VOLUME 8: ISSUE 2 MZN 125/US$5.30 OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEBER 2025

MozAgri

ENGLISH VERSION

Cashew sector transforming community livelihoods

ISSN 2308-006X


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Cashew sector revival — undeniably good news

Andrew Maramwidze (Editor)

The remarkable rebound of the cashew sector is undeniably good news. The sight of production nearing its 1970s peak and directly translating into better housing, education, and livelihoods for farming families is a narrative of success that the country should rightly celebrate.

However, the government's own cautious tone provides the crucial lens through which this success must be viewed: the current boom is a foundation to build upon, not a final destination.

The most significant warning comes from Minister Albino himself: "Quantity must go hand in hand with quality." This is the central challenge. Producing nearly 200,000 tonnes of raw nuts is an achievement, but the real, lasting wealth lies in moving up the value chain. History offers a sobering lesson.

In the 1970s, we were not just a producer, but a processing powerhouse, second only to India. The collapse of this local processing capacity after independence is a key reason why the sector's decline was so catastrophic.

Today, the risk is that Mozambique remains a supplier of raw materials to processing giants like India and Vietnam, capturing only a fraction of the final product's value. The government's 10-year plan to develop the value chain and promote the export of processed products is, therefore, not just a strategy for growth—it is an economic imperative. Studying models like Côte d'Ivoire, which has successfully built a robust domestic processing industry, is exactly the right approach.

Furthermore, the decision to maintain a stable reference price for farmers is a prudent short-term measure to ensure predictability. But long-term sustainability cannot rely on government price floors alone. It must be driven by a competitive, efficient, and high-quality industry that commands premium prices on the global market.

The cashew nut is more than a crop; it is a symbol of the country's potential for economic transformation. The current revival has put money in the pockets of farmers and restored a sense of pride. The next chapter must be about building factories, creating skilled jobs, and ensuring that the label "Made in Mozambique" is stamped on cashew packets sold in supermarkets from Brussels to Beijing.

The momentum is strong. The task now is to execute with the same commitment that farmers show in their fields. If done correctly, the cashew sector could truly crack the shell of widespread and lasting prosperity.

Please remember to share your comments, and Letters to the Editor.

Enjoy the read!

Gov't committed to Corumana dam

The Minister of Public Works, Housing, and Water Resources, Fernando Rafael, has highlighted the critical importance of the Corumana dam for the water supply of Greater Maputo, agricultural and energy production, as well as for flood protection in the Incomáti basin.

The minister also highlighted that the installation of floodgates, completed in 2020, represented a crucial step forward, increasing the reservoir's usable volume to 1.23 billion cubic metres, significantly increasing the dam's water resilience and response capacity.

He also reiterated the government's commitment to mobilizing financing for the construction of the Moamba Major dam and the rehabilitation of the defence dikes, initiatives that aim to mitigate flood risks and ensure integrated and sustainable management of water resources.

"The Corumana dam represents one of the backbones of the national water system," Rafael said.

AQUA fined Ecofarm 1.2 million meticais

Agriculture Minister Roberto Albino has been accused of illegally ordering the company Ecofarm to log 18 cubic meters of timber from 50 hectares of Albino's 500-hectare concession.

As a result of the infraction, the National Agency for Environmental Quality Control (AQUA) has fined Ecofarm 1.2 million meticais (18,800 US dollars, at the current exchange rate). However, the company contests the decision, arguing that the responsibility lies with the owner of the concession, the minister himself.

"Roberto Albino, Ecofarm, and other defendants are facing charges of illegal extraction of forest resources, punishable by sentences ranging from 12 to 16 years in prison," reads the document..

IAOM, Future Technologies contract cancelled

The Administrative Tribunal (AT), the body responsible for checking the legality of public expenditure, has refused approval for the controversial contract signed between the country's Cotton and Oilseeds Institute (IAOM) and Future Technologies of Mozambique, a company allegedly related to the Minister of Agriculture, Roberto Albino.

The contract, which was signed after a controversial public tender won by Future Technologies, was budgeted at 130 million meticais (about two million US dollars, at the current exchange rate).

The chosen company had to develop a platform for the digitalization of cotton and oilseed value chains. However, two prominent Mozambican NGOs, the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) and the Centre for Public Integrity (CIP), had warned that the tender was awarded to a company that lacks qualifications and is 'involved in conflicts of interest and favouritism.'

