

IWMI's Strategy to Advance Africa's Agriculture Agenda (CAADP 2026–2035)

Key messages:

- Water is central to the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme's (CAADP) 2026–2035 Strategy and Action Plan. The Kampala Declaration emphasizes the importance of sustainable water management in achieving its goals of agricultural production, trade, and resilience. Strategic investments and integrated water policies are essential for reducing vulnerabilities, build climate resilience, and secure the long-term sustainability of Africa's agri-food systems.
- The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) supports CAADP's vision by helping governments design climate-smart water solutions, de-risk irrigation investments, and develop inclusive business models that attract private financing. Through its Research for Development programs, IWMI partners with African Union member states, Regional Economic Communities, subregional organizations, and development partners to expand climate-smart agriculture, build digital tools for weather, market, and water data, and strengthen governance and capacity for scaling water-smart innovations.
- IWMI adds value through its unique approach, which combines research and innovation to mitigate water risks, address social inequalities, and manage resources sustainably. Its work leverages data science, gender-responsive approaches, and financial mechanisms to bring solutions to scale. Since 2007, IWMI has supported the implementation of CAADP through its regional offices, strategic partnerships, and embedded monitoring systems that foster accountability, learning, and adaptive management. A cornerstone of this support is the Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System (ReSAKSS), a multi-CGIAR initiative that drives evidence-based decision-making and implementation of CAADP priorities across the continent.

Context

The CAADP Strategy and Action Plan (2026–2035) seeks to transform Africa's agri-food systems through six strategic objectives: sustainable food production, inclusive livelihoods, nutrition, governance, financing, and resilience. The Kampala Declaration underscores the fact that sustainable water management is fundamental to this transformation (AU 2025a). IWMI brings a comparative advantage to CAADP's implementation through its integrated expertise in agricultural water management, climate adaptation, irrigation, digital innovation, and policy engagement. Its 2024–2030 Strategy 'Research and Innovation for Water Security' explicitly prioritizes water-smart innovations for agri-food transformation. IWMI's strengths range from scaling climate-resilient irrigation technologies and advancing groundwater governance to co-designing digital water solutions, promoting inclusive business models, and generating policy recommendations.



Field in Paaskoto, Kaolack Region, Sénégal, equipped with a drip irrigation system powered by solar panels, pumping water from both a well and a borehole. (photo: Xavier/Shutterstock).

These capabilities position IWMI as a trusted technical partner for African Union (AU) member states, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Subregional Organizations (SROs), such as the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA), the Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA), and the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF), as well as the African Union Development Agency – New Partnership for Africa’s Development (AUDA-NEPAD), and other stakeholders aiming to achieve CAADP’s targets.

IWMI’s work connects water security to agri-food transformation through the following:

- Scalable water solutions such as solar irrigation, water reuse, and nature-based approaches.
- Inclusive approaches using the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) framework and participatory tools.
- Irrigation productivity and financial innovations, including decision-support systems, inclusive business models, and farmer financing mechanisms.
- Climate risk reduction investments, including early warning systems, flood management, and resilience metrics.
- Digital water intelligence, from remote sensing to mobile climate services and smart irrigation technologies, and water resource management in the context of transhumant animal husbandry.
- Policy and institutional strengthening through national water dialogues, regional policy harmonization, and CAADP monitoring via ReSAKSS.

IWMI’s 2024–2030 Strategy advances CAADP priorities by leveraging its core strengths in water science, innovation, and policy engagement, underscoring IWMI’s water-centric solutions for food security and climate resilience.

CAADP Declaration, Strategy, and Action Plan

Background

CAADP has served as Africa’s premier framework for agricultural transformation since its launch in 2003, following the Maputo Declaration. In this landmark agreement, African Heads of State and Government pledged to allocate at least 10% of their national budgets to agriculture and target a 6% annual growth rate in agricultural GDP. This commitment recognized agriculture as the engine for economic development, poverty reduction, and enhanced food security across the continent.

