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Implementation Challenges of the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger: Evaluating Progress Toward Sustainable Development Goal 2

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Abstract: Recently, reducing hunger has become a top priority on Africa's development agenda. Despite efforts by governments and international donors, hunger continues to worsen across the continent. While much of the existing research has focused on the political and socio-economic drivers of hunger in Africa, few studies have explored the challenges faced when implementing policies aimed at addressing this issue, such as the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the integration, adaptability, and goal achievement of the policy using Richard M. Steers' Effectiveness Theory as a framework. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews, policy reports (2016–2024), peer-reviewed articles, and other relevant documents, then analysed with NVivo 12 Plus. The findings reveal barriers to integration caused by poor communication and limited consensus-building among stakeholders, and challenges in adaptation related to insufficient local contextualisation and capacity building. Concerning goal attainment, hunger has increased from 270.6 million to 295 million in 2024, food insecurity stands at 57.9%, and agricultural investments have decreased by 2.69%. This research contributes to the existing literature by illustrating how weak implementation can hinder policy goals, emphasising the need for more inclusive, context-sensitive, and well-coordinated strategies across Africa.

Abstrak: *Baru-baru ini, mengurangi kelaparan telah menjadi prioritas utama dalam agenda pembangunan Afrika. Meskipun ada upaya dari pemerintah dan donor internasional, kelaparan terus memburuk di seluruh benua. Meskipun banyak penelitian yang ada berfokus pada pendorong politik dan sosial-ekonomi kelaparan di Afrika, hanya sedikit studi yang mengeksplorasi tantangan yang dihadapi ketika menerapkan kebijakan yang bertujuan untuk mengatasi masalah ini, seperti Agenda Afrika 2030 tentang Nol Kelaparan. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengisi kesenjangan ini dengan memeriksa integrasi, kemampuan adaptasi, dan pencapaian tujuan kebijakan menggunakan Teori Efektivitas Richard M. Steers sebagai kerangka kerja. Data kualitatif dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, laporan kebijakan (2016-2024), artikel peer-review, dan dokumen relevan lainnya, kemudian dianalisis dengan NVivo 12 Plus. Temuan ini mengungkapkan hambatan integrasi yang disebabkan oleh komunikasi yang buruk dan terbatasnya pembangunan konsensus di antara para pemangku*

kepentingan, dan tantangan dalam adaptasi yang terkait dengan kontekstualisasi lokal dan pengembangan kapasitas yang tidak memadai. Terkait pencapaian tujuan, angka kelaparan meningkat dari 270,6 juta menjadi 295 juta pada tahun 2024, kerawanan pangan mencapai 57,9%, dan investasi pertanian menurun sebesar 2,69%. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada literatur yang ada dengan menggambarkan bagaimana implementasi yang lemah dapat menghambat tujuan kebijakan, sekaligus menekankan perlunya strategi yang lebih inklusif, peka terhadap konteks, dan terkoordinasi dengan baik di seluruh Afrika.

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, hunger remains a critical challenge, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa has a population of approximately 1.4 billion people, with a significant portion – over 70% - dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods (African Development Bank, 2022). In recent years, rapid population growth, urbanisation, armed conflicts, and climate change have worsened hunger in Africa (FAO, 2022). Statistically, approximately 38% of the world's hungry people live in Sub-Saharan Africa, a trend that has been on the rise since 2010. Sadly, about 20.4% of Sub-Saharan Africans are undernourished, the highest globally. Furthermore, 61% of Sub-Saharan Africans are faced with food insecurity, forcing them not to have enough food during the year, leading them to either reduce their food intake or go without eating for a day or more (Morris et al., 2024). Not only that, but children's malnutrition is also on the rise. For instance, over a quarter of children (30%) under the age of 5 are stunted or too short for their age. Worst of all, the cost of a healthy diet has increased by over 5.3% across the continent (Morris et al., 2024). As a result, reducing hunger has become a major policy discussion on the continent, leading to the implementation of frameworks such as the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger and the global SDGs.