Chapo implores nation to focus on agric

President Daniel Chapo has called for a focus on agriculture, commerce, and tourism to develop the country, reiterating the government's mission to combat corruption, kidnappings, and alcohol and drug use in schools.

"We, as Mozambicans, have a rich country. It's true that we have gas, we have coal, we have other resources, but we cannot forget that our basis for development is agriculture, commerce, and tourism, and this is what Mozambicans do every day. Gas is not edible, coal is not edible," said Chapo.

He called for a focus on these 'usual development sectors', which are the same ones that 'bring money home'.

Chapo added that corruption directly or indirectly affects everyone: "Because the money that could go to build more schools, more hospitals, more medicine, more books for children, more energy, more roads ends up going to one person or a group of people; this impoverishes our people".

IFAD urges for agric to go beyond subsistence

United Nations agency International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) President Álvaro Lario argues that the country's commitment to agriculture must go beyond subsistence to create value in the country's production chain.

"In Mozambique, around 80 percent of workers are in the agricultural world, and we want this world to be a productive world, not just a world of subsistence, but a world in which income and revenues allow people to live dignified lives and lives in which people can stay in their communities," Alvaro Lario said after meeting Daniel Chapo in Seville.

He also recalled that IFAD has a "partnership" with Mozambique and that the investments it has made allow it to support "small-scale agriculture, small-scale fisheries and, above all, to invest in youth, in opportunities and in the creation of jobs for small and medium-sized enterprises in production".

Turkish investors lured into agriculture

The Secretary of State for Industry at the Ministry of Economy, Custodia Paunde, has encouraged Turkish businessmen to invest in the country's agriculture.

She said the country also has huge deposits of minerals, coal, heavy sands, gold, and precious stones, as well as a coastline stretching over 2,700 kilometres.

Speaking at the opening of the Mozambique-Turkey business forum, Paunde said that the event is an excellent opportunity to explore strategic partnerships in the energy, agro-industrial, construction, finance, infrastructure and foreign trade sectors.

"These are areas with great potential where Mozambique seeks not only to attract capital and technology, but also to build a solid productive base that contributes to the structural transformation of our economy," she said.

She stressed that the Turkish companies present, with their diversity of products and proven technical capacity and inclusion, are ideal partners in this effort. The complementarity between the country's development needs and Turkey's industrial maturity opens up promising space for long-term sustainable business with transformative results.

Cashew sector transforming community livelihoods

Sharp increase in cashew production and trade is having a positive impact on the quality of life, the ministry of agriculture has announced.

However the ministry has emphasized the need to maintain quality standards and follow best practices.

Roberto Albino, the Minister of Agriculture, Environment, and Fisheries, recently stated that the cashew nut production and marketing plan showed "a positive performance" in the 2024–2025 season, in a note issued to the Cotton and Oilseeds Institute (IAOM).

He further indicated that output exceeded 195,000 tonnes, surpassing the initial target of 160,000 tonnes.

"Thanks to good agricultural practices and the commitment of producers, this growth has had a direct impact on communities, allowing many families to improve their living conditions, with access to housing, education, and other goods and services that meet their basic needs," read part of Albino's note.

Despite the progress, the minister stressed that "quantity must go hand in hand with quality," identifying as a priority the strengthening of the cashew nut value chain.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, "the development project for this value chain, presented during the meeting, is scheduled for implementation between 2025 and 2035 and will be led by the IAM itself. The objective is to create jobs, increase competitiveness, and promote the export of processed products".

The IAM has also been instructed "to study the best practices of leading cashew-producing and trading countries, such as Côte d'Ivoire, and to adopt innovative strategies adapted to the national context".

"We must do things differently with what we have – and do them well," Albino urges in the statement.

Currently government authorities have decided to maintain the producer reference price for cashew nuts at 45 meticais (€0.61) per kilo for the current marketing season to ensure the sustainability of one of the country's key cash crops.

"We will maintain the reference price at 45 meticais. We will continue to monitor market conditions, and there is nothing preventing this committee from meeting again to discuss setting a new reference price should market fluctuations require it," said Secretary of State for the Sea and Fisheries, Momade Juízo, recently.