Building on this foundation, the 2014 Malabo Declaration reaffirmed these goals while setting even more ambitious targets (AU 2014). These included eradicating hunger and child malnutrition, reducing poverty by half through inclusive agricultural growth, tripling intra-African agricultural trade, and enhancing the resilience of livelihoods and production systems by 2025. Despite these renewed commitments, the 4th CAADP Biennial Review Report presented to the African Union Assembly in February 2024 indicated insufficient progress towards these targets. Many countries remain off course, particularly in terms of resilience, nutrition, and investment goals. The lack of progress underscores the need for a more integrated agenda and stronger commitment from member states to drive African agricultural transformation.

Kampala CAADP Declaration, Strategy, and Action Plan (2026–2035)

In response to these challenges, the African Union convened an Extraordinary Summit in Kampala, Uganda, from 9 to 11 January 2025. This resulted in the pivotal Kampala CAADP Declaration (AU 2025a), which marked the adoption of a new 10-year Strategy and Action Plan for 2026–2035, charting a comprehensive course for the transformation of Africa’s agri-food systems. The Kampala Declaration highlights the urgency of accelerating agricultural transformation by addressing systemic vulnerabilities and building more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable agri-food systems. It places a strong emphasis on regional cooperation, sustainable resource management, and the use of science, technology, and innovation to drive change. Most importantly, it commits African leaders to ensuring that future agricultural growth is underpinned by climate adaptation, agro-industrialization, and equitable livelihoods.

The CAADP Strategy and Action Plan operationalizes this vision (AU 2025b). It calls for a holistic transformation of the entire agri-food value chain, spanning production, processing, distribution, and consumption. The Strategy emphasizes the integration of economic, social, and environmental dimensions, aligning itself with Africa’s Agenda 2063, the Africa Common Position on Food Systems, and the COP28 commitments on climate-resilient agriculture. It is guided by the principles of national ownership, inclusion, environmental sustainability, multi-stakeholder coordination, evidence-based policymaking, and mutual accountability.

CAADP’s Strategic Objectives include:

1. Intensifying Sustainable Food Production, Agro-industrialization, and Trade
2. Boosting Investment and Financing for Accelerated Agri-Food Systems Transformation
3. Ensuring Food and Nutrition Security
4. Advancing Inclusivity and Equitable Livelihoods
5. Building Resilient Agri-Food Systems
6. Strengthening Agri-Food Systems Governance

CAADP Action Plan

The CAADP Action Plan guides the implementation of the Strategy. It translates the six strategic objectives into specific, actionable interventions, with clear timelines and accountability mechanisms.

Among its priorities, the Action Plan places particular emphasis on the following:

- **Irrigation and water management:** Promoting efficient irrigation technologies, water conservation practices and rehabilitation of existing infrastructure, and integrating water use policies into national agricultural strategies.
- **Climate resilience:** Expanding investments in climate-smart agricultural practices, resilient seed varieties, and land restoration.
- **Digitalization:** Advancing digital tools for real-time weather forecasts, market price tracking, pest and disease alerts, and remote advisory services.
- **Inclusivity:** Closing the digital divide and improving access to financial services, particularly for women and youth.
- **Trade facilitation:** Simplifying trade processes and improving market access through harmonized standards and regional trade corridors.

Collectively, the Declaration, Strategy, and Action Plan present a comprehensive roadmap for Africa's agricultural transformation over the next decade. They prioritize inclusive growth, climate resilience, and sustainability while recognizing the critical role of enabling factors such as infrastructure, governance, and technology. This integrated framework offers a clear structure for regional and national actors to align their efforts and mobilize resources for the transformation of Africa's agri-food systems.

Alignment of IWMI's Capabilities with the Six CAADP Strategic Objectives (2026–2035)

IWMI, through its 2024–2030 Strategy “Research and Innovation for Water Security” (IWMI 2024a), brings a distinctive and critical comparative advantage to the implementation of CAADP's post-Malabo agenda. The Kampala CAADP Declaration and Strategy (2026–2035) recognize the centrality of sustainable water management in achieving agri-food system transformation. This synergy provides a strong foundation for alignment between IWMI's scientific leadership and CAADP's six strategic objectives.

