also emphasized the importance of evidence-based prioritization of food system challenges and solutions, guided by both data and stakeholder perspectives.

Overall, the methodology provided a robust foundation for identifying system-level constraints, generating consensus on priorities, and informing integrated and transformative policy actions (Rockefeller Foundation et al. 2021b; GAIN 2023). Similarly, the Kampala CAADP domestication process aims to provide the evidence base and stakeholder involvement to generate the best policy/strategy mix to deliver on Kampala goals and targets.

2. The Malawi Case Study

The FS-TIP food system diagnostic in 2021 revealed significant performance gaps across Malawi's food system using 22 supra-indicators, organized by the five UNFSS action tracks. These findings provided a comprehensive baseline to inform policy and investment strategies.

2.1. Access to Safe and Nutritious Food

Malawi continues to struggle with widespread undernutrition and poor dietary diversity. Only 1 percent of the population has an adequate Food Consumption Score (FCS), while 16 percent fall into the borderline category. Nearly 44 percent of national nutrient requirements are unmet, with the population relying heavily on maize and other starchy staples. The undernourishment rate is at 18.8 percent, significantly higher than the global average of 8.9 percent. Additionally, 20.1 percent of adults are overweight or obese, reflecting the double burden of malnutrition. Malawi's food safety index score stands at 66.7 out of 100, below the 75.3 average for Africa South of the Sahara, suggesting gaps in the regulation and enforcement of food quality standards. The dominance of maize in production and consumption crowds out more nutritious, diverse foods. Limited access to legumes, fruits, and animal-source foods worsens dietary quality, especially for children and women.

2.2. Sustainable Consumption Patterns

The affordability of healthy diets in Malawi is among the worst in the region, costing 219 percent of average household food expenditure—more than double the SSA average of 95 percent. This

economic barrier contributes to poor nutrition and diet monotony. The per capita greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from food consumption are 1,369 kg CO_2eq/person, which is relatively lower than the SSA average but remains significant in the context of environmental sustainability. Food waste is estimated at 146 kg per capita annually, which falls within the global range but still indicates systemic inefficiencies. Malawi's food environment policy index is notably low at 3 out of 14, underscoring the absence of robust national policies to guide food marketing and dietary behavior.

2.3. Nature-Positive Production

Malawi's food production practices are contributing to environmental degradation. Agricultural emissions amount to 7.5 MtCO_2e, and deforestation remains a serious issue with an annual rate of 0.55 percent—over three times higher than the SSA average. Food loss across the supply chain is 15 percent, reflecting significant post-harvest inefficiencies. The country's biodiversity and habitat index is also slightly below regional standards, at 50.7 versus 54.5 for Africa South of the Sahara. These figures suggest an urgent need for sustainable intensification, agroecological practices, and investments in cold storage, transport, and food processing infrastructure.

2.4. Equitable Livelihoods

Income inequality in Malawi's food system is evident, with a Gini coefficient of 0.45—slightly above the Africa South of the Sahara average. Smallholder farmers receive only 68 percent of the retail value, highlighting market inefficiencies and weak bargaining power. The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index stands at 0.84, indicating progress in gender equity but still revealing disparities in access to land, credit, and agricultural services. Closing these gaps will require targeted support for women, youth, and marginalized rural households. Rural poverty is pervasive, with female-headed households disproportionately affected. Structural inequalities in access to land, extension services, credit, and markets limit the economic potential of smallholder farmers—particularly women and youth. Labor markets are fragmented and offer few non-farm opportunities in rural areas.

2.5. Resilience to Vulnerabilities, Shocks, and Stress

Malawi's resilience indicators paint a concerning picture. Overdependence on rain-fed agriculture and deforestation has made the food system highly vulnerable to climate shocks. The lack of investment in irrigation and poor land management practices contribute to declining productivity and ecological degradation. The Household Resilience Index is low at 0.26, and access to credit among food system actors is limited to just 12 percent of the population. While the government's social protection programs reach 87 percent of intended beneficiaries, funding remains precarious, and targeting mechanisms are inefficient. These figures underscore the urgency of strengthening social safety nets, improving access to rural finance, and integrating resilience-building strategies across all sectors of the food system.

Together, these results reflect a food system under pressure from multiple fronts: inadequate nutrition, environmental degradation, economic inequality, and low institutional resilience. They also highlight clear entry points for policy reform, investment, and targeted interventions to support Malawi's transition toward a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient food system.

3. Policy Mapping and Identification of Gaps

The policy review revealed significant fragmentation and misalignment within Malawi's food system governance. Existing policies tend to prioritize staple crop production—especially maize—while underemphasizing nutrition, sustainability, and equity. Although multiple sectoral strategies exist, they often lack coherence and coordination across ministries and fail to integrate food systems thinking.

Key policy gaps include the absence of robust regulations for food safety and the marketing of unhealthy foods, which weakens the food environment. Investment plans overlook infrastructure for storage, processing, and market access, particularly for nutritious and perishable foods. Gender and youth dimensions are weakly embedded, and social protection programs, though widely targeted, face financial and implementation challenges.