He was speaking in Maputo during the first session of the Oilseeds Committee, which meets annually to define the producer reference price for each cashew nut marketing campaign.

Cashew nut sales reached around 195,400 tonnes in the 2024/2025 campaign, marking a historic milestone close to the record levels of the 1970s, when the country was one of the world's leading producers.

Cashew nut exports from Mozambique continue to grow, reaching US$38.7 million (€33 million) in the first quarter, making it the country's top-performing traditional export product, according to data from the Bank of Mozambique.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries, cashew production peaked 50 years ago, during the colonial period, at more than 200,000 tonnes per year. By the mid-1970s, Mozambique was the world's second-largest cashew producer (210,000 tonnes processed in 1973), behind only India, which then — and still today — purchases a large share of Mozambique's output.

After the country's independence on 25 June 1975, production fell to less than 10 percent of that figure, to around 15,000 to 20,000 tonnes per year.

However, output has been increasing annually, and in the 2024/2025 campaign, the local output stood among the top global producers, maintaining its position as the seventh largest.

EU backs $10 million to modernise Southern African Agriculture

Local farmers are set to benefit from a collaboration of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the European Union (EU), supported through a $10 million budget to accelerate the modernization of agriculture across the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The project, dubbed STOSAR II (Support to the Operationalization of the SADC Regional Agricultural Policy), will run from 2025 to 2028 and is financed by the EU under its Development-Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture (DeSIRA) program. The initiative targets all 16 SADC member states, building on successful efforts from its first phase.

The renewed focus comes as the region seeks to align its farming strategies with the continental CAADP Strategy 2026–2035, emphasizing climate resilience and agro-industrialization.

STOSAR II aims to consolidate initial progress by concentrating on four priority areas: Agricultural Information Management Systems (AIMS), Market Access, Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) and Inclusive Value Chains.

The local farmers' pilot country in the first phase saw a $172,000 investment that resulted in the training of 172 technicians across five provinces in critical areas like animal health and data systems. This included strengthening surveillance for threats such as the Fall Armyworm and Fusarium TR4.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries (MAAP) official affirmed the commitment, stating, "STOSAR II is a commitment to producers in Zambézia... and a commitment to Mozambique's place at the forefront of agrifood transformation in Southern Africa."

The investment underscores a regional push to utilize data and technology to professionalize agriculture, securing food supply and trade opportunities for the 340 million citizens of the SADC bloc.

CTA calls for new dynamism in agriculture

Lobby group, the Confederation of Mozambican Business Associations (CTA) has urged the government to boost coordination between the public and private sectors for the country's agricultural sector to bring new dynamism to the country's agricultural sector.

Gonçalves Correia, the CTA Deputy Chairperson speaking at the Agricultural Sector Coordination Committee, called for a strong and competitive agricultural and forestry sector, citing that coordination between public and private sectors is crucial.

"This can be the basis for sustainable economic growth for all and for poverty reduction in the country."

"The main challenges affecting the sector are low agricultural productivity, a financing deficit, and the need for reforms to the Land Law," he said.

He also pointed out the lack of coordination between stakeholders as the main problem facing the sector.

"Overcoming these issues requires commitment and concerted action. The private sector plays a central role in the transformation of the sector, not only as an investor, but also as a strategic partner in innovation, job creation, and the fostering of sustainable productive links between farmers, industries, and national and international markets," he said.

Correia also highlighted the importance of the Food Production and Intensification Program (PIPA) and the 2030 Strategic Plan for the Development of the Agricultural Sector (PEDRA 2030), claiming that these projects: "Should be a catalyst for new dynamics in the sector, fostering competitive value chains, improved market access, the integration of small producers, and resilience to climate change."

For his turn, Agriculture Minister Roberto Albino said that the government is working on a plan aimed at creating accessible and sustainable financing mechanisms tailored to the needs of producers "and coordination among key stakeholders in the agricultural sector, aiming to transform agriculture into a competitive and market-oriented sector."

"We intend to approach the agricultural sector as a business sector, farming for business. Instead of the Ministry continuing to purchase and distribute inputs, we want producers to decide what to produce, which inputs to purchase, and where to buy them," he said.

