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The Role of Food Systems Leadership and Capacitation in Transforming African Food Systems

African Centre for Technology Studies

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Authors: Joel Onyango, Eric Magale, Gillian Faith Achieng, Erica Atieno

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Summary

An estimated 282 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are undernourished, a figure that has been on an upward trend for the last five years. This statistic points to significant challenges within African food systems, including the impacts of climate change and trade policies on agriculture and poverty outcomes, as well as growing urbanization, among other interlinked challenges.

The significance of leadership's role in food systems transformation is uncontentious. Even so, there has been little research on food systems leadership, especially in Africa, based on actual fieldwork. Refreshingly, many leadership initiatives have been launched in Africa in the past two decades, and more so in the last five years, which have shown great initiative and mission in equipping food leaders with the skills they require to be effective as leaders of their organizations and bring about the transformation of food systems in Africa. This study sought to unbundle the question of how the capacitation of food leaders and a systems approach to leadership can help transform food systems in Africa.

An estimated 282 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are undernourished, a figure that has been on an upward trend for the last five years.

To come to this understanding, it was helpful to examine how leadership programmes (or initiatives) in Africa operate. A scan of a dozen leadership capacitation initiatives in Africa shows that the initiatives use different modalities to go about capacitation. There are also differences in the modalities around recruitment, instruction methods, length of the training, and target group in terms of age, experience, gender, sector and geography. Insights from interviews show that technical skills and a range of interpersonal, organizational, advocacy and business skills are critical for food system leaders. This study highlights limited awareness of the capacitation initiatives, the cost of attending and facilitating leadership initiatives, inadequate networking opportunities for food leaders and the lack of mutual collaborations among leadership initiatives as key areas that need to be addressed to realize the transformation of African food systems.

In conclusion, leadership capacitation is mission-critical in transforming African food systems. Further, the study suggests that for Africa to make up ground in food security and the sustainability of food systems, African food system leaders must re-orient their approach to leadership by embracing a broader system thinking, which this study finds as having the greatest potential for food systems transformation.

1. Introduction

Food and nutrition insecurity are persistent global challenges despite decades of intervention and significant financial investment by multiple actors (Rosegrant, 2023; Barrett, 2010). Ericksen (2008) asserts that the efficient operation of food systems is critical to achieving food and nutrition security outcomes such as food availability, accessibility, utilization and sustainability. Food systems integrate several components including agricultural production, food processing, supply, consumption, and waste management. It also encompasses a wide range of stakeholders, including farmers, agribusinesses, consumers, policymakers, and non-governmental institutions making it a multi-faceted sector.

Africa's food systems are shaped by a complex interplay of social, economic, environmental, and political dynamics that collectively impact food and nutrition security as well as agricultural sustainability across the continent.

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(Rosegrant, 2023; Barrett, 2010).

→ The most evident of these relates to the implications of climate change on agriculture and food systems. The persistence of current climate trends is expected to reduce agricultural land due to aridification and coastal areas becoming submerged (Ngaira, 2007), as well as increased economic losses (Asafu-Adjaye, 2014). Successive reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have reiterated how increased human activities is affecting climate change and in turn food and nutrition security (Eyring et al., 2021). Therefore, it is imperative to adopt more sustainable forms of agriculture that could forestall the negative climatic effects while increasing Africa's agricultural productivity, food and nutrition security and farmers' climate resilience.

→ The second challenge facing African food systems is the demographic trend and its implications on food demand and agricultural labour (Thomas & Zuberi, 2012, Som et al. 2018). Africa's population is projected to double by 2050, significantly increasing the food demands and the potential labour force (UN DESA, 2019). This demographic dividend is threatened by the high rates of youth unemployment and rural-urban migration, which depletes the rural labour force critical for production. The growing rate of urbanization in Africa is placing considerable stress on the urban food systems (Battersby 2018, Wegerif 2017). Rosegrant et al. (2013) assert that high population growth rates will severely impact caloric availability, malnutrition, and food security in least developed countries.

→ Another growing challenge affecting African agriculture relates to the regional and global trade policies that influence food imports which play a significant role in African food systems (Tawodzera et al., 2018, Fuseini et al., 2018, Hayombe et al., 2018, Wegerif 2016). Studies underscore the changing food economy, in particular, the growing prominence of supermarket chains in African urban areas which offer diverse imported food items (Opiyo & Ogindo, 2018; Wegerif, 2018; Wegerif, 2020). This trend threatens to push micro and small-scale retailers and

food businesses that usually operate in municipal markets, kiosks and at the roadsides out of business contributing to social inequities (Wegerif 2023). Records by FAO (2019) show that smallholder farmers, despite their significance in agricultural production, they are still facing significant challenges, such as restricted market access, financial services, and agricultural inputs. Radical changes are urgently needed to address the multifaceted and interlinked challenges in African food systems. Political leaders from Africa committed, during the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit, to be more attentive to the food systems concerns in their countries and devise strategies to accelerate transformation (Kalibata, 2022). According to Schneider et al (2023), Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries have mixed performance across the fifty indicators used by the Food Systems Countdown Initiative to assess progress in transforming the food system. The countries perform worse than the global average in thirty-two out of fifty indicators mostly related to diets, nutrition and health. However, they perform better than eighteen indicators including those on food systems, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and biosphere integrity (Schneider et al., 2023). These mixed results put SSA off-track with respect to eliminating hunger, malnutrition, and poverty by 2030 (Kapuya et al., 2022).

Food system leadership is one of the acknowledged strategies adopted to accelerate transformation of food systems. Adeola and Evans (2020) emphasize the crucial role of a diverse range of leaders in combating these challenges, catalyzing and steering change in the African food systems. Central to this is the urgent need to build the capacities of African food leaders, which involves enhancing their knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to effectively contribute towards systemic change. However, extraordinarily little is known about what leadership capacitation for transforming African food systems entails. That is, are leadership programmes capacitating leaders, what are the skills, knowledge and capacities nurtured; how are such initiatives operating in practice; what is their impact and how this could bring about transformative change in African food systems. Moreover, at a more theoretical level, many of discussions around systems leadership are focused on the global north, with little attention paid to how systems leadership unfolds in other contexts.

To fill this gap, this study sought to understand the role of leadership capacitation in transforming African food systems and how different leadership programmes can achieve this. In particular, the study explored how these leadership programmes work in practice and what these participants and programme conveners estimate to be the potential of food leaders to bring about food systems transformation. The study leverages insights from African food leaders, food systems experts and conveners of leadership capacitation programmes in Africa to explore the following research question:

> **What are the critical leadership capacities required for African food systems transformation and how are they acquired and nurtured?**"

This study contributes to current debates on food system leadership in the following ways. First, the study takes an iterative approach to understanding systems leadership in African food systems. More precisely, this study enriches extant literature on systems leadership by assessing its applicability to African food systems and its potential for food systems transformation. A more deliberate Afrocentric food system leadership research based on actual fieldwork will help sectoral actors re-orient their work towards transforming African food systems. Second, it advances our understanding on how food systems leadership and leadership capacitation is being practiced on the ground, what seems to work and in what circumstances, what does not, and why.

2. Theoretical perspectives on systems leadership and capacitation

Vast body of literature on leadership theories exist, however, food system leadership is underexplored (Etmanski, 2017). The limited literature on food leadership proposes several leadership approaches.

This study adopts the systems leadership approach for two reasons.

- **First,** an apt justification for this is offered by Ulimwengu & Blumenthal (2022), who suggest that the sticking issues around perennial food insecurity are systemic or structural in nature and that only a leadership approach that embraces a holistic or system-wide approach can effectively solve these issues.

- **Second,** Holleman et al. (2017) suggest that the transformation in the African food systems should encompass more than just economic and agricultural changes but to consider changes in all food system components as well as the necessary institutional support.

In this sense, a systems approach is critical for navigating the complexities of food systems Folke et al., (2005), and identifying strong points for effective interventions is crucial for leaders (Bryan, 2008).

