



Repurposing of Agricultural Support for Soil Health

Impact Program Overview

Context

The global agri-food system will need to feed **10 billion people by 2050, yet food insecurity is rising**. Sub-Saharan Africa is on the frontline of this global challenge, where food and nutrition insecurity are particularly persistent and increasing year on year. Without significant gains in productivity, meeting future demand will be impossible.

Global agricultural productivity growth has stagnated, with output gains driven largely by land expansion rather than improvements in productivity. Land degradation reduces crop yields for about 1.7 billion people. This degradation not only undermines food security but also imposes heavy economic costs—around US\$9.3 billion annually in Africa alone—threatening rural livelihoods. In Africa, an estimated 75–80 percent of cultivated land is degraded, losing substantial nutrients each year and affecting nearly two-thirds of the population.

A key driver is persistently low and imbalanced fertilizer use, which harms both soil health and crop production. Despite decades of allocating significant agricultural support to fertilizer subsidies, usage remains minimal and skewed, resulting in soil degradation, heavy fiscal burdens, and poor

returns on public investment. Addressing these challenges calls for repurposing public support to restore soil health and boost productivity.

The good news is momentum is building as many African governments are recognizing the urgent need for change and taking action. In 2024, African Heads of State endorsed the [Nairobi Declaration of Africa Fertilizer and Soil Health](#) which called for more comprehensive approaches in promoting fertilizer use and enhancing soils. Many countries also endorsed the [COP28 UAE Declaration of Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action](#), a first-of-its-kind commitment to ‘revisit or reorient policies and public support’ to transform food systems.

Several Sub-Saharan Africa countries are making changes to their fertilizer subsidy programs. They are adopting some of the best practices in the design of input support programs and recognizing the importance of creating fiscal space for other agricultural programs, but that effort is not yet advanced to the point of being comprehensive. The challenge is now to solidify, expand, and accelerate reforms in the coming years so that benefits are felt for generations of Africans to come.

Objective

The “[Repurposing of Agricultural Support for Soil Health](#)” Impact Program, part of a new multi-year signature program of the World Bank Group’s Knowledge Compact, will facilitate peer-to-peer sharing of knowledge and experience on impactful solutions to advance fertilizer subsidy reforms. Embedding and mainstreaming good practices¹ will improve the design and implementation arrangements of their input support programs, improve soil health, and improve enabling policies to implement the Nairobi Declaration of Africa Fertilizer and Soil Health. This should also create the right environment to crowd in private sector investments as part of the [World Bank Group’s AgriConnect](#) initiative.

Audience

The cohort members of the Impact Program will act as the changemakers, who lead repurposing efforts towards better soil health in Sub-Saharan Africa. Cohort members will consist of representatives of the Ministries of Agriculture and Finance and other government agencies from Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Senegal, Tanzania and Zambia, selected for their interest in repurposing input subsidy programs.

How will we achieve change?



Knowledge and Learning

The cohort members of the Impact Program, together with the World Bank Group and partners, will identify, curate and share knowledge on tested good practices in technology, management and policy to support countries in their journey of repurposing of agricultural support needed to improve food security and create jobs. The program will host two-three annual regional events, rotating among countries to highlight progress in key areas of fertilizer support. These events will bring together participants to exchange insights, innovations and lessons on areas ranging from digital farm registries and targeted subsidies to soil testing and private sector partnerships. Regional events will be complemented by demand-driven country-level learning events to respond to the country specific requests.



Convening a Community

The program will bring together policymakers, researchers, private companies, and farmers, leveraging regional and international networks to tackle fertilizer support and soil health challenges. To offer Africa-based solutions, it will partner with the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa ([FARA](#)), the Africa Network of Agricultural Policy Research Institutes ([ANAPRI](#)), the Center for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa ([CCARDESA](#)), the International Fertilizer Development Center ([IFDC](#)), the Africa Fertilizer Industry Development Association ([AFIDA](#)), and others to accelerate knowledge sharing and capacity building.



Linking Knowledge with Finance

Through the Impact Program, governments and the World Bank Group will leverage knowledge to improve the way they conduct and support reforms. The Program will inform future prior actions under Development Policy Operations, support implementation of the disbursement linked indicators under the ongoing Programs-for-Results in Tanzania and Zambia, underpin investments under the Food System Resilience Program Multiphase Programmatic Approach in Eastern and Southern and Western Africa, and use the results of the pilots under the ongoing Repurposing projects in Malawi, Tanzania, and Ghana financed by the [Food Systems 2030 \(FS2030\) Trust Fund](#) to inform the reforms of input subsidy programs and soil health investments.

^[1] Recommended best practices include increased flexibility to input access through e-vouchers; improved targeting by using digital farm registries; fertilizer prices determined by market forces; inputs are supplied by private agrodealers; subsidized share of fertilizer prices decrease over time; inputs imported by the private sector without government restrictions; input quality control, research and extension are integral in fertilizer support programs; farmers can access site-specific fertilizer use recommendations through soil information systems, and tailored public investments reduce soil acidity.