Strategic Objective 1: Intensifying sustainable food production, agro-industrialization, and trade

IWMI improves irrigation productivity and promotes sustainable land and water management, especially for smallholders. It supports agricultural intensification through affordable, climate-smart irrigation (solar, precision, and small-scale irrigation, wastewater reuse, and water–energy–food systems). IWMI co-designs inclusive business models, facilitates access to climate finance, and demonstrates that solar irrigation boosts production, resilience, and year-round yields.

Digital tools, advisory services, and market linkages enhance production stability, reduce post-harvest losses, and strengthen value chains. Participatory approaches ensure women and youth can adopt solutions tailored to their needs.

Strategic Objective 2: Boosting investment and financing for accelerated agri-food systems transformation

IWMI catalyzes investment through bankable cases for irrigation modernization, solar pumping, and storage. IWMI also works with governments to design blended finance and public-private partnership (PPP) models, and with donors to promote de-risking tools.

A key focus is Farmer-Led Irrigation Development (FLID), promoted through public investment, private sector engagement, community-driven approaches, and entrepreneurship. These pathways expand farmer access to irrigation, align with CAADP's financing goals, and scale inclusive, climate-resilient solutions (IWMI 2024a; IWMI 2024b).

Strategic Objective 3: Ensuring food and nutrition security

IWMI strengthens food security by enabling shifts from rainfed to irrigated farming, increasing year-round availability, and diversifying crops. IWMI's nutrition-sensitive irrigation supports nutrient-rich food production, while wastewater reuse integrates food safety and water quality monitoring, aligning with CAADP's holistic approach to nutrition and health (IWMI 2024a).

Strategic Objective 4: Advancing inclusivity and equitable livelihoods

IWMI integrates gender, youth, and equity into its programs through participatory planning, youth-led innovation labs, gender-responsive governance, and targeted grants. IWMI also promotes digital and climate-smart irrigation technologies that increase access for marginalized groups.

In Ethiopia, IWMI has fostered youth entrepreneurship in water and climate solutions while in West Africa, it has empowered women in irrigated vegetable value chains (Nigussie et al. 2024; Minh et al. 2024). These initiatives drive income generation, social protection, and empowerment, reinforcing the CAADP commitment to inclusive growth and equitable livelihood transformation (IWMI 2023; IWMI 2024a; IWMI 2024b).

Strategic Objective 5: Building resilient agri-food systems

Resilience is central to IWMI's mission driving its work on climate-smart water management and risk reduction. IWMI advances climate-smart water management, groundwater resilience, disaster risk reduction, and integrated early warning systems. Through the Early Warning, Early Action, Early Finance (AWARE) Platform, IWMI enables a shift from reactive to proactive disaster response through anticipatory action and pre-arranged finance, protecting lives and livelihoods (Amarnath et al. 2023; Attoh and Amarnath 2025). Climate vulnerability mapping and partnerships under the CGIAR Initiative on Climate Resilience support adaptive planning and governance (Minh et al. 2024; IWMI 2024a; IWMI 2024b).

Strategic Objective 6: Strengthening agri-food systems governance

IWMI strengthens water and agri-food governance by promoting multi-level and transboundary mechanisms, inclusive dialogues, and evidence-based policies. It collaborates with AUDA-NEPAD, RECs, and river basin organizations to harmonize policy across water, agriculture, energy, and climate.

IWMI's expertise in data systems, remote sensing, and digital twins enhances accountability, enabling countries to monitor performance and adapt policies in real time. IWMI's role in CAADP Biennial Reviews via ReSAKSS, in collaboration with AKADEMIYA2063, further institutionalizes learning and evidence-based governance.

IWMI collaborates with the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), RECs, the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Southern African Development community (SADC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Union du Maghreb Arabe (UMA), the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), and river basin organizations such as the Volta Basin Authority (VBA), Niger Basin Authority (NBA), Limpopo Watercourse Commission (LIMCOM), Zambezi Watercourse Commission (ZAMCOM), and Senegal River Basin Development Authority (OMVS), to harmonize policy across water, agriculture, energy, and climate.