Competitive farming to cut food imports - Albino

The agriculture minister has called on farmers to focus on competitive production, criticising the continued dependence on food imports to supply the national market and saying the country has both the capacity and resources to meet demand.

"If our producers, from small-scale farmers upwards, all come together with this vision that it is necessary to produce competitively to satisfy the market, we will be in a position to make our agricultural sector competitive and sustainable," said Agriculture Minister, Roberto Mito Albino.

Speaking during the first meeting of the Agricultural Sector Coordination Committee (CCSA), the minister highlighted the role of this multisectoral body, which brings together social and economic actors and international cooperation partners to improve coordination in implementing agricultural policies, strategies, and programmes.

Albino said the country wants to focus on agriculture as a business, noting that the sector is crucial to the country's development.

"We have always said and reiterated that the main objective in the agriculture, environment and fisheries sectors is food production. Mozambique cannot continue to depend, as it does today, on imported food when we have the technical and human conditions to produce food for the basic basket competitively," he said.

According to the minister, "production for export must be prioritised", but above all, it must also help to replace imports.

"Now that foreign currency is in short supply, our vulnerability to food imports has become much clearer," he added.

The minister urged the private sector to make funds available to finance entrepreneurial initiatives in agriculture, calling for new repayment models appropriate to the sector.

"We have to create financial instruments that attract anyone with the technical skills to do what they do best, to produce food as a priority," he said.

The government also wants to modernise the way technicians and producers interact, saying it will focus on the use of information technology to make communication more flexible and reduce delays.

"If we want to increase production, it means we have to protect our animal and plant health and strengthen inspection and laboratory services. There is no longer any room for fake seeds (…). We want to declare open war on those who falsify seeds," Albino said.

Germany announced €45.5 million in funding through the German Development Bank (KfW) to finance agricultural initiatives by micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

The financing mechanism for sustainable rural development, known as FINOVA, was launched in Maputo at a ceremony during which Mozambique's Minister for Planning and Development, Salim Valá, emphasised the German fund's commitment to generating more jobs and income.

Valá said that this type of financing helps to materialise the government's "plans to replace imports and create more jobs".

Mozambique has more than 4.5 million farms, the "vast majority" of which are small-scale operations on less than two hectares, Valá said.

"Only 2.5 percent of the cultivated area has irrigation, and less than 10 percent of farmers have access to formal credit or structured technical assistance," he added.

Coffee lures foreign investment

The coffee industry is providing significant economic stimulus within the Gorongosa district of Sofala, attracting substantial foreign development backing.

The latest official statistics indicate that more than 1,500 families in the Gorongosa district are now involved in coffee cultivation, establishing a crucial alternative income stream for communities surrounding Gorongosa National Park.

The crop is proving to be a potent economic driver, generating both direct and secondary employment.

Pedro Muagura, the park's administrator, highlighted the transformative income potential, citing one producer who earned 250,000 meticais (€3,300) last year—a figure that surpasses typical local formal wages.

Gorongosa currently yields approximately five tonnes of coffee every three months, with key export destinations including Portugal, England, and the U.S. While production is in its nascent stages, the national industry, heavily concentrated in this region, is accelerating. Mozambique expects to harvest nearly 100 tonnes this year, up sharply from 40 tonnes a year ago.

This expansion is underpinned by integrated conservation and economic development funding. The Norwegian government recently committed 427 million meticais (€5.6 million) to the park, specifically targeting community support and agricultural initiatives like coffee. This is complemented by funding from the Italian Cooperation Agency.

The long-term strategy, also supported by an additional 2,200 producer families, aims to establish a national production area of 5,000 hectares within the next decade. Jenaro Lopes, President of the Mozambique Coffee Growers Association (Amocafé), indicated that the priority is quality over volume, stating that the goal is to "produce quality coffee so that we can win this market outside of Mozambique."

The coffee initiative serves as a model for integrating commercially viable agriculture with conservation efforts to deliver sustained economic benefits.

Financial barriers threaten agricultural future - FAO

Aspirations for agricultural modernisation are facing significant headwinds on the local market as women and young people continue to be locked out of essential financing, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has warned.

Speaking at the first meeting of the Agricultural Sector Coordination Committee (CCSA), FAO representative José Fernandez emphasized that despite recent progress, deep inequalities in access to resources and services persist.