Garnett et al. (2013) conceptualizes systems leadership as an integrative approach emphasizing collaborative, cross-sectoral, and adaptive management to address global systems' complex, multifaceted challenges, which are also integral to food systems. This approach emphasizes the role of leaders in fostering an environment that encourages collaboration, learning, and innovation across the various components and stakeholders of the food system (Dreier and Nelson, 2019). Systems leadership goes beyond traditional hierarchical leadership models, advocating for a leadership style that is more inclusive, participatory, and capable of engaging a diverse range of stakeholders (ibid). Numerous studies have explored the applicability of systems leadership in various sectors including education (Hopkins, 2007, Hargreaves et al., 2008), healthcare (Bigland, 2020), and community development (Onyx & Leonard, 2011).

More recently, there has been an acknowledgment that a systems approach to leadership can be applied more widely to the public, private and not-for-profit sectors (Stewart, 2018). However, systems leadership in general remains underexplored in the context of African food systems. Therefore, the idea that this leadership approach can bring about transformation in African food systems merits deeper reflection. In the absence of such critical research, system leadership in Africa will remain a theoretical idea which is detached from the realities on the ground. Another issue to consider is that the systems leadership approach has its roots in the Global North. There is a need for a critical examination of whether the leadership approaches can apply neatly to African food systems, which needs to be explored in a way sensitive to Africa's socio-cultural, political, and economic context.

A systems leadership approach presupposes that system-wide transformation can only be brought about by a collective of leaders compared to individuals. Taking this view, there is a strong imperative to pay attention to the capacities of individual members of leadership collectives. The idea of leadership capacitation therefore becomes important in achieving system-wide transformation. Moyo (2022) and UNDP (2008) urge that capacity development is needed at the individual, institutional and systems level. Competence building at the individual level should follow from two perspectives, the institutional level which focuses on specific technical and soft skills that are lacking and the system level where coordination and collective efforts need strengthening to support multi-sectoral action needed for food systems to operate effectively. Capacitating leadership involves equipping leaders with the skills, knowledge, and networks required to drive transformation in African food systems effectively (Adeola and Evans 2020). Thus, it is instructive to examine what capacities are requisite for system-wide transformation and how best to impart these capacities to food leaders in Africa. This study conceptualizes transformative leadership capacity as the capacities that bring about system-wide changes as opposed to (small) incremental changes in food systems. Senge et al. (2015) suggest three core capacities that a systems leader needs to develop, one, having an understanding of the broader food system and an ability to make connections to their domains; two, an ability to listen and reflect for more productive engagements with other leaders; and three, an ability to shift the focus of the collective from reactive problem solving to co-creating the future through a shared vision.

Capacitating leadership involves equipping leaders with the skills, knowledge, and networks required to drive transformation in African food systems effectively (Adeola and Evans 2020).

Recent agri-food literature acknowledges the importance and urgency of empowering leaders to bring about transformation. For instance, Rwamasirabo (2021) indicates that Africa needs well-skilled food leaders who can devise and implement transformative strategies necessary to harness the continent's extensive potential for agricultural development. Tailored capacity building for leaders is expected to bring about impactful partnerships and the much-needed innovation in agri-food systems (Rosegrant 2023). It is in line with this realization that a growing number of initiatives have been launched over the past decade, focusing on capacitating food leaders in Africa to equip them with requisite skills and create a community of food leaders who can collectively bring about transformative change(see, Gillespie & Nisbet 2019), Adeola and Evans 2020, Ulimwengu and Blumenthal 2022). The initiatives considered in this study are highlighted under Appendix I.

3. Research design

To garner insights on how different initiatives capacitate African leaders as well as how they aim to transform the food systems, a desk mapping and content analysis of twenty-two leadership initiatives implemented across Africa was conducted to understand who was working on leadership capacitation, where, targeted leaders, and their implementation modalities. An overview of the initiatives is provided in Appendix I. This was followed by data collection using semi-structured interviews with twenty-three key informants (see Appendix II). Purposive sampling and snowballing were used to recruit the informants who included programme coordinators, alumni of leadership initiatives, newly admitted fellows and food system leaders who have not attended leadership programmes. The diverse backgrounds and roles of the informants ensured that rich insights were gained about the leadership capacities considered most relevant for African food leaders, the implementation modalities and the potential effectiveness of the initiatives. An online validation workshop was conducted in July 2024 where the interviewees and other experts in the food leadership space were invited to reflect on the findings of the study.

These next sections provide insights about the characteristics of the food systems leadership initiatives implemented across Africa, the leadership skills and capacities, and the challenges and gaps in strengthening food system leadership.

4. Working modalities of food leadership initiatives in Africa

There are approximately twenty-two leadership initiatives implemented across Africa that are relevant to food leadership capacitation (see list in Annex I). This is by no means an exhaustive list; there may be several other, less notable leadership programmes, especially those that operate in limited geographies. Twelve of the mapped initiatives target agri-food leaders, while ten are open to leaders from all sectors. Table 1 provides the taxonomy and modalities of the leadership initiatives in Africa.

TABLE 1

Taxonomy and modalities of leadership programmes in Africa. (Source: Authors compilation)

Group	Subgroup	Initiatives	% Total
Sector	Agri-Food	12	55
	Open/ All sectors	10	45
Target group	Youth & early career (up to 35 years)	11	50
	Mid-career & executives (up to 45 years)	3	13
	No age restriction	8	37
Gender	Female	2	9
	All Gender groups	20	91
Length of programme	Less than 1 Month	4	18
	Less than 3 Months	3	13
	3 to 6 Months	5	24
	6 to 12 Months	4	18
	Over 12 Months	1	4
	Unspecified/ Flexible	5	23
Mode of instruction/ participation	In-Person	5	23
	Virtual	7	32
	Hybrid	10	45

The deeper analysis of how various leadership initiatives operate prioritised the twelve initiatives working with agri-food leaders, which almost 55% of the mapped programs. However, it was noted that food system leaders do not exclusively participate in leadership programs focused on the agri-food sector alone. They also engage in the more 'generic' but equally valuable leadership programs, such as the Mandela Washington Fellowship and the Young Africa Leaders Initiative (YALI), which recruit leaders from all sectors operating in the public administration, civic and entrepreneurship leadership spaces. Insights about the goals and implementation modalities of the leadership initiatives are described in the sections below.

4.1 Shared objectives

The reviewed initiatives address common objectives and use similar language. Most initiatives aim to "empower", "equip", "support", "develop", "mentor", "train", "build the

capacities of" and "enhance the management skills of" leaders. The objective statements of the twelve leadership initiatives have some congruence in that they aim to empower leaders to change the agri-food sector outcomes. For example, the Africa Food Fellowship and the UN Food Systems Youth Leadership Program aim to contribute towards "transformation of food systems", the African Nutrition Leadership Programme focuses on "addressing nutrition challenges", while the Cambridge-FAO Leadership Academy for Regional Innovation and Vision in Equitable Food Systems (THRIVE Programme) aims to use leadership to "combat food insecurity and hunger by 2030". In this sense, there is acknowledgment of the value of leadership and leadership capacitation in bringing about transformative change in the food sector.

4.2 Implementation modalities

There are several notable similarities and differences in the implementation approach of leadership initiatives. Approximately 23 percent of the mapped initiatives conduct in-person training, 32 percent operate virtually, and 45 percent employ a hybrid model combining both approaches. These varied approaches illustrate the diversity of programme designs, addressing various needs and contexts in the leadership landscape. Similarities exist in some of the learning approaches employed by the initiatives, including mentorship, coaching, peer learning, and workshops which are common approaches applied by most initiatives. For example, both the Centre for African Leaders in Agriculture (CALA) and the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) programmes prioritize mentorship and coaching to strengthen the practical leadership skills and sector-specific knowledge.

Some of the unique elements of the initiatives include working on specific projects, internship placement and financial investment provided to advance ideas to improve the sector. This is the case for the African Leadership Institute which requires the participants to complete a project during the programme; while the Mo Ibrahim fellowship uses placements in international organizations for the fellows to gain practical industry skills as opposed to training the fellows directly. Similarly, internship opportunities are offered under the Mandela Washington Fellowship as well as financial support for fellows interested in practice-oriented learning or those who develop competitive and innovative business proposals. It is worth mentioning that the initiatives also vary in duration of implementation. the length of the programmes varies from under one month to over a year (table 1). The Ecological Organic Agriculture Leadership Course (EOALC) in Africa is designed to provide a one-week, intensive bloc training and webinars for organic leaders. Both the UN Food Systems Youth Leadership Program and the THRIVE programme offer five-day workshops. The CALA and African Food Fellowship offer leadership training programmes for 16 and 10 months, respectively.