IWMI's expertise in data systems, earth observation tools, and advanced analytics, including digital twins for water systems, reinforces mutual accountability under CAADP by enabling member states to monitor performance, simulate system scenarios, and adapt interventions in near real-time. IWMI's support to CAADP's Biennial Reviews through ReSAKSS highlights its role in institutionalizing learning and evidence-informed governance at the continental scale (see Box 1 for details of IWMI's roles in CAADP).

Box 1. Making the case: IWMI's CAADP-aligned initiatives in Africa

Since 2007, IWMI has supported African countries in achieving CAADP goals through applied research, technology pilots, innovation scaling, agribusiness acceleration, and policy advisory.

- **West Africa:** IWMI has scaled solar irrigation, soil moisture sensors, and small-scale irrigation in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, and Nigeria, improving efficiency, yields, and incomes for more than 3,000 farmers. In Ghana and Mali, IWMI co-designed inclusive business models with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that blend technical support and financial services, enabling smallholders to invest in affordable on-farm irrigation solutions.
- **Eastern Africa:** IWMI supported farmers and agribusinesses in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania with innovations and growth capital, including irrigation mapping in Ethiopia. IWMI also demonstrated participatory irrigation models and strengthened water user associations in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Tanzania.
- **Southern Africa:** IWMI introduced nutrition-sensitive irrigation in Malawi and advanced rainwater harvesting, irrigation, and early warning systems in Zambia and Zimbabwe to build drought and flood resilience.
- **Northern Africa:** IWMI promoted safe wastewater reuse for irrigation in Egypt.
- **Continental:** IWMI strengthened CAADP monitoring and refined water-related indicators.

These efforts demonstrate IWMI's role in delivering integrated, scalable, and nutrition-sensitive solutions that strengthen resilience, improve livelihoods, and align with CAADP's six strategic objectives.

IWMI creates partnerships across Africa to advance CAADP implementation, working with diverse partners and national governments to align water and agricultural strategies to drive research, policy, and innovation. With support from development partners and donors, IWMI mobilizes financing for water-smart agriculture and climate-resilient food systems.

IWMI's research for development delivery is facilitated through its decentralized regional hubs in Ghana (West and Central Africa), Ethiopia (Eastern Africa), South Africa (Southern Africa), and Egypt (North Africa), as well as country offices in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Nigeria (Figure 1).

As a CGIAR research center with a pan-African footprint, IWMI's strategic partnerships and delivery mechanisms translate water-smart science into action, ensuring context-specific, scalable solutions embedded in Africa's agri-food policy and investment frameworks.

These offices serve as nodes for contextualized delivery, technical assistance, and engagement with CAADP-aligned national and regional processes and priorities.