“Rural women and young people remain under-represented in value chains, production processes and the division of labour,” Fernandez stated. He argued that unlocking their potential through inclusive policies and climate-resilience measures is crucial for the sector’s long-term sustainability.

The FAO representative stressed the need for greater private sector investment to drive innovation and generate quality employment.

“The private sector, when properly engaged, can speed up the modernization of agriculture and fisheries, expand market access and support balanced regional development,” Fernandez said.

The call for capital comes as the Minister of Agriculture, Roberto Albino, criticized the country’s continued dependence on food imports, insisting that Mozambique possesses the capacity for local self-sufficiency. Albino urged farmers to prioritize competitive production to serve the domestic market.

The focus on agricultural finance received a timely boost with the announcement that Germany, via the German Development Bank (KfW), will provide €45.5 million ($49 million) in funding.

The financing mechanism, dubbed FINOVA, is specifically designed to support micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the agricultural sector. At the launch in Maputo, Planning and Development Minister Salim Valá underscored the commitment of the German fund to generating jobs and boosting incomes in the country’s vast rural economy.

China-Africa agricultural cooperation boosts modern farming

As China-Africa agricultural cooperation continues to deepen, the partnership arising is sowing the seeds of shared growth and modernization.

China's technological support is helping African nations strengthen food security, improve livelihoods, and build a greener, more sustainable future for all.

In Gaza Province, a drone hums steadily above the green fields of an agricultural park developed through cooperation between China and Africa.

With a preset route and the single press of a button, the drone takes off, spraying herbicide onto crops along its programmed path—a vivid example of how China-Africa cooperation is driving agricultural modernization across the continent.

Compared with traditional manual spraying, a single plant-protection drone can cover more than 6.7 hectares of farmland per hour, greatly improving productivity. The agricultural park is part of a broader China-Africa agricultural cooperation project that has introduced drones to a wide range of field operations, including land mapping, rice seeding, and herbicide spraying.

"Being able to work on this farm has benefited me a lot. This is my first time working for a company in the agricultural sector. I've learned many technologies and gained much knowledge, such as how to operate drone spraying," said a local employee.

Beyond technological upgrades, China-Africa cooperation in agriculture is also improving the lives of local communities.

Under the guidance of Chinese agricultural experts, many local citizens have received hands-on training in modern planting techniques.

The new skills have not only boosted local agricultural productivity but also increased farmers' incomes.

"These companies have played a strategic role not only in rice cultivation and the practical application of modern agricultural technologies, but also in seed production and variety testing. This has had a positive impact on Mozambique's agricultural structure. We highly value our partnership with China," said Roberto Mito Albino, Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries.

So far, China has established agricultural cooperation mechanisms with more than 20 African countries and regional organizations.

As more advanced Chinese agricultural equipment and technologies enter Africa, smart farming is expected to further enhance productivity and unlock the continent's agricultural potential, enriching the "African granary" with China's technology and experience.

AfDB approves $22.8 million to boost rice production

The African Development Bank Group has approved a $22.8 million grant from its concessional African Development Fund to strengthen the local rice value chain and enhance climate resilience, targeting 30,000 smallholder farmers across four provinces.

According to AfDB, the grant will fund the rice value chain and climate resilience project, which seeks to increase the country's rice self-sufficiency from 50 percent to 75 percent by 2030, addressing critical food security challenges in one of Africa's most food-insecure nations.

Despite rice being a staple food, the country produces only half of the 600,000 tons it consumes annually. The country relies on imports to bridge the 300,000-ton gap, a dependence that drains foreign reserves and deepens rural poverty.

"By targeting the most vulnerable populations and focusing on climate-smart technologies, the grant will create a lasting impact on food security and rural livelihoods," Macmillan Anyanwu, the Bank Group's Country Manager for Mozambique, stated, noting that the initiative aligns with the country's national development strategy and the Bank's commitment to transforming agricultural value chains.

The project specifically targets vulnerable populations, with 70 percent of beneficiaries being women and 30 percent being youth.

In addition, the project aims to quadruple rice yields—from one ton to four tons per hectare—and increase annual household incomes from about $590 to $1,000. Initial results are expected to generate an extra 6,000 tons of rice annually. While that covers just 2 percent of the country's current deficit, it sets a foundation for scaling up production and reducing import dependency.