However, efforts under the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger have failed to produce the needed results and have consistently declined more than anywhere in the world. Globally, the number of people facing hunger increased by 1% during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sub-Saharan Africa faced the worst of this increase, nearly doubling it at 1.7%, which represents the proportional rise in the share of the population experiencing hunger compared to pre-pandemic levels. Notably, between 2019 and 2022, hunger significantly increased in all parts of Africa, with more than 57 million people undernourished due to the rise in the cost of food across the continent (African Union, 2024). In some areas, hunger has become extremely dire, with people, especially in conflict zones (e.g. Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, South Sudan) struggling to obtain any food at all (Quarm & Begho, 2024). Hunger remains widespread, exacerbated by poor policy implementation, limited investment in modern agriculture, and weak governance structures. In Sub-Saharan Africa, food production has struggled to keep pace with population growth, leading to high levels of food import dependency and vulnerability to global food price shocks (UNDP, 2022). Despite regional and international efforts, many Sub-Saharan African countries remain off track in achieving any of the SDGs, especially Goal #2 by 2030.

In recent years, academic discussion on policy implementation for reducing hunger has gained a lot of attention as a global challenge, particularly in developing countries where poverty, conflict, and climate change worsen the situation (Cooper et al., 2021). Research has shown that despite global efforts, hunger remains a serious problem, with some regions experiencing higher levels of hunger than before (Rahaman et al., 2021). Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, continues to face hunger crises due to natural disasters, poor governance, and insufficient investment in agriculture (Abdi et al., 2024). Climate variability, including prolonged

droughts and extreme weather events, has further reduced agricultural productivity, making it difficult for farmers to produce enough food to meet the needs of growing populations (Omotoso et al., 2023). Furthermore, economic challenges such as inflation, fluctuating food prices, and limited access to financial resources have worsened food insecurity, especially among low-income households (Fagbemi et al., 2021). Some studies have also emphasised the role of political instability, conflicts, and displacement in disrupting food supply chains, causing food shortages, and increasing reliance on food aid (Ouko & Odiwuor, 2023).

While numerous studies have examined the political and socio-economic drivers of food insecurity in Africa, few have systematically assessed the implementation bottlenecks of policies, particularly the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero, which was designed to solve these problems using a structured theoretical model. Prior studies have also acknowledged that well-designed policies can improve food security by increasing agricultural investments, enhancing trade relations, and providing support to vulnerable populations (Pingali & Plavšić, 2022). Yet, some researchers argued that poor coordination, weak accountability, and political interference have hindered the successful implementation of food security initiatives in Africa (Quarm & Begho, 2024). Therefore, the researchers found the need to fill in this gap by conducting a study that examines the implementation challenges of the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a theoretical point of view. The policy, which was launched in 2016, has three core targets: (a) ensuring healthy and well-nourished citizens, (b) modernising agriculture to enhance productivity, and (c) fostering environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient communities. In this light, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the main implementation challenges of the policy in achieving SDG #2 in Africa?
2. To what extent does the policy meet its three core targets?
3. Why has the policy failed to reduce hunger in Africa?

The objective of this research is to identify specific barriers related to the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger and evaluate the extent to which it has contributed to reducing hunger across the continent. Interestingly, this study arrives at a time when hunger has become an urgent discussion in Africa, thus making two significant contributions. First, it conducts an in-depth analysis of the challenges of the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger toward achieving SDG #2 by 2030. Second, the analysis is guided by Richard M. Steers' Effectiveness Theory as the theoretical framework, which assesses the success of policies based on three key dimensions: integration, adaptation, and goal attainment. This framework allows for a structured examination of the implementation challenges of the policy and whether it is successful or not. The framework, in the context of this study, is illustrated below.