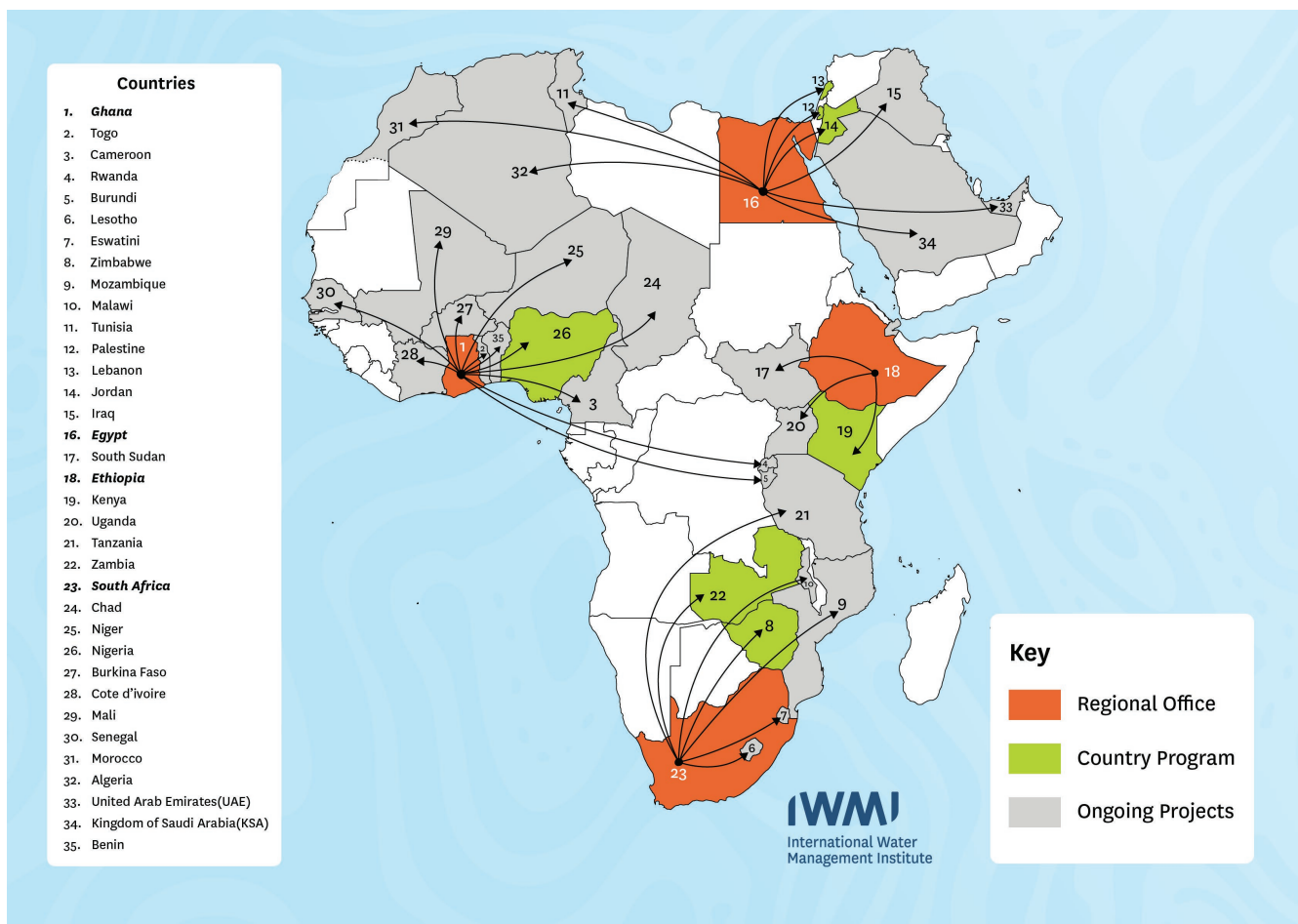


Figure 1: IWMI's footprint in Africa.

Note: The arrows represent the direction of activities from the regional hubs to different countries.



Centre pivot irrigation system in Yagaba, Northern Region, Ghana, implemented under the International Water & Agricultural Development program (photo: Hamish John Appleby).

IWMI's Engagement Modalities for CAADP Delivery

To accelerate implementation of the Kampala CAADP Strategy (2026–2035), IWMI applies five modalities which are detailed below. These modalities are anchored in IWMI's 2024–2030 Strategy, which is built around three strategic focus areas: Mitigating water risks, overcoming global inequalities, and managing water sustainably; and four transformational levers: Water data science, water governance, gender and social inclusion, and scaling, finance and investment.

1. Action research and innovation for policy-science-practice integration

Building on its role as the CGIAR Water Systems Science lead, IWMI will continue generating high-impact research on irrigation, water storage, circular economies, and early warning systems, directly informing CAADP policy cycles, investment plans, and technology adoption strategies. IWMI will ensure that innovation pipelines are aligned with CAADP and Africa's long-term food system transformation goals.