RIVACREP will rehabilitate 1,000 hectares of irrigation infrastructure, primarily in Gaza province, and establish five small-scale milling factories alongside 10 aggregator centres through a public-private partnership. Key interventions include the rehabilitation of irrigation systems, soil leveling, drainage improvements, and the construction of climate-resilient storage facilities, as well as the introduction of drought- and flood-tolerant rice varieties through partnerships with international research institutions. These interventions are expected to cut post-harvest losses by more than half, from 26 percent to 12 percent.

"By building resilient infrastructure and integrating private sector actors, RIVACREP will enable Mozambique to reduce dependency on imports, create domestic value addition, and set the foundation for an industrialized and climate-smart rice sector," said Neeraj Vij, African Development Bank Group's Regional Sector Manager.

"The project will also serve as a model for transformative value chain development that can be replicated in other key commodities. This will contribute to building a more self-reliant and resilient economy, reducing external dependency while creating opportunities for youth and women."

Currently, the country faces widespread malnutrition, with child stunting rates as high as 44 percent in Zambezia province. The project incorporates a strong nutrition component targeting 6,000 beneficiaries through the promotion of biofortified rice varieties rich in iron and zinc.

To address vulnerability to climate shocks and regional security challenges, particularly in northern provinces, RIVACREP also features a Contingency Emergency Response mechanism, enabling rapid support during crises.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Environment, and Fisheries will lead project implementation, with safeguards in place to ensure environmental and social protection. RIVACREP supports multiple development objectives aligned with the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

On the other hand, the project duration spans from December 2025 to December 2030, with a mid-term review in 2028.

The African Development Fund is the concessional arm of the African Development Bank Group, providing grants and soft loans to support development projects in Africa's most vulnerable countries. The support demonstrates the African Development Bank Group's renewed commitment to climate resilience, inclusive growth, and value-added agricultural production.

A hungry world knows no borders

By DR. HIMANSHU PATHAK*

When crops fail, people move not by choice, but by necessity. As families are displaced by droughts and failed harvests, the pressures do not always stop at national boundaries. In short, hunger has become one of the most powerful forces shaping our century.

From the Sahel, the vast semi-arid belt stretching across Africa from Senegal to Sudan and the Horn of Africa to South Asia's dry zones and Southeast Asia's coastal farmlands, climate shocks are undermining food production and disrupting communities across the Global South.

In the Sahel, prolonged drought and poor harvests, among other factors, are driving migration north through Niger and Mali toward North Africa and, for some, across the Mediterranean.

Across South Asia, recurrent floods and heat stress have displaced millions in India and Bangladesh, while in Southeast Asia, rising seas are forcing coastal farmers and fishers inland.

These pressures are magnified by rapid population growth, especially in the Sahel, where the population is projected to more than double by 2050, placing immense strain on already limited arable land.

The same story is unfolding across the globe. In Central America's drought-stricken Dry Corridor, years of crop failure are pushing families to leave their farms and migrate north in search of food and safety.

Safeguarding the right of people to remain where their families have lived for generations, now depends on enabling communities to produce more food from every hectare, even as conditions grow harsher.

We must view food security not only as a humanitarian concern, but through the prism of peace and stability.

History shows that when people cannot feed their families, societies fracture and conflicts occur. The world's most strategic investment today is in the hands that grow our food and not in walls or weapons.

By investing in climate resilient crops such as the drought and heat tolerant varieties developed by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and expanding access to scientific innovation and improved seeds, we enable communities to withstand climate shocks, secure their livelihoods, and remain in their traditional lands instead of

being forced to migrate by a crisis not of their making.

These positive impacts are already visible, but they must now be scaled up dramatically to match the magnitude of the challenge.

The World Bank estimates that up to 216 million people could be forced to migrate within their own countries by 2050 as climate impacts intensify, most of them in Africa and South Asia.

Investing in resilient food systems in the Global South is one of the most effective and humane strategies for ensuring regional and ultimately global stability.

The UNDP estimates that every dollar invested in sustainable agriculture today saves seven to ten dollars in humanitarian aid and migration management later.

At ICRISAT we witness this every day. Across Africa and Asia, we work with governments and communities to turn drylands, some of the harshest farming environments on Earth, into zones of opportunity.