Environmental strategies are insufficiently linked to agriculture and nutrition objectives, with minimal emphasis on agroecology or sustainable intensification. Overall, Malawi lacks a unified, cross-sectoral policy framework capable of driving inclusive and resilient food system transformation.

4. Conclusions and Proposed Way Forward

The Malawi food systems diagnostic illuminated a multidimensional web of challenges that continue to undermine inclusive and sustainable transformation. Core issues such as over-reliance on maize, limited dietary diversity, underperforming value chains, climate vulnerability, weak institutional coordination, and insufficient data systems persist. Yet, this exercise also underscored the potential of structured diagnostics to identify policy levers, coordination gaps, and investment opportunities that can drive systemic improvements.

The diagnostic drew on the Food Systems Transformative Integrated Policy (FS-TIP) framework, which integrates systems thinking, stakeholder consultation, and both qualitative and quantitative evidence. By organizing findings around five action tracks and three cross-cutting themes, the process provided a holistic lens to identify performance bottlenecks and policy misalignments that may not be visible through siloed analyses. Notably, it highlighted the need to rebalance efforts toward enablers such as governance, finance, land, and gender equity.

While the diagnostic was country-specific, its methods and lessons are broadly applicable. It offers a replicable blueprint for other African countries striving to translate the aspirations of the Kampala CAADP Declaration on Building Resilient and Sustainable Agrifood Systems (2026–2035) into measurable, actionable strategies. Indeed, the insights from Malawi serve as both a caution and a catalyst — revealing where progress has stalled and where opportunities remain untapped.

Way Forward

4.1. Strategic Policy Directions for Malawi

Based on the diagnostic findings, five critical policy directions emerge:

- **Strengthen Data and Accountability Systems**: Malawi needs robust, real-time, disaggregated food systems indicators, publicly accessible dashboards, and embedded feedback loops in its planning frameworks.
- **Enable Structural Transformation**: Incentivize non-farm rural employment, value addition, and export diversification through aligned industrial and trade policy instruments.
- **Mainstream Cross-Cutting Enablers**: Gender equity, land tenure security, youth inclusion, climate adaptation, and governance must be elevated from peripheral concerns to central pillars of food systems planning.
- **Reform Subsidies and Social Protection**: Redirect maize-heavy input subsidies toward a more diversified and nutrition-sensitive portfolio and integrate safety nets that promote resilience and agency.
- **Institutionalize Diagnostics**: Embed periodic food systems diagnostics in national cycles (e.g., NAIPs, NAPs, and M&E systems), with clear resourcing, mandates, and inter-ministerial coordination.

4.2. Steps to Conduct a Food Systems Diagnostic Using the FS-TIP Approach

To support other countries — including those implementing the Kampala Declaration — the following steps provide a **structured, replicable methodology** for undertaking food systems diagnostics:

Step 1: Framing and Alignment

Define the scope of the diagnostic and align it with national development goals and global frameworks (e.g., SDGs and the CAADP Declarations (Maputo, Malabo, and Kampala). Establish high-level buy-in across government, donors, and technical partners.

Step 2: Construct Diagnostic Framework

Adopt a systems-based analytical framework (such as FS-TIP) that integrates five action tracks (food security, healthy diets, environmental sustainability, livelihoods, and resilience) and three cross-cutting dimensions (governance, equity, and finance).

Step 3: Compile and Analyze Data

Use both **quantitative** indicators (e.g., supra-indicators, sectoral datasets) and **qualitative** insights (policy documents, grey literature, participatory consultations) to map current performance and identify gaps.

Step 4: Conduct Policy and Institutional Mapping

Assess alignment, coherence, and implementation of existing policies and institutional mandates. Identify overlaps, gaps, and areas needing coordination.

Step 5: Engage Stakeholders

Facilitate consultations across ministries, civil society, private sector, farmer groups, and development partners to validate findings, refine priority areas, and enhance legitimacy.

Step 6: Generate Policy Insights

Translate diagnostic findings into actionable policy recommendations across tracks and enablers. Use visual tools (e.g., heatmaps, traffic light systems) to flag critical gaps.

Step 7: Institutionalize and Disseminate

Embed the diagnostic into formal planning instruments (e.g., NAIPs), budget frameworks, or investment compacts. Disseminate findings in accessible formats for decision-makers and implementers.

4.3. Complementarity with Kampala Diagnostics

This Malawi diagnostic does not compete with or replace the **Kampala Diagnostics Process**, which is still evolving and not yet embedded in national policy cycles. On the contrary, it provides a **practical, tested approach** that complements and reinforces the objectives of the Kampala Declaration. The FS-TIP methodology and findings can serve as a foundational input to Kampala-aligned diagnostics by offering structured, system-wide insights that can be adapted across countries and regions.

In this way, the Malawi case offers both a **proof of concept and a partner framework**, contributing not just to national reform but to Africa's collective journey toward more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable food systems.

