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Johanna Braun has over five years of professional experience in the fields of agriculture, food security and development policy. In her role as Senior Policy Advisor at Welthungerhilfe in Berlin, she is responsible for several policy processes such as the G20, the Kampala Agenda and SDG 2.



Joe Mzinga has over 15 years of experience working in the Civil Society sector and media in Eastern and Southern Africa. He currently is the Regional Coordinator at the Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers Forum (ESAFF) and has always been passionate about Gender, Trade, Advocacy and Sustainable Development.

“ It would have been better if the AU had started the process from the ground up ”

Embedded in the CAADP framework, and adopted in 2014, the Malabo Agenda was intended to contribute to implementing agriculture-led development on the continent that eliminates hunger, reduces poverty and food insecurity, and facilitates higher sustainable economic growth and development. In February 2024, the African Union presented the last report on the implementation of the Malabo Agenda. At the same time, the post-Malabo process was launched to draw up an agenda, a strategy and goals for the next decade. A talk with representatives from civil society about the challenges of the current round of negotiations and the coming years.

The Malabo process is based on voluntary commitments by African states. Will these commitments ensure that the governments really implement the goals?

Johanna Braun: The leverage for change is there, but it is not particularly strong. Unlike the European Union, the African Union has no governmental power and cannot impose sanctions. Accountability works through regular reports from the AU member states. Nevertheless, many African countries have made great progress in this area in recent years. Hunger and poverty have been significantly reduced, and governments have worked on agricultural investment plans and started concrete policies, for example for rural development. However, the targets set for 2025 will not be met.

So now all hopes are set on the post-Malabo process – is this warranted?

Joe Mzinga: Let me start with saying that it is aligned with global processes especially on environmental aspects and climate change – particularly with the Sustainable Development Goals. And then there is the UN Food Systems Summit, and we have the African Agenda 2063. All these are connecting the same efforts for people to finally live happy, healthy and dignified lives.

Secondly, the post-Malabo process is a framework for enhancing partnerships. Note that the AU works together with a wide range of stakeholders: Regional Economic Communities, different non-state-actors and farmer organisations as well as European and American partners such as GIZ, AGRA and USAID. In addition, they work with UN agencies like the FAO and with academia and research institutions such as the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa, Akademiya2063 and many others. Women organisations, youth, as well as high-level representatives from African or-

ganisations are integrated in the process, too. Thirdly, the post-Malabo process has enhanced buy-in and ownership, which will eventually guarantee mutual accountability as countries will have to produce biannual reports in their implementation of the appropriate agricultural policies.

What is your impression of the consultation process so far?

Sara Worku: Compared to the preparation and consultations in 2014, the 2024 one is far better as there was an effort to make the consultation inclusive. In terms of representation and engagement, it is by far better.

Johanna Braun: Broadly speaking, there were three ways to participate in the process. First, consultations took place at regional level. Then there was the opportunity to submit comments, so-called memoranda. Finally, individual organisations, including Welthungerhilfe, were invited to work on a specific topic in working groups. The AU provided good and structured moderation, and suggestions and comments were always welcome.

So can we speak of meaningful participation?

Joe Mzinga: I have mixed feelings. All in all, the process was very participatory, and everyone had an opportunity to present and be listened to. However, we saw a lot of academics taking the lead. All the thematic working groups were led either by people from universities and research organisations or by technocrats from international organisations. That was good in terms of providing expertise, but we didn't see much involvement of experts from the Regional Economic Communities and national focal persons of the CAADP, the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme. It would have been better if the AU had started the process from the ground up. They could have translated the issues into

the technical languages afterwards and come up with the final document. We hadn't expected the process this year. We were reckoning with it for next year, when the CAADP Malabo decade comes to an end. We think that this led the process to be rushed. However, we smallholder farmers managed to come up with a position, and we produced a video on it, and participated in a number of CAADP post-Malabo regional events and consultations in May, June, July and August 2024. But we could not see these being integrated into the process later on.

Johanna Braun: Yes, until recently it was unclear to us what the AU and the participating states would do with our proposals. In the meantime, we have received a first draft in which we can see that the proposals of our working group on the right to food, agroecology and food sovereignty did not make it into the text. But the demand for disaggregated data, for example, did. However, I don't usually get to know what governments do with our input. I think it's great that we are at least getting an interim result like this. Meaningful participation is a civil society demand that is rarely met. The post-Malabo process should have also been more transparent.