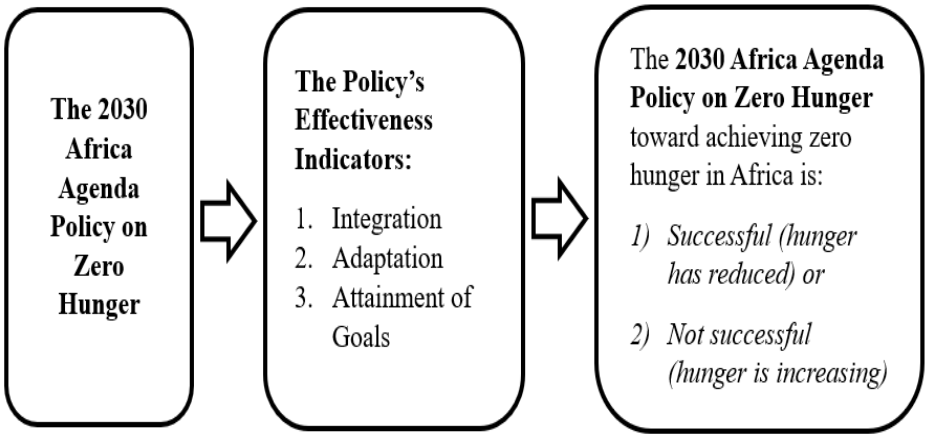

Fig. 1. The Effectiveness Theory for understanding the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger
Source: Adopted from Steers et al., (2004) and modified by the authors.

Steers et al. (2004) developed the Effectiveness Theory to evaluate organisational and policy effectiveness based on three indicators as shown in Figure 1. (1) *Integration* – the extent to which different stakeholders coordinate their efforts, align their strategies, and work toward shared goals. (2) *Adaptation* – the ability of a policy to respond to external changes, such as economic shifts, climate variability, and political instability. (3) *Attainment of Goals* – the degree to which a policy achieves its intended objectives.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative case study approach. Creswell, (2014) explained that the descriptive qualitative method is essential for understanding and interpreting things' meanings in their natural settings to find answers to why and how. The case study method investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context (Rashid et al., 2019). In this research, the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger is selected as the case for analysis, given its strategic role in promoting sustainable development, particularly in addressing hunger across the continent. Examining this policy from 2016 – 2024 will provide valuable insights into the challenges of the policy and whether it's on the path to achieving zero hunger by 2030.

We collected primary data through in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants (see Table 1). These informants were purposively selected based on their availability, knowledge and expertise about the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger. For privacy, the informants' identities are anonymous. The interview was conducted within the period of two months (November 15, 2024 – January 20, 2025), via online Google Meet and Zoom Meetings. To validate the data, we employed a triangulation method by comparing the responses of all the informants to identify key themes and patterns guided by the framework used in this study. Further, secondary data were collected from the Africa Sustainable Development Reports between 2016 to 2024. Additionally, data were collected from 25 latest peer-reviewed articles, government and international reports from the African Union, the African Development Bank Group, the United Nations, the Food Aid Organisation, the World Bank Group, the World Food Programme, and other relevant sources.

Table 1. Key informants selected for the interview

Cateogry	Number of Informants	Key Information
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)	1	A policymaker was selected to discuss the policy and its implementation challenges.
WASDA (nongovernmental organisation)	1	An expert was selected to provide insights into the policy's effectiveness and the major obstacles to achieving SDG #2.
African Women in Agribusiness Network (AWAB)	1	A specialist in agricultural development was selected to discuss challenges faced by local communities and women's groups.
West African Civil Society Institute (WASCI)	1	A representative was selected to highlight grassroots challenges and the impact of the policy interventions.
Research and Academia	1	An academic researcher specialising in public policy was selected from the Africa Policy Research Institute (APRI) to provide a critical assessment of the policy, its implementation and its effectiveness.
Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)	1	A policymaker was selected to share perspectives on regional collaboration and cross-border agricultural trade in relation to Zero Hunger.
East African Community (EAC)	1	A regional development officer was selected to provide insights on agricultural modernisation and food security strategies in East Africa.
Southern African Development Community (SADC)	1	An agricultural policy advisor was selected to discuss implementation challenges and successes in Southern Africa.
African Union (AU) Commission, Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture	1	A senior officer was selected to provide a continental perspective on the 2030 Africa Agenda Policy and its alignment with the SDGs.
Pan-African Farmers' Organisation (PAFO)	1	A representative was selected to highlight farmers' perspectives on policy implementation, market access, and climate resilience across Africa
Total	**10**	