4.3 Target groups

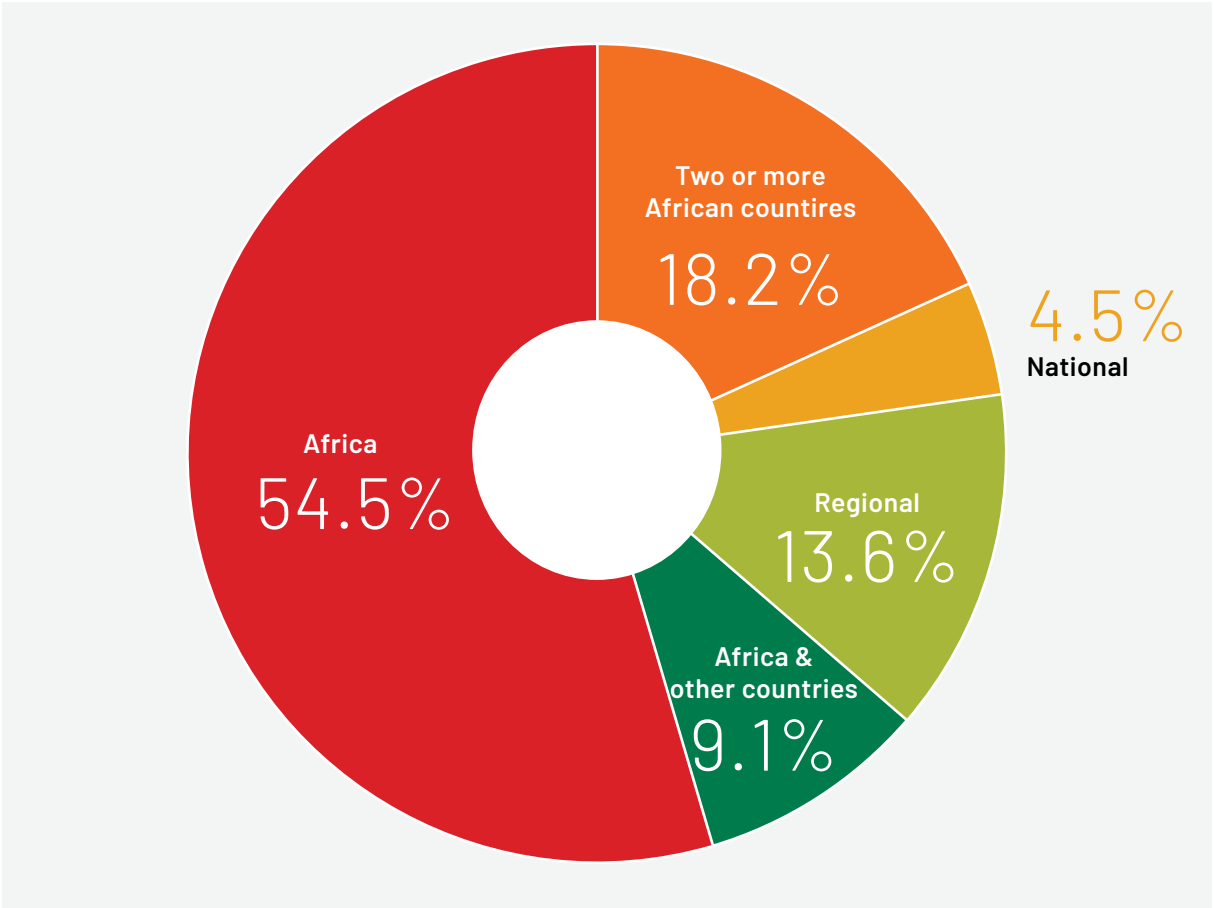
The programmes show a difference in the target audience. To begin with, only two of the twelve agri-food-focused programmes (also the twenty-two mapped programmes) specifically target only women leaders: the Leading Africa Women in Food fellowship and African Women in Agricultural Research & Development (AWARD). Half of the mapped initiatives (50 percent) prioritise the youth, which is defined as populations below 35 years. A small number (13 percent) of initiatives focus on mid-career leaders and new executives (typically below 45 years) while 37 percent have no restrictions on the age of the participants.

Further, the programmes also show some differences in the geographies of the target participants (figure 1). A slight majority (54 percent) of the mapped initiatives focus on capacitating African leaders with no restrictions on the region or country. However, some programmes draw their participants from Africa and other continents. For example, the UN Food Systems Youth Leadership Program attracts leaders from Africa and the Asia Pacific. At the same time, some initiatives have a strong regional focus, for instance, the THRIVE programme is for participants from the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region; compared to the Mandela Washington Fellowship and YALI which attract participants from the Sub-Saharan Africa region. Only four of the twenty-two mapped programs are only open to participants from selected countries in Africa. The African Food Fellowship focuses of leaders from Kenya and Rwanda; and CALA selects its candidates from 8 African countries in East, West and Southern Africa. A few programs, such as the Emerging Leaders Foundation (EFL-Africa) in Kenya, are country-specific. There may be other less notable programmes that may fall under this category.

4.4 Recruitment process

There are also variations in the recruitment processes of these programmes. Overall, recruitment processes for most initiatives tend to be thorough and highly competitive, aimed at selecting the most promising candidates who can benefit from and contribute towards the program's goals. Majority of the initiatives recruit their cohorts through open calls for applications and submissions are evaluated based on set internal criteria. For example, CALA focuses on senior and rising leaders in specific countries, often seeking individuals who have shown dedication to transforming the agricultural initiatives. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation selects three fellows each year, focusing on mid-career professionals who demonstrate the potential to become exceptional African leaders. AWARD seeks to attract women under thirty-five from ten African countries who demonstrate strong leadership potential and a deep dedication to agricultural research. However, a few initiatives recruit their participants through nominations by others.

FIGURE 1
Geographical coverage of mapped leadership initiatives in Africa (Source: Authors compilation)



For example, the Africa Leadership Institute requires that Tutu Fellows be nominated based on demonstration of their past achievements and illustrated ability for further future achievements. This makes the process of filling the twenty available fellow positions highly competitive given that it targets more accomplished industrial leaders.

A few of the initiatives provide remuneration for participation. These include the Mo Ibrahim fellowship which provides USD 100,000 to cover the cost of the fellowship at the hosting institution; and the Mandela Washington Fellowship and the Obama Foundation Leaders Program which cover the travel and living costs of the fellows. Conversely, some initiatives, such as the Emerging Leaders Foundation (EFL-Africa) and the African Food Fellowship charge a fee for attending the programme to ensure commitment of the fellows. Further, other initiatives require that fellows attend the program but do not require payments to the fellowship. This is the case for the ACTS Sustainability Fellowship and the Africa Leadership Institute. A few initiatives are fully offered online to make costs of running the programmes affordable. These include the ACTS Sustainability Fellowship, and partly, the Ecological Organic Agriculture Leadership Course (EOALC).