In India's Bundelkhand region, stretching across southern Uttar Pradesh and northern Madhya Pradesh our science-led watershed interventions have turned what were once parched and deserted wastelands into thriving, water-abundant croplands.

In Niger, climate-resilient seed systems are now transforming uncertainty into productivity. From drought-tolerant sorghum and pearl millet to digital tools that guide farmers on planting and water management, science is helping people stay and thrive where they are.

These few examples show that solutions exist. What is missing is scale and that requires more sustained investment.

Developed nations have both the capacity and the self-interest to act. Supporting food systems in the Global South should also be seen as insurance against instability.

A world where millions are forced to move in search of food and water will be a world without stability anywhere.

FAO's 2025 World Food Day theme, "Hand in Hand for Better Food and a Better Future", captures what this moment demands, a deeper investment in science that makes a real difference, and genuine partnership.

Across the Global South, collaboration is already strengthening through the ICRISAT Center of Excellence for South-South Cooperation in Agriculture as nations share knowledge, seeds, and strategies to build resilience together.

Yet the North, too, has a vital role to play in recognition that hunger and instability anywhere can threaten prosperity everywhere.

The future of food security, peace, and climate resilience must be built together. As the climate crisis tightens its hold, the world must choose, act now to strengthen the foundations of food and farming, or face the growing cost of displacement and unrest.

Let us remember that peace, like harvests, depends on what we sow today.

*Dr. Himanshu Pathak is the Director General, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT).

A food tax shift could save lives
…without a price hike in the average shopping basket

More expensive steak, cheaper tomatoes, but the same total cost for the average basket of groceries at the supermarket. A comprehensive study, led by researchers from Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden has analysed the potential effects of a food tax shift – where VAT is removed from healthy foods and levies are introduced on foods that have a negative impact on the climate.

The study shows that a shift in taxes could have both environmental and human health benefits, and means that 700 fewer people in Sweden would die prematurely each year.

Today, diet in many high-income countries is a leading risk factor for certain diseases and premature death. In Western Europe, unhealthy diets cause many times more deaths annually than high levels of alcohol consumption, and about as many deaths as smoking. Furthermore, what we eat also has a very negative impact on the climate. In Sweden, the negative climate impact of food consumption is roughly twice that of direct emissions from all Swedish passenger car traffic.

Current policy initiatives mainly rely on providing dietary guidelines. The European Commission's own advisory body, "Science Advice for Policy by European Academies" (SAPEA), has recommended the use of economic incentives to encourage healthier diets. This new study analysed how such incentives could be implemented in practice using a food tax shift, and what effects a reform of this kind might have.

The case examined was Sweden, but, according to the researchers, the results are relevant for most high-income countries. The study was carried out by researchers from Chalmers University of Technology, Karolinska Institutet, and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.

"Today's diets are making us sick and negatively impacting the climate. If we want to do something about this collectively, taxes and subsidies are a good way forward. Our research also shows that this can be done without the average trip to the supermarket for groceries becoming more expensive when selective taxes on certain food groups are compensated by removing VAT on other food groups," says Jörgen Larsson, researcher at Chalmers University of Technology, who led the recently published study.

With a food tax shift, VAT would be removed from some foods that we should eat more of, according to, for example, the recently released EAT Lancet report. The effects of imposing levies on certain foods that have a big impact on the climate were also calculated.

The study shows that the dietary changes expected from a food tax shift could prevent about 700 deaths annually among people under 70 in Sweden. This can be compared with the figure of around 200 road traffic deaths in Sweden annually.

"This high figure surprised us, and yet it is a conservative estimate. There is also a lot of suffering associated with unhealthy diets that is not apparent in this figure, such as living with obesity or type 2 diabetes," he says.

The food tax shift would also reduce the climate footprint of Swedes' food consumption by about 700,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year—equivalent to an 8 percent reduction in emissions from all passenger cars, or nearly one in ten cars disappearing from Sweden's roads.

The study focused on four food groups: (1) fruits and vegetables, (2) legumes and

whole-grain products, (3) red and processed meats (beef, lamb, pork, and processed meat), and (4) sugar-sweetened beverages.