The data analysis technique in this study was done using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis by Miles et al., (2014): data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. To make meaning of this model, all the data were imported into NVivo 12 plus software for analysis. NVivo is a set of tools that helps researchers code and analyse qualitative data systematically to arrive at valid conclusions (Dollah et al., 2017). In the first phase: (1) *data collection* – all the imported data were classified in NVivo 12 plus based on interview transcriptions and document files. In the second phase: (2) *data reduction* – every statement from the informants and key meanings from document files were reduced and coded. The coding process followed a deductive approach, using two indicators of the Effectiveness Theory (integration and adaptability) as predetermined categories, while allowing limited inductive subcoding for emerging themes. In the third phase: (3) *data presentation* – the coded data were presented through visualisations. The percentages in the figure were generated automatically by the NVivo 12 plus software, calculating the proportion of references coded under each theme relative to the total coded references. It represents the percentage distribution of coding references, showing how each category contributes to the overall analysis. In the final stage: (4) *conclusion and verification* – the researchers verified the analysis and made valid conclusions based on the data findings. However, the limitation of our method is that it does not focus on individual African countries but rather examines continental

trends, meaning the findings may not accurately represent the unique implementation challenges faced by individual African countries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Integration of the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger

According to Steers et al., (2004), the first indicator within the effectiveness theory is *integration*, referring to the systems and socialisation processes that function as a conduit between community aspirations and as a symbol of the diverse stakeholders' collaborative efforts. This can be assessed based on the policy's capacity to conduct outreach, foster consensus, manage outreach procedures, and facilitate communication with other organisations. In the context of this research, the aim is to inspect the challenges of integrating the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger. To achieve this, the researchers visualised the findings generated using the NVivo 12 plus software as shown in Figure 2.

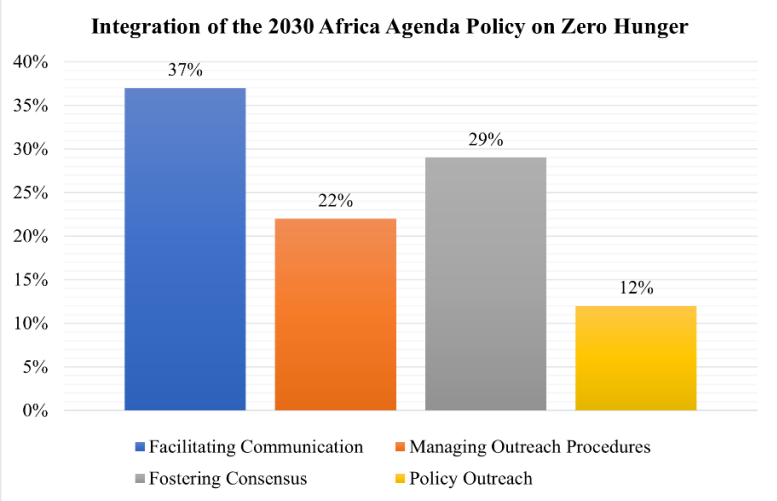

Fig. 2. The integration analysis of the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger
Source: Processed by the authors in NVivo 12 plus software

From Figure 2, *facilitating communication (37%)* has the highest percentage, suggesting that communication gaps are the most pressing barrier to integrating the policy. Effective communication is what drives policy's success, ensuring clear coordination between stakeholders (e.g. governments, private actors, and local communities). However, there is a lack of proper communication between these stakeholders, which is deeply rooted in weak information dissemination structures and inadequate intergovernmental coordination. For example, in ECOWAS, policy directives are communicated from the Directorate of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) to national Ministries of Agriculture, which then pass them to local government units and, ultimately, local farmers. But delays often occur between the ministry, local government units, and the farmers due to limited funding and bureaucratic approval processes. Language barriers are another factor because English and French are the official languages in the ECOWAS region. In rural parts of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and The Gambia, policy updates are sent in English through government networks, but these are not translated into local languages such as Krio, Kpelle, or Mandinka, meaning that community leaders and farmers cannot fully understand the intended actions. Further, in rural regions, reliance on outdated communication methods such as infrequent radio broadcasts and the lack of

information dissemination by local administrative offices means that time-sensitive information does not reach farmers promptly. In many communities, internet connectivity is virtually non-existent, limiting the use of email or online platforms for stakeholder engagement (Morris et al., 2024). A policymaker at the DARD of ECOWAS narrated:

> *"One of our main challenges with this policy is ensuring that information flows smoothly and consistently from the regional level all the way down to the farmers who are meant to benefit from it. At ECOWAS, we often send directives to the national ministries, but by the time these reach local government units and eventually farmers, the content has often been delayed or not fully understood. Also, we have observed that the policy updates are only available in English or French and are never translated into local languages, making the intended actions of the policy unclear in rural communities. Even when we develop communication strategies, the reliance on outdated channels like occasional radio broadcasts means people either receive the information too late or not at all."*

In addition, bureaucratic inefficiencies as another factor that often leads to delays in transmitting the policy information, preventing timely action. Poor communication among stakeholders is a major barrier to policy success, often leading to implementation failures (Junaidy et al., 2024). Similarly, a lack of participatory communication undermines policies, and effective communication is crucial.