2. From data to decisions: Powering CAADP's progress through water insights

IWMI will actively contribute to CAADP's mutual accountability systems by co-designing and supporting monitoring water-specific indicators such as irrigation coverage and performance, water productivity, and resilience to hydrological extremes. IWMI will serve as a recognized data source for member states by leveraging its advanced water data science platform, including remote sensing, geographic information system (GIS), and artificial intelligence (AI)-powered analytics. Real-time digital dashboards, earth observation-based tools, and feedback loops will be rolled out in select countries to inform adaptive planning and policy reform aligned with CAADP's biennial review cycles.

3. Resource mobilization and investment alignment

IWMI will partner with the African Union Commission (AUC), AUDA-NEPAD, RECs, SROs, governments, and development partners to design water-smart investment plans. By leveraging data and return on investment evidence, IWMI will continue promoting sustainable financing for solar irrigation, nature-based storage, wastewater reuse, digital water solutions, and groundwater recharge, while coordinating cross-sector investments for greater CAADP impact (see Box 2 for how IWMI mobilizes finance).

Box 2. Mobilizing finance and scaling innovations for water-smart agriculture.

IWMI drives financing and scaling of water-smart innovations that advance CAADP priorities. It develops investment cases for irrigation, water storage, and resilience, supports governments in accessing global climate funds, and mobilizes capital for SMEs through CGIAR's Food System Accelerator. IWMI has mobilized over USD 14 million in private and concessional capital for small and medium-sized enterprises through its role in such initiatives. By de-risking smallholder irrigation and integrating digital tools, inclusive finance, and policy reforms, IWMI strengthens the investment environment for resilient food systems across Africa.

4. Structured capacity development and technical assistance

IWMI strengthens national, regional, and private sector capacity across CAADP priorities by co-developing tools, curricula, and methodologies with universities, national agriculture research and innovation systems, and regional bodies. Targeting governments, basin authorities, SMEs, and extension services, its programs integrate gender and youth while supporting investment coordination, project development, and postgraduate research for inclusive, water-smart agri-food transformation.

5. Policy dialogue and in-country anchoring

IWMI will strengthen engagement in national and regional CAADP policy spaces through participation in joint sector reviews (JSRs), biennial reviews, national agriculture investment plan revision and development processes, regional water platforms, and AU technical working groups. Using its water governance expertise, IWMI will advocate for water-smart integration into agricultural and climate frameworks and support alignment with nationally determined contributions, sustainable development goals (SDGs) such as SDG 6, and Agenda 2063.

To foster policy coherence and coordinate investments across sectors, IWMI will co-convene regional dialogues and multi-stakeholder platforms that directly address barriers to scaling agricultural water solutions. Through these platforms, IWMI brings together governments, private sector actors, and researchers to align policies, mobilize finance, and operationalize practical solutions in practice.

By coupling institutional solutions with investment readiness, IWMI enables countries to scale CAADP-aligned, water-smart agriculture. Table 1 highlights IWMI's entry points for alignment with CAADP's set of six strategic objectives.

