

**COMMON MARKET FOR EASTERN AND
SOUTHERN AFRICA**



**OPENING STATEMENT
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COMESA SECRETARY GENERAL**

**DURING THE
AFRICA FERTILISER AND SOIL HEALTH SUMMIT
7TH - 9TH MAY 2024
NAIROBI, KENYA**

Honourable Frank Tumwebaze, Minister of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries of the Republic of Uganda and Chair of the AU Specialized Technical (Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Water and Environment),

Honorable Mithika Linturi, Cabinet Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, Republic of Kenya,

Honourable Dr. Musalia Mudavadi, Prime Cabinet Secretary and Cabinet Secretary for Foreign and Diaspora Affairs, Republic of Kenya,

Your Excellency Ambassador Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko, AU Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, and Sustainable Environment,

Excellencies, Heads of Regional Economic Communities,

Representatives of Development Partners,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The COMESA Secretariat is honored to be part of this Special AU Summit on Fertilizer and Soil Health. And I want to start off by thanking the African Union Commission for organizing this Summit and inviting COMESA to take part in it. I also thank the Government and Peoples of the Republic of Kenya for hosting this Summit and for the hospitality we have been surrounded with since our arrival in beautiful Nairobi.

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let's first celebrate our successes. As a continent, Africa has managed to make progress in developing the agricultural sector, with agricultural production more than doubling in the past two decades, from US\$ 192 billion to US\$ 427 billion between the years 2000 and 2021. In addition, Africa has laid down a long-term blueprint for agricultural development and food security, in the form of the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), which is one of the priority flagship programs of the African Union Agenda 2063.

Nonetheless, Africa is still a net importer of food, in spite of its vast water and fertile soil resources. The main reasons behind this dilemma are lack of investment and low agricultural productivity. As a result, hundreds of millions of Africans still suffer from food insecurity and malnutrition. Ironically, the war in Ukraine revealed that Africa relies heavily on Russia and Ukraine for food and fertilizer. In the ensuing period, food insecurity and soil degradation took bigger tolls in African countries.

Multiple other shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, debt burdens, conflicts within the continent as well as rapid population growth, subsistence agriculture, unsustainable agricultural practices, lack of know-how and lack of transport and other basic utilities like electricity have exacerbated the situation and risk of further hardship.

Over and above, the decline of soil health in many parts of Africa is a source of concern about the resilience of agricultural systems and sustainable food production, as compromised soil health hinders soil's response to yield-enhancing inputs like fertilizers and improved crop varieties, thereby increasing the vulnerability of smallholder farmers and rural communities to external shocks.

To give you a few concrete figures, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported that more than 278 million Africans, or around 20% of Africans, were classified as undernourished in 2021. In addition, various studies estimate that over 70% of the continent's cultivated land area is degraded, resulting in a loss of at least 30% of nutrients per hectare annually.

Distinguished Audience,

COMESA would like to commend the African Development Bank (AfDB) and other concerned development partners for supporting the African Fertilizer Financing Mechanism as a means to address the shortage of fertilizers and declining soil health.

Between 2016 and 2019, Africa's average fertilizer consumption ranged from 14.2 Kg/Ha to 17 kg/ha, which falls short by far from the Malabo target of 50 kg/ha. Even more, there was a significant dip in the consumption figures reported from 2020 to 2021 (CAADP BR Reports).

In addition to this kind of financial solutions, we need to strengthen the private sector's involvement in driving business around soil fertility improvement for food and nutrition security and economic growth on the continent. Through appropriate schemes such as tax incentives, the private sector, including small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs), can be influenced to invest in fertilizer production and other soil health improvement products and services.

In their turn, African governments need to enact enabling policy, legal and regulatory frameworks to guide, support and incentivize the sustainable use of fertilizers and other soil resources. Regulatory provisions for sustainable soil management should address all possible uses of fertilizers and other soil health products and their impacts on the soil and the wider ecosystem, while ensuring consistency and streamlined processes across all concerned governmental agencies. In this regard, specific attention should be given to quality assurance, packaging and labeling to deal with the challenges of counterfeit and low-quality products on the market.

At the regional level, regional economic communities (RECs) play a crucial role in supporting agricultural development and food security through the promotion of regional trade and investment, including in fertilizers and other soil resources. RECs also provide vital venues of policy harmonization, capacity building and technical assistance through the programs they implement with development partners.

In collaboration with our technical and development partners, COMESA has been implementing programmes designed to drive agricultural transformation and to improve food security in the region. Some of the programme interventions include: supporting and promoting regional agricultural value chains through initiatives such as the Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP), which we implement in partnership with the EU; promoting regional seed trade through harmonisation of seed regulations to trigger seed trade across the region and enhance farmers access to quality seeds for increased productivity, which is a program being implemented by the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), which is a specialized agency of COMESA; and strengthening agri-food data systems through the development of a digital Regional Food Balance Sheet as a platform to provide real-time and forward-looking data to inform evidence-based food security and trade policies as well as business and investment decisions that can spur regional trade and investment in agri-food systems, which is an initiative we are implementing in partnership with the African Green Revolution Alliance (AGRA) and a number of other development partners. In addition, the COMESA Climate Change Program has been supporting Member States to embrace and adopt climate-smart practices and technologies to enhance the resilience of agriculture to climate change related shocks.

And as a contribution to the efforts to implement the Abuja Declaration on Fertilizer, the COMESA Secretariat and its agency, the Alliance for Commodity Trade in Eastern and Southern Africa (ACTESA), launched in 2014 a joint program on fertilizer policy and regulatory harmonization in partnership with the African Fertilizer and Agribusiness Partnership. The main objectives of this program were to harmonize fertilizer policies and financing mechanisms and promote regional fertilizer trade. While progress has been made on these fronts, so much more needs to be done, including with regard to the very basic notion of harmonization of policies and regulations as a crucial prerequisite to

enhancing regional investment and trade in fertilizers and soil health products and services.

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I conclude, I would like to highlight that all the key stakeholders, including the African Union, AUDA-NEPAD, the African Development Bank (AfDB), the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), regional economic communities (RECs), governments, development partners, financial institutions, the private sector and civil society need to work together closely to support the necessary interventions in the areas of fertilizer and soil health, including promoting investment and regional trade in these products and services.

I wish you fruitful discussions and thank you for your kind attention.