4.5 Impact monitoring

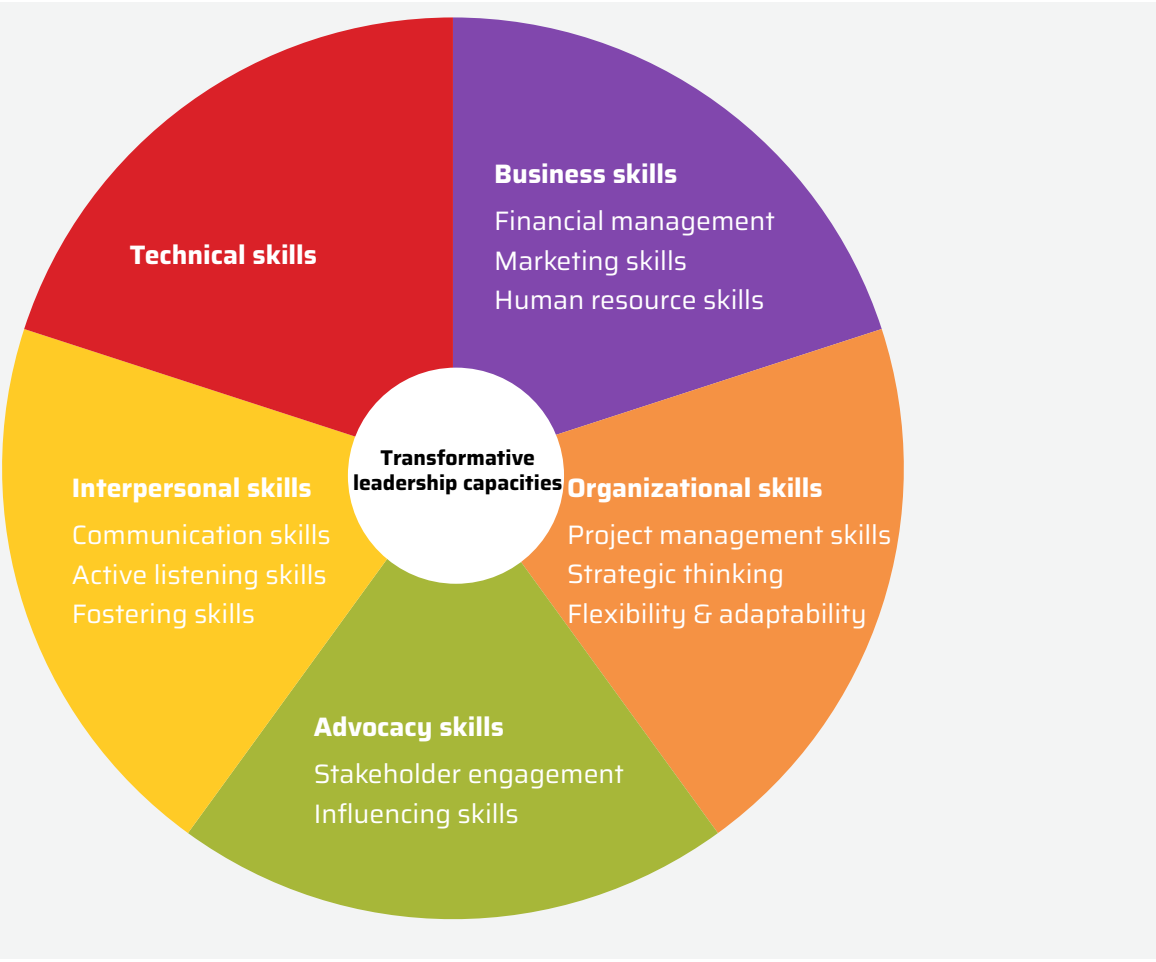
While impact assessment differs from one programme to another, it usually involves follow-ups to monitor alumni development and maintaining engagements through networks. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation maintains an alumni network, offering ongoing support and opportunities for former fellows. AWARD utilizes follow-up evaluations and monitors the professional paths of its participants to evaluate the long-term effects. CALA measures impact by considering the active participation of individuals in significant agricultural conferences and their continuous professional growth. Most initiatives often use a combination of qualitative and quantitative metrics to evaluate programme achievements. These metrics include career progression, contributions to sectoral advancements, and participant feedback.

5. Leadership skills and capacities

5.1 Leadership skills

This section presents insights of what skills the consulted food systems leaders considered to be most critical for their effectiveness, success and system-wide transformation. These capacities can be bundled into five categories namely organizational skills, advocacy skills, interpersonal skills, technical skills and business skills (figure 2).

FIGURE 2
Transformative leadership capacities (Source: Authors compilation)



5.1.1 Organizational skills

Organizational skills bundle capacities such as strategic thinking, project management skills, flexibility, and adaptability. Strategic thinking entails the ability to be the vision-bearer of the organization. To food system leaders, this meant having a clear idea of where they would like the organization to go and selling a picture of success to all stakeholders in a way that would encourage them to work collaboratively towards the shared vision. The need for this capacity was also corroborated in a validation workshop for the study where attendees mentioned that 'fore-sighting', 'future literacy' and 'building a shared vision' as a critical skill for African food leaders.

The capacity to develop effective strategic plans is intricately linked to project management skills which require a leader to set clear objectives for a project, anticipate and manage the operational risks that the project will attract and manage the project from end to end to deliver the desired outcomes. Invariably, the food system leaders pointed out that they had to develop practical project management skills to realize success. Although, according to the informants, the referenced project management skills varied in different initiatives, there were thematic commonalities identified in the described project management strategies. These included time management, precise goal setting, risk management, performance measurement and effective budgeting.

The African food systems leaders stressed the importance of flexibility and adaptability in leadership styles. That is, the ability to adapt and respond to different situations and changing contexts emphasizing that there was no one leadership style suitable for all circumstances. In other words, while admitting that they have a dominant leadership style, food system leaders suggested that an effective leader should be able to switch to an empathetic, democratic or even dictatorial posture depending on the situation or issue at hand. Leadership theorists such as Paul Hersey describe this as situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1997), while others conceptualize it as adaptive leadership or a 'leader in a (permanent) crisis, as coined by Heifetz et al. (2009).

5.1.2 Interpersonal skills

The second bundle of capacities is interpersonal skills which speak to a leader's capacity to relate with others effectively. Various themes emerged from our discussion with food leaders including empathy, emotional intelligence, and respect. These themes relate to a leader's ability to accommodate and harness a diversity of opinions or, as one informant put it, "active listening." The informants argued that leaders often interpret situations positionally or from their vantage point, which may obscure them from other larger goal and system-wide issues, leading to debates about who has the correct perspective on an issue. An ability to accommodate divergent views and privilege the vulnerable who may not have an equally strong voice is a capacity that African leaders consider critical for their success.

The capacity to develop effective strategic plans is intricately linked to project management skills which require a leader to set clear objectives for a project, anticipate and manage the operational risks that the project will attract and manage the project from end to end to deliver the desired outcomes

The study revealed that it is also essential for food systems leaders to foster inclusivity to bring about lasting and system-wide change. Inclusivity in this sense relates to gender equity and social inclusivity considerations. It can be surmised that social and cultural norms around African food systems have potential to facilitate or hinder transformation. Interviewed leaders made a proposition that for tomorrow's food system leaders to be effective they must develop a deep appreciation of inclusivity issues as they relate to their domain and the food system at large. Inclusivity should be prioritised in all food leadership initiatives. It is imperative for food leadership initiatives to actively recruit diverse and inclusive cohorts to give a voice to everyone in the food system and their alumni networks.

Establishing effective working relationships requires effective communication skills. The art of vision-selling described above also requires a leader to communicate effectively. Put differently, it encompasses articulating the one's vision to diverse stakeholders in ways that will elicit collaborative action toward achieving it. Informants pointed out that effective communication skills are assets in all spheres of food systems leadership including fundraising, marketing, collaborative working and managing internal and external stakeholders.

5.1.3 Advocacy skills

Both the food system leaders and coordinators of the leadership initiatives stressed the need for leaders to be effective in different advocacy spaces. According to them, food system leaders must be able to engage actively with the political economy of food systems, which eventually determine the extent to which transformative ideas become adapted at larger scale. The leaders should have a deep appreciation of the underlying interests behind the various constraints to food systems transformation, the most promising policies and programs to address them, and the actors who may block or support such efforts.

