

The 20th edition of the Africa Food Systems Forum will be hosted in Rwanda from September 1 to 5, organizers said Wednesday, marking 20 years of efforts to transform agriculture and food systems across the continent.

The meeting comes as countries begin a new decade under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme and step up efforts to mobilize large-scale investment through initiatives such as the New African Financial Architecture.

This year's forum will be held under the theme "Investing in Agri-Food Systems: Growing Jobs, Nourishing Nations, Building Resilience," with a focus on turning commitments into results through increased investment, stronger partnerships and clearer accountability.

Over the past 20 years, the forum has brought together participants from more than 100 countries, hosted over 3,000 sessions and showcased investment opportunities valued at more than \$200 billion from governments and small and medium-sized enterprises.

More than 4,500 participants including heads of state, ministers, business leaders, investors, development partners and innovators are expected in Kigali, one of the continent's main gatherings on agriculture and food systems.



Agriculture Minister Telesphore Ndabamenye said the theme reflects mounting pressure on African economies, pointing to declining development assistance, volatile commodity prices and rising debt levels.

"Africa cannot afford to continue treating investment in food systems as an afterthought," he said, calling for it to become a central priority.

Since its inception, the forum has expanded from an investment-focused conference into a platform that brings together policymakers, investors and development partners to shape policy, partnerships and financing for food systems transformation.

Amath Pathe Sene, managing director of the forum, said the 20th edition marks both progress and a need for faster action.

"The scale of the challenge now requires a step change in how we act," he said.

“What is needed is better alignment between policy and investment, stronger collaboration across sectors and a shift from commitments to implementation at scale.”

Rwanda’s selection as host reflects its growing role in agricultural reform. Officials say the country has pursued policies aimed at improving productivity and resilience, alongside efforts to draw in private-sector investment.

Hailemariam Desalegn, board chair of AFSF Partners and a former Ethiopian prime minister, said the next phase of Africa’s food systems transformation will depend on follow-through.

“We have the frameworks and the knowledge,” he said. “What is required now is consistent implementation, stronger investment environments and deliberate efforts to attract both public and private capital.”



Alice Ruhweza, president of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, said the Kigali meeting must focus on delivery.

“We need clear plans, practical pathways and a readiness to deliver measurable results,” she said, adding that partners would work to ensure commitments made at the forum are tracked and implemented.

The program will include plenary sessions, ministerial talks and investment meetings, along with platforms for innovation. Youth-led businesses and small and medium-sized agri-food enterprises will have opportunities to engage directly with investors and partners.

With food demand rising and climate pressures mounting, decisions from the Kigali meeting could shape how Africa addresses its food system challenges in the years ahead.