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ABOUT AKADEMIYA2063

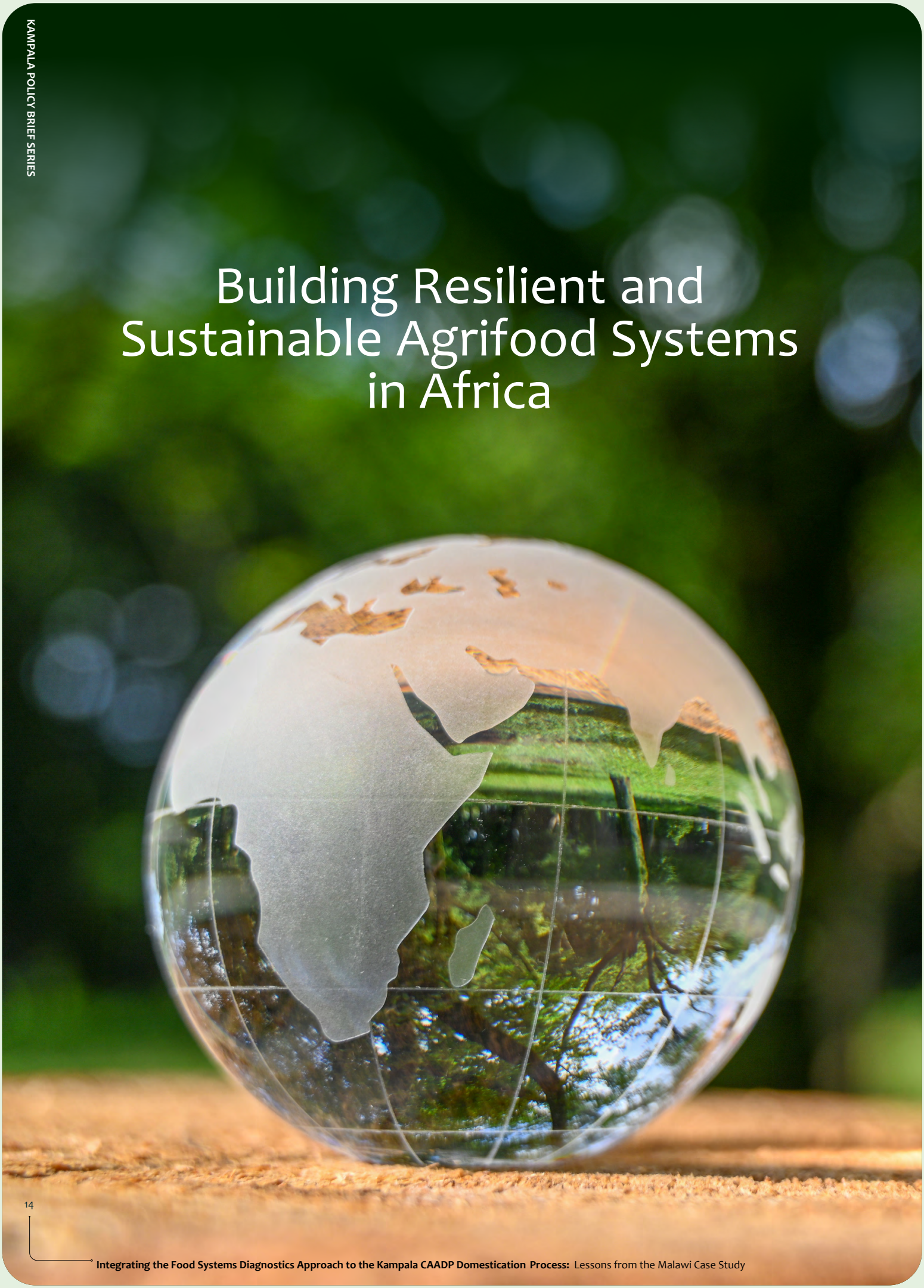
AKADEMIYA2063 is a pan-African non-profit research organization with headquarters in Kigali, Rwanda, and a regional office in Dakar, Senegal.

Inspired by the ambitions of Agenda 2063 and grounded in the recognition of the central importance of strong knowledge and evidence systems, the vision of AKADEMIYA2063 is an Africa with the expertise we need for the Africa we want. This expertise must be responsive to the continent's needs for data and analysis to ensure high-quality policy design and execution. Inclusive, evidence-informed policymaking is key to meeting the continent's development aspirations, creating wealth, and changing livelihoods for the better.

AKADEMIYA2063's overall mission is to create, across Africa and led from its headquarters in Rwanda, state-of-the-art technical capacities to support the efforts by the Member States of the African Union to achieve the key goals of the African Union's Agenda 2063 of transforming national economies to boost growth and prosperity.

Following from its vision and mission, the main goal of AKADEMIYA2063 is to help meet Africa's needs at the continental, regional and national levels in terms of data, analytics, and mutual learning for the effective implementation of Agenda 2063 and the realization of its outcomes by a critical mass of countries. AKADEMIYA2063 strives to meet its goals through programs organized under five strategic areas—policy intelligence, knowledge systems, data intelligence and governance—as well as partnerships and communication and outreach activities. For more information, visit www.akademiya2063.org.

Building Resilient and Sustainable Agrifood Systems in Africa



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