Advocacy skills go beyond persuasion skills to achieve desired outcomes to entail the ability to lobby collectively as leaders in the food systems. For instance, several Kenyan food system leaders gave a poignant example of collective lobbying in recent public debates on genetically modified organisms (GMOs), which the Kenyan Government proposed as a solution to food insecurity. This was a critical development that needed coordinated action and a collective (and stronger) voice in the GMO debate as it would have a lasting effect on livelihoods, health and food systems more broadly. Indeed, networking among food system leaders and mutual partnerships among leadership initiatives fundamentally speak to a systems approach to leadership. It has been emphasized here that systems leadership concerns the more collective action rather than individual acts of food system leaders. This implies that efforts to build a well-skilled and active collective will yield systemic transformation. As she explained:

> I think there's value in strong leaders coming together within the food systems sector. When we come together, we can share knowledge, mobilize resources, and address some contemporary issues. For example, in Kenya, when we had concerns about the GMO ban in the country, we were able to convene as leaders and discuss the wider implications of the GMO ban, so I can say there is real value in working together (Participant 8-Leadership Programme Coordinator)

5.1.4 Business skills

The interviews revealed that there is a need for African food system leaders to develop a deeper understanding of commerce and business development skills. This is due to the commercial nature of the agri-food sector and the fact that many Africans have livelihoods that are anchored in the agri-food industry. The proliferation of commercial interests such as large chain supermarkets and increasing food imports continue to affect how the food sector operates and livelihoods. The identified business skills include finance, marketing, and human resource management skills.

The business skills were also described as 'ability to deal with uncertainty' which fundamentally speaks to risk management skills; and 'entrepreneurial skills' or 'understanding the business of food', which reveals the commercial nature of the systems in which food system leaders need to be active.

Developing business skills is particularly relevant for food system leaders with a technical background who may not have such skills. Indeed, half of the food system leaders we spoke to revealed that they got into the food space after formal training in technical fields. One such food system leader explained;

> The skills I have had to learn are around people because I have a technical background. I am an animal nutritionist. I have had to learn skills around finance, budgeting and human resourcing" (Respondent 4: Mandela-Washington Alumni)

5.1.5 Technical skills

Technical skills were mentioned among the most needed capacities for food system leaders. These capacities ranged from content understanding about the entire food value chain from production to handling, storage, and distribution as well as nutrition. The informants stressed the need for leadership programmes to provide technical mentorship to food system leaders. In their view, leaders must be well-versed in the field and keep abreast of innovations and new technologies in their sub-system.

> When we talk transformation, we need to talk innovation. As Africa, we cannot play catch-up in this sector. We, the youth especially, can be very innovative but we need to have the technical skills for innovation to come about." (Respondent 9 – Fish Farm Manager)

However, we noted that few initiatives identified technical skills as a gap and have incorporated aspects of technical mentorship in their curriculum. The African Food Fellowship, for example, attaches its fellows to technical mentors who are ideally experts in a specific area and can guide them through the food systems initiatives they design have a systemic outlook. In general, most interviewed food system leaders get technical advice from local agrovets, friends and peers; and they had mixed perceptions about the accuracy of the information.

5.2 Capacities

5.2.1 Vision to strategy

The ability to bear and sell a vision of success, however, does not stand alone. African food leaders intimated that it is even more important to develop the ability to translate their organization's vision into operational strategies that will effectively deliver on the vision.

5.2.2 Ability to influence stakeholders and policy

Politics matter. Informants of this study expressed that food leaders in Africa should appreciate the complex nature of food system governance and the politics surrounding food systems and back this up with an ability to influence others.

5.2.3 Ability to communicate effectively

This capacity has a strong bearing on a leaders ability to communicate a vision, lead a team effectively and be effective in the advocacy space. Versatility in communication was emphasized given that leaders are required to communicate with different stakeholders in different circumstances. This also relates to the ability to have difficult conversations.

5.2.4 Creating a culture of excellence

This also relates to commercial excellence, which refers to leaders having a strong commercial (entrepreneurship) sense and the necessary business and technical skills to back this. Value or profit, however, should not be at the expense the people, whom these food systems serve. Given that food leaders interface with people, excellence also relates to the ability to make them feel valued and safe and fostering accountability on the part of the leader and the team or stakeholders which is likely to build trust.

The skills earlier discussed interface with these capacities in diverse ways as depicted below.

Vision to strategy	Influencing stakeholders	Communicating effectively	Creating a culture of excellence
Organizational skills Business skills	Interpersonal skills Advocacy skills	Interpersonal skills Advocacy skills	Business skills Technical skills Organizational skills

6. Challenges and opportunities for better leadership capacitation

Several challenges affect leadership capacitation, including limited networking among food system leaders, lack of collaboration between leadership initiatives, inadequate resources to facilitate and participate in leadership programmes, and limited awareness of leadership initiatives by potential food system leaders.

6.1 Limited networking opportunities

Networking among food system leaders and other stakeholders was a dominant theme in the discussions about systems transformation. The leaders see networking as a form of capacitation, perhaps even more effective than participating in a short-term leadership capacitation programme. This is because of the tacit nature of some skills which require close interaction. Most respondents indicated that they had not attended a networking event or workshop in the last five years because such events are not commonplace within the continent.

> There isn't a lot of networking happening in Africa, so there is certainly room for more networking. A lot of these events come from the Western world, such as the World Tilapia Forum, and the next one coming up is called Aquavision, which will be in Norway" (Respondent 9: Fish farm manager)

Food system leaders pointed out that networking and learning opportunities are pivotal to their development as leaders in that they provide affordable ways to gain practical and technical knowledge, as well as information on markets and resources.

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As two leaders recounted:

> Despite having a PhD in this area, I did not learn everything I know about food systems in a class but rather through fieldwork and interaction with people in the food systems field" (Respondent 11: Food systems expert).

> We are missing out on opportunities because of not interacting and sharing with others. I personally would like to do a show-and-tell about what we have done here as a way of encouraging others in this space. And maybe it should be structured, say a quarterly session to brainstorm and so on" (Respondent 6: Fish farm Manager).

The key issue is that leadership capacitation is not an end in itself but should be complemented by networking opportunities to realize system-wide transformation.

6.2 Collaboration between leadership initiatives

Presently, leadership programmes in Africa typically work in silos despite there being apparent areas of alignment between the initiatives. Collaboration among these initiatives is implicit rather than explicit. This is attributed to the initiatives having different engagement modalities as described earlier. While operating autonomously within their specialized fields, many programmes have a common language regarding gender equity, sustainable development, and capacity building. For example, AWARD and the Leading African Women in Food Fellowship both aim to empower women in agriculture, but their efforts are not coordinated. However, the shared goals and thematic overlaps suggest potential for collaboration.

Some initiatives, such as the UN Food Systems Youth Leadership Program, emphasize dismantling institutional silos and fostering systemic change, which could pave the way for more integrated approaches. Establishing networks such as the Now Generation Network by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation demonstrates a commitment to promoting continued collaboration among alumni. This mirrors what some of the study's informants voiced:

> Although the AFF has worked with CALA and shares the same goals to strengthen the African food systems, it was just a one-time thing, and we do not have an established collaboration system" (Respondent 12: Leadership Programme Coordinator)

> We know of each other, but we don't know about each other's work, and we don't work together closely to say that we have disbanded the existing silos in the African food systems" (Respondent 13: Leadership Programme Coordinator)

6.3 Poor awareness of leadership programmes

One of the respondent categories was for leaders who are not alumni of any food leadership initiatives or have not attended any leadership programmes. Our interaction with these respondents revealed that they had limited awareness of the existing leadership initiatives (listed in Appendix II), they lacked knowledge about where and how these initiatives worked and of peers who had gone through the programme.

This inadequate awareness was also echoed by other food system leaders who had attended at least one capacitation programme. These leaders intimated that even if some initiatives are known, it remains unclear how they operate and what the capacitation programmes entail. The inadequate understanding was mainly a problem for food system leaders working in smaller and micro-operations or early career persons as opposed to those employed in large established organizations in the middle to senior management positions.

6.4 Resourcing challenges

Another challenge that emerged from the conversations with the coordinators of the initiatives was inadequate resourcing to run capacitation initiatives for food system leaders. Many leadership initiatives in Africa operate in a constrained resource space as they rely on donor funds. However, these resources are not always guaranteed and are usually inadequate to enable expanding the scope and scaling-up the initiatives. Some leadership initiatives charge a fee to the participants primarily to ascertain their commitment, make the initiatives sustainable and the recruited cohorts more inclusive. Similarly, other initiatives provide limited fee waivers and partial scholarships, especially to leaders from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds.