Sara Worku: This is true. Although the process was more participatory, I was not sure how far stakeholders' comments and inputs would be included in the main documents either. Especially the issues of food sovereignty and agroecology were mentioned many times by many participants. But I don't think the AU appreciates them because they deem them very controversial. At the end of our session, they clearly told us that we should not expect these subjects to be reflected in the final document because some countries or some heads of state may not buy them. For us, this development is surprising because food sovereignty and agroecology are really critical. We need to move from climate-smart agriculture to agroecology.

The new agenda is to be adopted in Kampala, Uganda, in January 2025. Will the methodology of the Malabo Declaration regarding monitoring be continued?

Johanna Braun: It looks like many indicators are going to be updated, and I think that makes a lot of sense. There are currently 59 indicators in the AU's official monitoring system, some of which will certainly be adapted. Around half of the 49 countries that contributed to the last biennial report did not provide enough data to be able to report meaningfully.

There is a conflict of objectives between the desire to cover all aspects and the actual possibilities of the individual countries. There was a lot of criticism from our working group about the fact that no disaggregated data is usually collected for young people, women and marginalised groups. A clearer picture and specific targets, for example reaching the poorest people, would be very helpful in improving their situation.

What are the shortcomings of the Malabo Agenda as of now?

Sara Worku: There are still conflicting ideas and practices. For instance, on the one hand, we are promoting the environment and climate-smart agriculture. But on the other, we are promoting commercialisation, which is important for food security as it will increase production and productivity. However, commercialisation requires the use of fertiliser and pesticides which may have health impacts, and could undermine nutritional aspects, crop rotation as well as diversification, and perhaps even endanger soil health and contribute more heavily to climate change.

Another point concerns genetically modified organisms. During our meetings many spoke out against using them. But some countries are already implementing agriculture with GMOs. It will be up to the individual countries to include them or not in their country strategy and grow them or not.

Joe Mzinga: The majority of producers, crop growers, fisherfolk and livestock keepers reside in rural areas where infrastructure is bad – no good services, no electricity, no roads. They need improvements in the rural space. This is a very important aspect within the entire agricultural agenda. Africa needs infrastructure. Rural infrastructure and water and land was emphasised in the Maputo Declaration but forgotten during the Malabo era. The notion that Africa is urbanising quickly and that this makes investment into rural infrastructure obsolete is totally wrong. Agriculture will still be practised in rural areas. Once we can produce enough food to feed Africa and enough for the industries to add value, we will certainly see changes. So, all in all we need a broader agenda. Productivity and growth are key, but the other factors must not be neglected. That includes infrastructure and extension services as well as social services and vocational training.

Do you expect improvements from the post-Malabo process for the farmers on the ground?

Sara Worku: Yes, it could improve the live-

lihoods of the farmers on the ground as the focus of CAADP shifts towards a holistic, comprehensive and integrated approach. For instance, the last CAADP mainly focused on agricultural production, but now the focus is broader, and we are able to discuss agri-food systems.

Joe Mzinga: If there is a proper follow up, it will be very important for smallholder farmers on the ground: access to inputs will be there, the government will have prepared a good environment for the private sector and the other stakeholders, provided irrigation schemes wherever possible and created a legal framework that grants women and youth access to ownership and utilisation of land.

How do you see your roles after the new declaration is ratified?

Joe Mzinga: Farmers on the ground are asking their governments big questions. Why aren't we doing good in terms of extension, in terms of seed or in terms of financing? You committed on financing agriculture, so you have to deliver. You committed on financing rural development, so you have to deliver. You committed to ensure that you have fewer stunted children, so you have to deliver. Decision-makers have to deliver if we put pressure on them.

In recent years, a sense of understanding has grown that we need to abide to these commitments. And we have been successful before. In Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Rwanda, smallholder farmers went to the officials and demanded more funding. In some districts where they allocated only 0.03 per cent of the budget to agriculture, it is now up to six per cent.

Johanna Braun: Before the Maputo Declaration in 2004 and the Malabo Declaration in 2014, the agricultural agenda in Africa had been determined by colonial powers and, later on, by donors. The latter are still active in the background and finance the agenda's development. Nevertheless, it is African decision-makers who are agreeing on an agenda. This is not perfect, but I think it's progress. As Joe said, it's now important for non-state actors to follow the implementation of the agenda and to push for the goals that the African states have agreed on.

The talk was led by Uwe Kerkow. It was first published on the Welthungerhilfe website and slightly adapted for publication in Rural 21.

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