Africa’s agriculture transformation is key to ensure food security and the end of hunger and malnutrition to the continent and is a key strategic pillar of the African Union’s Agenda 2063, the economic development blueprint for the continent. Agriculture is the backbone of the African economy, with the sector accounting for about 16% of the continent’s GDP, 60% of its labour force, 20% of its total merchandise exports and is the main source of income and work for 90% of the region’s rural population.

The objective of the Africa Fertilizer Map 2020 is to increase awareness on the appropriate use of fertilizers and their potential to increase farm productivity and transform agriculture. There are several challenges that Africa is facing and targets it should meet to achieve its full potential growth, including closing a fertilizer consumption gap in various countries; to meet these targets, Africa needs to follow agronomic recommendations and public and private sectors need to partner to transform the fertilizer value chain.

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While Africa has the highest area of uncultivated arable land (202 million hectares) in the world, which is about 50 percent of the global total, its productivity lags far behind other developing regions. Productivity is held back by fragmented and often-insecure land holdings, poor access to finance and slow adoption of new technologies and innovative business models. The population in sub-Saharan Africa is expected to double from the current 1.2 to about 2.4 billion by 2050. But even at current levels, the region still experiences food shortages. Crop yields are low as a result of low use of agricultural inputs and a dependency on rainfed agriculture. Only 6% of Africa’s cultivated land is irrigated and average fertilizer consumption in Sub-Sahara Africa is estimated at 17kg of nutrients per hectare of cropland (Agra 2018), which is nearly double the baseline of 8–9 kg/ha of 2006, but compares with a world average fertilizer consumption of 135kg/Ha.

Fertilizer consumption among smallholder farmers, who make up the majority of farmers in the region and farm most of the land, has grown in the past decade but it is still far below what is needed as farmers face numerous challenges that limit their effective fertilizer demand. The majority of these smallholders have little or no experience with fertilizers and its potential to enhance crop yields. Of the farmers who may be aware of this, the majority do not know the right types and rate of fertilizers they should use for their soils and crops. Further, these farmers have limited access to finance which further affects their demand for fertilizer and other inputs. Markets in the region are fragmented and intra-regional trade is weak. Agro-dealers and other rural entrepreneurs need to trigger farmers’ demand for new fertilizer products, especially blends. Willingness to invest in fertilizers will be driven by improved knowledge and information, better availability of fertilizers, and better market opportunities for farm output.

The challenges facing the fertilizer sector should be addressed holistically: more private sector investment and research in area- and crop-specific fertilizers is needed to increase fertilizer use efficiency and governments should work with farmers to put in place the right policies, investments and regulations for infrastructure development and financing to reduce the cost of fertilizers and to prevent pollution and soil degradation. Public–private partnerships are needed to develop cost-effective fertilizer procurement and distribution systems, integrated soil fertility management, extension advisory services for the effective use of organic nutrient sources and good agronomic practices such as the 4R Nutrient
Stewardship. This is what will lead to an African Green Revolution, hence an Abuja II summit, with an inclusive, comprehensive and integrated approach, is being proposed to take place in early 2021, with the participation of key stakeholders in the fertilizer supply chain.

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