The researchers focused on foods with strong scientific evidence for their effects on health or the climate. Reducing consumption of beef and lamb was found to benefit the climate, while other measures would primarily promote health. VAT would therefore be removed from fruit, vegetables, legumes, and whole-grain products, while levies would be introduced on sugar-sweetened beverages, beef, lamb, pork, and processed meat.

"That the price of food affects the level of consumption is well known. A historical example is beef consumption, which increased by 50 per cent in Sweden during the 1990s, largely attributable to the price of beef almost halving after Sweden's entry into the EU," he says.

Price makes a big difference for consumption

The study's calculations were based on current VAT levels in Sweden, and confirm that price changes have a big impact on what consumers put in their shopping trolleys. The removal of VAT would reduce the price level of these products by almost 11 per cent, leading to an increase in consumption of, for example, 10 per cent for whole grain bread and 4 per cent for fruit and vegetables. The levy on sugar-sweetened beverages would increase the price by around 17 per cent, which the researchers estimated would reduce consumption by about a quarter.

The biggest difference for Swedish consumers would be in the prices of beef and lamb, where the tax shift would mean a price increase of around 25 per cent, or almost 3 euros per kilo. This is estimated to reduce meat consumption by 19 per cent.

"While it might seem to be a big price increase, it would also lead to a decrease in meat consumption in Sweden by one-fifth – thus returning meat consumption to the same level as in the 1990s. Not everyone needs to become vegetarian for the sake of the climate, but with more moderate consumption, a lot stands to be gained," he says.

Cost-neutral for both low- and high-income earners

Increases in the price of food usually hit low-income earners harder because this group spends a larger proportion of their income on food. But with the proposed tax shift, some foods would be more expensive and others cheaper, something the researchers see as an advantage for gaining public acceptance for the change.

"That the reform is also cost-neutral for central government also improves the chances of its implementation. In the long term, a food tax shift would benefit central government economically through better public health, reduced sick leave, and lower costs for health care," he says.

The article Cost-Neutral Food Tax Reforms for Healthier and More Sustainable Diets has been published in the scientific journal Ecological Economics. The authors are Jörgen Larsson, Liselotte Schäfer Elinder, Jonas Nässén, Edvin Månsson, Elin Röös, Sarah Säll, Emma Ejelöv and Emma Patterson. These researchers are active at Chalmers University of Technology, Karolinska Institutet, and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, all in Sweden.

The study was carried out within the framework of the research programme Mistra Sustainable Consumption. During Black Week, on November 26, 2025, the Mistra Sustainable Consumption research programme will hold its final conference, featuring a presentation on the food tax shift study.

Japanese company NEC Africa to improve Côte d'Ivoire agriculture

NEC Africa, the African subsidiary of the Japanese multinational NEC Corporation, has kicked off a project with Côte d'Ivoire's Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Food Production that aims to improve and upgrade agricultural efficiency with digital technology.

The agricultural sector accounts for about 30 percent of Côte d'Ivoire's GDP, and about 50 percent of the population is engaged in agriculture. However, in recent years, the prices of seeds and fertilizers have risen sharply due to conflicts, natural disasters, and pandemics throughout the world, and many farmers have been unable to procure sufficient supplies of necessary materials, which has become a crucial issue for Côte d'Ivoire in terms of food security.

The NEC project aims to harness digital solutions to ensure a fair supply of agricultural materials, such as seeds and fertilizers, and stable harvests through more efficient farming support.

To that end, NEC Africa is providing its "e-Voucher" solution, in which ID cards and smartphones visualize the distribution status and history of agricultural supplies. The ID cards are registered with biometric information to prevent unauthorized use of coupons.

NEC will also utilize its agricultural ICT platform CropScope to build a database covering 30,000 hectares of farmland to provide organized information on the location, size, and crop types of fields managed by farmers. NEC said this will support crop growth monitoring and field inspection tasks for agricultural advisors.

NEC added it will provide farming advisory functions that suggest optimal fertilization and harvest timing, contributing to stable crop production.

The project is being implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture of Côte d'Ivoire utilizing funds from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the African Development Bank, which provided loan aid to the government in 2022 in the form of a co-financing arrangement aimed at "emergency food security".

NEC said it will "continue to leverage digital technology and contribute to sustainable agriculture and food security in developing countries through public-private partnerships."

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