> We understand that the cost can be prohibitive to some. We offer 20 percent scholarships to fellows (who are) not able to pay the whole fellowship fee. For us, charging a fee is just to make the programme sustainable so that we can reach more leaders" (Respondent 12: Leadership Programme Coordinator)

The consulted food system leaders also echoed this resourcing challenge. Leaders who were knowledgeable of the food system capacitation initiatives but did not attend any explained that it was challenging to cover the costs of participating such programs. While admitting there was much to gain in attending such programs, committing personal resources for capacitation seemed less of a priority for the leaders, especially those employed in micro and small organizations. Participants in the validation workshop corroborated this finding emphasizing that the required time commitment, associated financial cost and to a less extent the geographical location of the initiative were factors considered to influence participation in leadership capacitation programmes.

6.5 Harnessing the youth potential

The meaning of 'youth' varies in different societies worldwide as well as in the food system leadership initiatives. The United Nations defines 'youth' as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, while the African Youth Charter designates youth as persons with ages between 15 and 35 years.

This mapping of leadership initiatives shows a deliberate effort to capacitate young leaders, which is 50 percent of the initiatives target people below 35 years. Thirteen percent of the initiatives (e.g. Africa Leadership Institute and the Mo Ibrahim Fellowship) considered youth applicants to have age limits of 40 years while the Obama Foundation Leaders Program has a maximum of 45 years. There was consensus among all respondents that the youth demographics in Africa present an opportunity to transform food systems if there are efforts to proactively engage them in leadership capacitation initiatives and networks.

> The most significant potential (for transformation of the sector) lies in the youth. The youth have the energy to innovate and test solutions, which is where the agri-food industry is going... they have the time to try and try again if they fail. (Respondent 9: Fish farm Manager).

Similarly, respondent 6 describes a few initiatives they are involved in aimed at reaching the youth:

> We offer a lot of internships. We also go into universities and give talks about the aquaculture value chain and encourage them to take up this line of profession. In learning institutions, we sponsor an award for the best aquaculture student. We also have partners in Kenya, and we have a competition we call 'Best Fish Farmer', all to create interest and make the industry attractive for the younger generation to prevent its decline" (Respondent 6: Aquaculture Company General Manager).

7. Reflections

This study set out to explore African perspectives on food leadership capacitation. From the conversations with the respondents from within and outside the African continent, it became apparent that contextual dynamics and nuances exist in how food systems operate at regional, national and sub-national levels in Africa; and therefore, variation in how the leaders perceive capacitation to transform the food systems. Hamman (2022) and Bolden and Phillip (2005) come to a similar conclusion that both academics and scholars need to pay attention to the contextual diversity when exploring and investing in leadership development to transform the varied African food systems.

This implies that,

- **First,** leadership capacitation initiatives need to be mindful of these contextual nuances to avoid generalizations that may be inaccurate and insensitive to the different socio-cultural and economic practices influencing food systems in Africa.

- **Second,** the 'one-size-fits-all' approach to leadership capacitation is infeasible, there is a need to pay closer attention to the capacitation needs of the food system leaders to ensure their experiences and emerging needs are catered for.

The interviewed African food system leaders emphasized that the five bundles of capacities: organizational skills, advocacy skills, interpersonal skills, technical skills and business skills, were critical to their effectiveness. These capacitation needs mirror some of the needs raised by leaders in developed countries that is documented in extant literature. For example, this study illustrates that ability to influence, advocate and collaborate with others are important capacities for food system leaders in Africa. Similar skills, which is strategic capacity around policy advocacy, critical food systems literacy, negotiation skills, are highlighted by Hoey and Sponseller (2018) are critical to foster collaborations among food systems leaders in Michigan State in the United States. Further,

This study illustrates that ability to influence, advocate and collaborate with others are important capacities for food system leaders in Africa.

interpersonal skills, stakeholder engagement and vision bearing that a mentioned as critical for African food system leaders are also emphasized by different scholars (Hinrichs, Gillespie and Feenstra 2004, Mars 2015) as important skills to stimulate innovation and catalyze the development of a more cohesive and sustainable local food system in different communities in the United States. It may be argued that identified similarities in the required capacities imply that the leadership skills are hegemonic and have universal use, and that there are no apparent contextual differences that dictate how these skills are valued. This is a theoretical question that merits further reflection by both African scholars and practitioners. Further, this study is less secure about how food system leaders in different geographies within Africa would reorder the identified capacities in terms of their importance because, after all, people in different context are bound to have different leadership-shaping experiences.

7.1 Reflecting on systems leadership

Whereas most consulted food system leaders were not aware of the idea of systems leadership in theoretical sense, they showed what needs to be done to bring about the desired transformation. Networking, partnerships, inclusivity and capacitation were key themes that emerged from the conversation with food system leaders. These ideas are patently aligned with a systems approach to tackling the challenges in the agri-food sector which, as earlier argued, are interlinked and therefore systemic in nature. Thus, this study finds that a systems leadership approach is critical in addressing the challenges facing the African food systems.

Kahane et al. (2013) point out that collective leadership offers a pathway for harnessing diverse knowledge systems, integrating various sectoral interests, and navigating socio-political complexities to achieve food security and environmental sustainability in Africa.

This study accentuates the importance of supporting networking, collaboration and collective action of food system leaders. Collaboration to change the food system is demonstrative in various agri-food sector research in Africa. Kahane et al. (2013) point out that collective leadership offers a pathway for harnessing diverse knowledge systems, integrating various sectoral interests, and navigating socio-political complexities to achieve food security and environmental sustainability in Africa. Ingram (2018) illustrates the effectiveness of collective leadership in bridging silos across agriculture, nutrition, and environmental management to ascertain food system resilience in Africa. Similarly, Reed et al. (2017) collaborative projects involving participatory approaches and knowledge sharing involving local communities, NGOs, and research institutions, improved agricultural practices, enhanced food security, and conserved biodiversity in East Africa. Enabling environments, created by policies and institutions that support collaborative governance and participatory decision-making are essential for the success of collective leadership initiatives to advance innovations in African food systems (Darnhofer et al. 2020).

7.2 A nexus between systems leadership and leadership capacitation

Several capacities highlighted in the findings, such as active listening, the ability to foster inclusivity, influencing skills and strategic thinking are consistent with those pointed out by Senge et al. (2015). The authors suggests three core capacities a systems leader requires namely 'listening and reflecting', vision-selling through collaboration and co-creation and systems thinking. A systems leadership approach suggests establishing a collective with a shared vision and shared responsibilities working together to drive systemic (transformative) change (Brouwer et al., 2016). This study reinforces the systems thinking that transformative change cannot be brought about by a single leader's effort but rather through collective action. Often, however, individual capacities in the realm of systems thinking are often overlooked. The study attempts to make visible the importance of capacitating individual members of the collective, arguing that the collective is only as effective as the individual capacities that constitute it. Put differently, a collective of individuals with better capacities has greater potential to bring about the transformation of food systems compared to individual leaders working in silos or leaders in a collective without the requisite transformative capacities.

7.3 Inclusivity for food systems transformation

Addressing gender and social inclusion in food systems also fundamentally speaks to a systems leadership approach. There was consensus among the study respondents that the youth present an opportunity to transform food systems if there are efforts to bring them into the food leadership collective and adequately skill them. The youth demographic in Africa is the largest in the world, with 60 percent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa below 25 years and one billion people under 30 years (Rocca and Schultes, 2020). Many reports

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assert that African youth present an opportunity for the continent's growth if they are adequately skilled to realize their full potential. Indeed, the Jobs for Youth in Africa Strategy 2016-2025 envisages the creation of twenty-five million jobs and training some fifty million Africans to become entrepreneurs; the strategy, which is almost drawing to its end, identifies agriculture as one of the three job-creation sectors, alongside industrialization and ICT (AfDB, 2016).

