



11<sup>TH</sup> G20  
PARLIAMENTARY  
SPEAKERS' SUMMIT



**TRADE JUSTICE AND IMPROVED  
GLOBAL MARKET ACCESS FOR  
AFRICAN AGRICULTURAL  
PRODUCTS**

26 July 2025

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**Harnessing Parliamentary Diplomacy for the Realization of Global Solidarity,  
Equality, and Sustainability**

**Honourable Members of the Pan African Parliament, Speakers of African Parliaments, and Distinguished Guests.**

As we gather here to discuss ways to tackle challenges facing the African continent's agricultural sector and explore opportunities, specifically in relation to market access for agricultural products, it is important to emphasise the role the sector plays in the development of and livelihoods of people on this continent.

**The agricultural sector is an important and strategic sector for African economies and the livelihoods of its citizens. More than 70% of employment in Africa is within the agricultural sector and smallholder farmers contribute to the majority of the continent's farming activity.** This means that Africans are more dependent on income from the agricultural sector than from any other sector.

For the African continent, agriculture is one of the strategic priorities to foster sustainable economic growth, employment creation, food security, and poverty reduction; particularly when viewed from the crucial perspective of the development of smallholder agriculture. **Sustainable agricultural growth among smallholder farmers is deemed to be a necessary condition for improving national and household food security as well as reducing rural poverty.**

**Therefore, growth and development of the agricultural sector are crucial for the overall development of the continent, particularly in rural areas.** Globally, there is also consensus on the important role of the agricultural sector in driving economic growth and food security. **However, its growth has been impacted by the lack of access to finance, the impact of climate change and challenges in accessing markets, including climate change mitigation policies and interventions.**

**The lack of agricultural finance** is a constraint to development as it constrains cashflow available to purchase inputs and limits investment in productivity-enhancing technology. Lending to the agriculture sector, particularly for smallholder farmers, can be difficult, costly and risky due to the risks associated with production, transport to market and access to market.

**These risks are exacerbated by the growing impact of climate change** on the sustainability of agriculture, impacting livelihoods, food security, and trade. Climate change typically affects productivity and can alter comparative advantages. For example, a country may no longer be able to produce a certain product at a lower cost, and as a consequence, cannot export the excess supply competitively.

**In terms of accessing markets,** many African countries have had preferential access to markets such as the European Union, United States, and the United Kingdom. However, recent developments, including the introduction of tariffs and other barriers to trade, are threatening the sustainability of the continent's agricultural exports to these markets.

**These factors contribute to Africa's current position of being a net importer of agricultural products despite the availability of its natural resources.** Hence, trade in agricultural products is essential to drive employment, economic growth and development in the African context. However, trade barriers hinder this. These trade barriers include:

- (i). **Increasing Tariffs/ import duties** which make exports less competitive in the destination market.
- (ii). **Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures:** Stringent health and safety rules pose formidable barriers. While SPS regulations serve legitimate public health goals, they can be applied in overly restrictive ways that prevent imports from other countries. African exporters, especially of fruit, vegetables, fish and livestock, must comply with strict residue and hygiene standards.
- (iii). **Non-Tariff Barriers** such as regulations on quality, packaging, labelling and environment may hinder access to markets.
- (iv). **Subsidies:** Subsidies, such as direct payments, input subsidies, and price supports, in developed countries disadvantage African farmers that have to compete with farmers in these countries. These subsidy programmes keep domestic prices low; as a result, imports become less competitive in that market.

As Parliaments, we have the responsibility to:

- (i). **Call on international partners for technical assistance and/or funding to support smallholder farmers** to improve access to technology and agricultural extension services.
- (ii). **Call on international partners to support initiatives to mitigate against the impact of climate change on the agricultural sector.**
- (iii). **Engage our counterparts in the United States on the adverse impact of the higher tariffs** it has imposed on countries, including many African countries.
- (iv). **Engage our counterparts in the United States on the way forward with the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)**, as there was uncertainty about the status of the free market access for certain products under AGOA in light of the higher tariffs introduced.
- (v). **Engage our counterparts in the EU on its environmental protection policies** that impact Africa's agricultural sector. Persuade our EU counterparts to reconsider the inclusion of smaller, less developed African countries in these policies, or to allow for longer transition periods, particularly in this sector that is dominated by smallholder farmers who may not have the resources to comply with the regulations or policies.

(vi). **Advocate for the strengthening of multilateralism and the implementation of multilateral policies** rather than individualistic protectionist policies that benefit a few countries. In particular, imposed environmental protection policies may adversely impact the African agricultural sector. While South Africa recognises that it is necessary to take measures to protect the environment, such measures should be multilateral and take into account the development levels of other countries.

While exploring options to address challenges, **it is important that we also explore opportunities noting that African countries have diverse agricultural products, many of which are able to compete in international markets.** Specifically, there are opportunities that exist for increasing trade with other G20 countries, such as China, India, and Saudi Arabia, among others, that are open to exports of agricultural products and are already importing some of our agricultural products.

**Improving market access requires a multipronged approach. As we look for markets outside the continent, we should also look within. Intra-African agricultural trade is significant, and its potential has not been fully exploited.** In 2024, intra-African trade in agricultural products was approximately 21% of the continent's total trade.

Given the extent of existing agricultural trade in the continent, efforts should continue towards improving intra-African trade as envisioned by the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Therefore, **Parliaments should facilitate market access for agricultural products by passing budgets/approving funding and should oversee the implementation of programmes that:**

- (i). Ensure access to finance, particularly for smallholder farmers,
- (ii). Mitigate the impact of climate change by building climate-resilient infrastructure, and
- (iii). Harmonise Sanitary and Phytosanitary standards and remove non-tariff barriers.

The African Continental Free Trade Area has laid a foundation for this. Therefore, it is up to member countries to ensure implementation.

African Parliaments and their members can play an active role in shaping global trade dynamics by engaging in diplomacy and advocacy. The P20 platform provides an ideal opportunity to do so.