Table 1. IWMI's entry points for alignment with CAADP's strategic objectives

CAADP Strategic Objective	Priority Area	IWMI's Entry Points given the Role of Water	IWMI's Proposed Interventions
1. Intensify sustainable food production, agro-industrialization, and trade	Increase agri-food output by 45% by 2035	Ensure the functionality of agricultural input systems, including water management	- Generate investment-ready evidence on agricultural water management innovations - Provide irrigation suitability maps - Support piloting of climate- and water-smart technologies
	Reduce post-harvest loss by 50%	Promote sustainable resource use	- Promote circular economy approaches for wastewater reuse and nutrient recovery
	Raise the share of locally processed food to 35% of agri-food GDP by 2035	Strengthen agro-water linkages	- Support irrigation-for-processing clusters and solar mechanization models
2. Boost investment and financing for accelerated agri-food systems transformation	Increase public sector investment in agri-food systems	Improve evidence-based planning	- Conduct cost-benefit analysis of water investments - Guide prioritization via digital investment tools
	Crowd-in private capital	Strengthen bankability of irrigation enterprises	- Support accelerator programs and finance-readiness for agri-SMEs - Develop lending models (e.g., solar irrigation, gender credit scoring)
	Support research and development, and infrastructure	Enhance innovation scaling	- Deploy regional digital tools (e.g., IRRILine – a digital platform that enables smallholders to access irrigation advice via a helpline) - Provide technical assistance through grants and capacity development of African Member States for irrigation investment
3. Ensuring food and nutrition security	Achieve zero hunger by 2035; Ensure 60% of the population can afford a healthy diet	Support agri-food systems that enhance human nutrition and health outcomes	- Ensure safe reuse of water, integration of water quality monitoring, and food safety in wastewater reuse initiatives - Pilot nutrition-sensitive irrigation - Partner with CGIAR, national institutions, and non-state actors
4. Advance inclusivity and equitable livelihoods	Improve rural infrastructure and access to social services among marginalized communities	Close gender and youth gaps in access	- Support youth-led water innovation labs - Develop inclusive irrigation governance guidelines - Co-develop Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) consistent water management curricula and strategies with national institutions
	Expand participation in value chains	Empower marginalized producers	- Build capacity of water user associations and basin authorities - Promote gender-smart irrigation bundling models

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5. Build resilient agri-food systems	Manage climate and disaster risks so that 40% of households are protected from shocks by 2035	Reduce vulnerability to shocks	- Promote adaptation within agri-food systems - Pilot anticipatory actions and early warning systems - Promote best practices and cost-effectiveness in anticipatory actions - Guide risk mapping and vulnerability targeting - Support watershed restoration programs
	Expand sustainable land and water management by at least 30%	Strengthen and invest in climate-smart practices	- Promote integrated groundwater management - Inform the implementation of nationally determined contributions/national adaptation plans through data and tools
6. Strengthen agri-food systems governance	Enhance cross-sector coherence	Harmonize policy across water, agriculture, and energy sectors	- Facilitate multi-stakeholder platforms and national dialogues to promote policy coherence - Support regional water platforms and CAADP Technical Working Groups
	Strengthen mutual accountability	Track performance under CAADP across national, regional, and continental levels	- Provide water indicators and earth observation-based monitoring tools to promote regional collaboration - Enable water-energy-food-ecosystem nexus entry points

Conclusion

IWMI's 2024–2030 Strategy aligns closely with the Kampala CAADP Strategy (2026–2035), positioning the institute as a key knowledge partner and technical enabler for Africa's agri-food systems transformation.

With strengths in water management, policy engagement, innovation scaling, and investment mobilization, IWMI contributes to all six CAADP objectives. Realizing this vision requires more than technical solutions. It demands integrated approaches, shared ownership, strong partnerships with the AU Commission, AUDA-NEPAD,

partnerships with the AU Commission, AUDA-NEPAD, RECs, member states, and development partners, which are essential to scale water-smart innovations, strengthen institutions, and mobilize funding for sustained investment, and robust monitoring. Strategic leadership, financing, and institutional capacity are crucial to embed water-smart priorities into agricultural strategies.

IWMI stands ready as CAADP's strategic partner to help achieve a resilient, food- and water-secure Africa through coordinated action, sustained investments, and strong partnerships.



IWMI rice demonstration field in the Kpong Irrigation Scheme in Ghana (Photo: Hamish John Appleby).

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A farmer in a maize farm supported by the Ashaiman Irrigation Scheme, Greater Accra, Ghana (photo: Hamish John Appleby).

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The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) is an international, research-for-development organization that works with governments, civil society and the private sector to solve water problems in developing countries and scale up solutions. Through partnership, IWMI combines research on the sustainable use of water and land resources, knowledge services and products with capacity strengthening, dialogue and policy analysis to support implementation of water management solutions for agriculture, ecosystems, climate change and inclusive economic growth. Headquartered in Colombo, Sri Lanka, IWMI is a CGIAR Research Center with offices in 16 countries and a global network of scientists operating in more than 55 countries.

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