Even though one-third of Africa's youth population is unemployed (Rocca & Schultes, 2020), they have not been actively involved in the food sector, according to most respondents. They explained that youth and women often do not have access to resources such as land and access to credit to be involved in farming. This has been documented extensively in the literature (Osabohien and Al-Faryan 2024,Geza et al., 2021; Mulume et al., 2022, Drimie, 2022). The findings of this study underscores the need to embrace inclusivity and increasing targeting the youth and women to bring about systemic transformation. This was also surfaced during the validation workshop indicating the need for more diverse cohorts in the initiatives and leaders to provide space for vulnerable groups, which fundamentally speak to inclusivity. This finding agrees with two instructional studies by the Southern Africa Food lab which focus on developing leaders in African food systems. Moyo (2022) and Hamman (2022) emphasize fostering inclusivity in its many facets and urge that this will inevitable require confronting the systemic issues and actors that perpetuate the different forms of exclusion of African leaders from participating in or benefiting from African food systems. The studies also urge that inclusivity and diversity of perspectives can disrupt power dynamics and restore balance of power in African food systems, especially in the context of growing corporatization of food systems.

7.4 Alignment of food system actors for transformation

Food leaders are in an ideal position to bring about transformative change by virtue of being in touch with action on ground through their direct interaction with other value chain actors. There are multiple opportunities for the private sector, government, non-governmental organizations, and institutions of learning to partner with the leadership initiatives to equip todays and tomorrow's food system leaders. One way that organizations can partner with food leadership initiatives is through resourcing, which one of the challenges identified in this study. Inadequate resourcing is a sticking issue for many African food system leadership initiatives, partly because the programmes typically rely on donor funding. Some initiatives have explored the alternative of charging participants a fee, which many food system leaders find prohibitive. Examples of ways that resourcing could be sustainable is by, one, exploring areas of mutual interest between funding organizations and leadership initiatives; and two, setting up public funds through the relevant agri-food focused government departments, which could be ring-fenced for leadership capacitation. Three, leadership initiatives could partner with stakeholders in the public and private sectors to provide in kind support such as technical mentorship and targeted knowledge sharing for food system leaders. Technical skills are one of the key capacity gaps identified by African food system leaders.

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Four, providing incentives such as awards and grants, especially for effective, scalable and replicable solutions.

7.5 Sustained collaboration and cross-learning

This study has shown that there is a vast ecosystem of leadership programmes which contribute separately to food systems transformation despite having shared objectives. There is an opportunity to collaborate improve the effectiveness of these initiatives and strengthen their impact across Africa. Effective collaboration, however, should be mutually beneficial for the initiatives. For instance, cross-learning among initiatives about the effectiveness of the capacitation modalities through sharing what works and leveraging on the experiences of the alumni and programme coordinators. The initiatives could enhance their curricula through sharing of the identified capacitation needs and how they have evolved over time. Networking presents an opportunity to pursue collective action and strengthen advocacy on food matters. Moyo (2022) and Hamann (2022) emphasize the importance of food system leaders engaging in social movements active in food systems as a path to transforming the agri-food sector. According to study respondents, their greatest potential in contributing towards food systems transformation lies in sustaining the avenues for learning and networking among food systems leaders beyond attending the short-term (majority of which last for less than six months) capacitation programmes. This perspective is shared by Drimie (2022) who states that food system leadership networks can not only be potential hubs of learning and social innovation but are also critical for advocacy. Various analyzed leadership initiatives aim to establish alumni networks of food system leaders who they believe will transform the sector. However, our analysis shows that some initiatives leverage their alumni networks with less success than others; in that they have indeed built a community of food leaders but have not sustained it through regular and structured networking events. Nonetheless, networking of food systems leaders is already happening but in less notable ways. For example, some expos and farmer field day events are typically organized and sponsored by private corporations such as agrochemical and seed companies with only a few continental forums in the nature of AGRA's annual Africa Food Systems Forum. Governments in Africa cannot be by-standers in this effort; they need to complement efforts by not-for-profit organizations and private sector players to bring together food leaders in regular events to have a far-reaching and lasting impact.

8. Conclusion

This study sought to explore African perspectives on the role of leadership capacitation in bringing about food systems transformation, using a systems leadership approach lens to make this analysis. Insights of this study are drawn from twenty-two key informant interviews and a desktop analysis of twenty-two leadership programmes in Africa. The study reveals that the leadership initiatives have shared objectives and a shared language around empowering African leaders. However, the initiatives have different working modalities, areas of focus and target groups. This study re-emphasizes the need to impart African food system leaders with skills and capacities to help them become effective members of a collective action for transformative change. Some of the capacities that the leaders considered to be requisite for systems transformation include advocacy skills, technical skills, and a range of interpersonal, organizational and advocacy skills.

There is urgent need for regular, structured networking of food leaders, which has the potential to foster collective purpose and capacities through peer-to-peer learning. The study further urges the development of partnership models, which could see food leadership initiatives explore synergetic and cross-learning opportunities among themselves for leadership capacitation and transformation of African food systems. There is also a need to open feedback loops further for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of food leadership initiatives and their impact and identify learning, innovation, and improvement areas. Although many food system leaders are unfamiliar with systems leadership as a theoretical concept, this is implied in how they conceptualize food systems transformation, suggesting that a systems approach to food leadership is applicable in Africa. Insights about the operations and effectiveness of leadership initiatives and experiences of food system leaders in transforming the food systems in Africa remains understudied, continuous exploration of this topic remains essential.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Leadership Programmes in Africa

	Programme	Objectives	Programme structure	Date Est.	Geographical Focus	Target Group	Gender Specific	Duration	Mode of participation
1	Centre for African Leaders in Agriculture (CALA)	The (CALA) Advanced Leadership Programme is a collaborative, hands-on, and tailored experience for senior and rising leaders in Africa's agriculture sector. Designed for individuals spearheading and directly implementing specific country-level agriculture initiatives.	In-country coaching Peer learning accountability sessions Participation in biannual leadership forums, and the African Green Revolution Forum	2021	Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.	Open, Government, private sector, civil society organizations, Women leaders, Individual working to advance agroecological practices	No	16 months	Virtual & in-person
2	Emerging Leaders Foundation (EFL-Africa)	To empower, support and accompany young women and men to achieve meaningful, dignified and impactful participation in governance, economy and public affairs at all levels of society	Training-mentorship-Coaching	2012	Kenya	18-35 Years	No	6 Months	Virtual and in-person
3	Mo Ibrahim Foundation	To identify and mentor the future generation of outstanding African leaders by providing them with unique work opportunities at the most senior level of prominent African institutions or multilateral organizations, whose mandate is to improve the economic and social prospects of Africa. Each year three Fellows have an opportunity to work in the executive offices of the AfDB (Abidjan), ECA (Addis Ababa) or the ITC (Geneva). Fellow also becomes members of the Now Generation Network	Placements	2006	Africa	Mid-Career and New Executives	No	12 months	In-person
4	Ecological Organic Agriculture Leadership Course (EOALC) in Africa	To support the organic leaders who are striving for truly sustainable change in agriculture in their regions.	bloc trainings including a webinar series Training of trainers	2019-2022	Africa	Open, Organic agriculture leaders	No	1 Week	Virtual & in-person

	Programme	Objectives	Programme structure	Date Est.	Geographical Focus	Target Group	Gender Specific	Duration	Mode of participation
5	African Women in Agricultural Research & Development (AWARD) Leadership Program for Women in Science	Designed to equip participants with the skills and confidence to lead and innovate The inaugural Cohort of the AWARD Leadership Program for Emerging African Women in Science, piloted in 2021, comprised 24 women from 10 African countries	Training & Group Coaching	2021	Africa	Below 35 years	Yes	6 months	Virtual & in-person
6	UN Food Systems Youth Leadership Program	The goal of this engaging programme is to change food systems holistically. It is in line with the Secretary-General's UN Food Systems Summit +2 Report, his Call to Action, and the Stakeholder Contribution Report, which all address the lack of qualified workers as well as the needs of youth advocacy and capacity building. Become a part of a movement that dismantles institutional silos and transforms food systems.	Co-creative Workshop		Africa, Asia, Pacific	Early Career Professionals interested in leading food systems	No	5 days	In-person
7	Leading African Women in Food Fellowship By African Food Changemakers	Designed to empower and celebrate women leaders in the African food and agriculture sector	Mentorship Training Peer-peer learning		Africa	Open, Top Chefs in Africa Disruptors Food/Beverage Narrative Changers Ecosystem Enablers Trailblazers	Yes	6 months	
8	African Leadership for Agribusiness By African Leadership Academy	AL for Agribusiness is a network dedicated to supporting and developing young leaders committed to transforming the agriculture sector across Africa. The network aims to catalyze connections among key stakeholders along the agriculture value chain, fostering an ecosystem that facilitates diverse career pathways for young leaders.	Webinars, communities of practice calls and an annual gathering, internships, masterclasses, coaching, support to agriprenuers to build innovative ventures	2020	Africa	Youth	No	6 Months	In-person

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	Programme	Objectives	Programme structure	Date Est.	Geographical Focus	Target Group	Gender Specific	Duration	Mode of participation
9	Africa 2.0	Building an inspiring and prosperous Africa and committed to finding and implementing sustainable solutions that will drive forward the transformation of the continent. The initiative runs a variety of programs that drive progress under the 10 strategic pillars with a particular focus on youth empowerment through entrepreneurship.	online engagements through social media and newsletters, advocacy campaigns, and events	2010	Africa	Youth	No	Varies	Virtual & in-person
10	African Leadership University (ALU)	They aim to educate the next generation of ethical and entrepreneurial leaders for the African continent and the world. With the belief that young people have this potential, they try to unlock it through a one-of-a-kind learning experience that provides students the foundation for a lifetime of [illegible]ding positive change.	Peer-to-peer learning, lectures, events, workshops, coaching, and mentorship, self-directed learning, etc.	2015	Mauritius and Rwanda	Youth	No	Varies	Virtual & in-person
11	THRIVE: The Cambridge-FAO Leadership Academy for Regional Innovation and Vision in Equitable Food Systems	[illegible]is food systems leadership academy, aims [illegible]provide scholarships and skills training to [illegible]mpower local leaders to make better decisions and integrate national pathways to combat food insecurity and hunger in line with the 2030 Agenda.	Workshops and exercises applying systems thinking, scenario analysis, collaborative intelligence	2023	Near East and North Africa (NENA) region	Open, Food leaders	No	5 days	In-person
12	Africa Food Fellowship	Aim is to unleash leadership for transforming food systems	Mentorship		Rwanda, Kenya	Open, Food leaders	No	10 months	Virtual
13	African Agricultural Leadership Institute	The Obama Foundation's Leaders program aims to inspire, empower, and connect regional cohorts of changemakers to accelerate positive and lasting change in their communities and throughout their region.	Mentorship, workshops & vocational training	2022	DRC, Nigeria, Kenya	Open	No	Varies	In-person

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	Programme	Objectives	Programme structure	Date Est.	Geographical Focus	Target Group	Gender Specific	Duration	Mode of participation
14	Obama Foundation Leaders Program	The objective of the programme is to develop individual and institutional leadership capacity at various levels in nutrition across the African continent. The ANLP, based at North-West University in South Africa, is committed to leadership development of early and mid-career nutrition professionals and related stakeholders on the African continent.	Peer learning, live virtual sessions, coaching	2018	Africa, Asia, Pacific, Europe, United States	Youth (24-45) years	No	10 months	Virtual and in-person
15	African Nutrition Leadership Programme	To develop individual and institutional leadership capacity at various levels in addressing nutrition challenges across the African continent through a 10-day leadership development programme for individuals, together with tailor-made leadership and functional capacity development programmes based on stakeholder/institution needs	Capacity training through institutional learning		Africa	Individuals from nutrition related disciplines in the government sector, the UN, civil society, academia and to a smaller extent from the private sector and individual consultants.	No	10 days	In-Person
16	Young African Leaders Initiative	The programme helps participants enhance their management skills, assist in their personal development, and encourage purpose-driven leadership through an entrepreneurial impact project that promotes sustainable development in Africa.	Mentorship, networking, and coaching	2010	Africa	Youth	No	6 weeks	Virtual
17	One Africa-Leadership Development Programme	The programme helps participants enhance their management skills, assist in their personal development, and encourage purpose-driven leadership through an entrepreneurial impact project that promotes sustainable development in Africa.	Seasonal courses through one-on-one coaching sessions, group intervention sessions, and certified coaching		Africa	Youth	No	3 Months	Virtual & in-person

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	Programme	Objectives	Programme structure	Date Est.	Geographical Focus	Target Group	Gender Specific	Duration	Mode of participation
18	Mandela Washington Fellowship	As part of the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) this fellowship provides outstanding young leaders from Sub-Saharan Africa with the opportunity to hone their skills at a U.S. higher education institution with support for professional development after they return home. The programs focus on leadership training in one of three tracks: Business, Civic Engagement, or Public Management.	Seasonal courses	2014	Sub Saharan Africa	Youth (25-35years)	No	6 weeks	Virtual & in-person
19	Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)	The core purpose of AFSA is to influence policies and to promote African solutions for food sovereignty. AFSA serves as a continental platform for consolidation of issues pertaining to food vereignty and together marshal a single and der voice on issues and tabling clear workable utions.	Training and mentorship coaching	2008	Sub-Saharan Africa	Unspecified	No	Varies	Virtual & in-person
20	African Centre for Biodiversity	e ACB aims to address the challenges and issues surrounding biodiversity loss, seed sovereignty, food systems, and the rights of smallholder farmers, especially in the face of increasing corporate control over agriculture and natural resources.	Training and educational activities.	2003	Africa	Unspecified	No	Varies	Virtual & in-person
21	ACTS Sustainability Fellowship	Designed to be an inclusive, globally collaborative initiative that transcends geographical and career-stage boundaries. The program places a strong emphasis on creating a diverse community of practice that brings together the fresh perspectives of early career researchers and the wealth of experience from established researchers. In this way, the fellowship program represents a transformative step towards building a more equitable, inclusive, and impactful global research community.	specialized courses and training	2023	Africa	Unspecified	No	12 Months	Virtual

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	Programme	Objectives	Programme structure	Date Est.	Geographical Focus	Target Group	Gender Specific	Duration	Mode of participation
22	The African Leadership Institute (Archbishop Tutu Leadership Fellowship)	Focuses on building strategic leadership across the continent by developing exceptional leaders representing all spheres of society. It does so primarily through the Institute's flagship programme, the prestigious Archbishop Tutu Leadership Fellowship. Alumni of the African Leadership Institute form a dynamic network of Fellows passionately committed to the continent's transformation, bridging the divide between nations and ensuring that Africa is set centre-stage in global affairs.	Projects & In-person trainings		Africa	30-40 years	No	6 Months	In-person

Appendix II: List of informants

Participant	Participant information	Country	Gender
1	YALI Programme Alumni	Kenya	Male
2	YALI Programme Alumni	Kenya	Female
3	ARIN-NDC Alumni	Kenya	Female
4	Mandela Washington Fellowship Alumni	Benin	Male
5	Mandela Washington Fellowship Alumni	Kenya	Female
6	Aquaculture, General Manager	Uganda	Male
7	Leadership Programme Coordinator	Kenya	Male
8	Leadership Programme Coordinator	Kenya	Female
9	Fish Farm Manager	Kenya	Male
10	Food Systems Expert	Italy	Female
11	Food Systems Transformation Associate	Kenya	Male
12	Leadership Programme Coordinator	Kenya	Female
13	Leadership Programme Coordinator	Netherlands	Female
14	Sustainability Fellow (Currently in Fellowship)	Benin	Male
15	Sustainability Fellow (Currently in Fellowship)	Ethiopia	Male
16	Sustainability Fellow (Currently in Fellowship)	Kenya	Female
17	Sustainability Fellow (Currently in Fellowship)	Kenya	Female
18	Food systems Expert	Rwanda	Female
19	Leadership Programme coordinator	USA	Male
20	Farm Manager	Zimbabwe	Male
21	Farm Manager	Zambia	Female
22	Food Systems Regional Specialist for Africa	Zambia	Male
23	Farm Manager	Kenya	Male

African Food Fellowship

Leading the change in Africa's food systems