Figure 2 also shows *fostering consensus (29%)* as a major concern, indicating the difficulty in having dialogue among stakeholders about the implementation of the policy. There are multiple actors involved in this policy (e.g. governments, NGOs, international donors, local communities, etc.); thus, conflicting priorities continue to slow down decision-making. For instance, in Malawi, disagreements between the Ministry of Agriculture and international donors over fertiliser subsidy allocations in 2022 delayed the rollout of key food security programmes for six months. Similarly, in Kenya, some regional governments prioritised export-oriented cash crops, while NGOs advocated for subsistence farming, creating tensions in policy direction. Additionally, political instability, vested interests, and competing policy agendas are complicating the issues. Further, many African governments have undergone frequent policy shifts, often influenced by political egos instead of long-term sustainability goals (African Union, 2024). Countries don't give equal commitments due to political transitions and different priorities, making it difficult to establish long-term, multi-stakeholder agreements on implementation strategies (UNDP, 2022). For example, in Niger and Mali, political transitions through coup d'états in 2021–2023 resulted in shifts in agricultural priorities, where the military juntas halted food security programmes initiated under the policy. Omotoso et al. (2023) argued that African policies are often characterised by weak stakeholder engagement, leading to limited ownership and poor execution. Therefore, commitments and multi-stakeholder coordination are needed to effectively implement this policy.

Furthermore, *managing outreach procedures (22%)* and *policy outreach (12%)* are noticeable challenges, although not as severe as the previous two, but are significant. This refers to how well the policy reaches affected populations. We found significant shortcomings in the policy's accessibility, awareness and grassroots involvement. Since its implementation, the policy has struggled with poor implementation strategies, where resources fail to reach local communities efficiently (African Union, 2024). A representative from WASCI explained:

> *"International donors often allocate funding through grants and loans for food security programs under this policy. However, we are suffering from massive public corruption, weak monitoring, and a lack of transparency in how funds are disbursed*

> *by our national governments. In many cases, resources are diverted to politically connected projects or delayed for months or even years in bureaucratic channels. By the time any support reaches rural communities, it is often too little, too late, and in most cases, never arrives at all. This leaves farmers without the seeds, fertilisers, or training they were promised during electoral campaigns, and communities remain unaware of programs that were meant to target them."*

This high level of corruption affects rural communities the most, where government outreach programs face logistical constraints, including poor infrastructure, lack of transportation, and weak local governance structures. For example, in Ethiopia and Nigeria, food distribution programs have been hampered by inefficiencies in supply chain management, reducing their impact on food security (Giller, 2020). Ouko & Odiwuor (2023) found that even well-designed policies fail when outreach mechanisms are not properly decentralised. Thus, outreach inefficiencies, particularly public corruption, are significantly hindering the policy agenda.

Lastly, policy outreach, referring to how well the policy is publicised, promoted, and adopted by all stakeholders, is another challenge (Figure 2), impacting the overall effectiveness of the policy. This is a result of weak policy advocacy, inadequate dissemination, and low awareness campaigns. For instance, many rural farmers and local communities lack access to policy documents, training, and extension services, limiting their ability to engage with and benefit from the policy programs (Morris et al., 2024). Additionally, heavy reliance on formal media channels for outreach programs continues to exclude rural populations, many of whom lack access to newspapers, television, or digital platforms. Mallek et al. (2024) argued that policy education and advocacy play a crucial role in ensuring that stakeholders, especially smallholder farmers, understand and adopt new food security measures. However, the outreach strategies about this policy have continued to fail due to low investment in public awareness initiatives.

The Adaptation of the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger

Steers et. al. (2004) explained the second indicator within the effectiveness theory, adaptation, referring to an organisation or policy's ability to adjust to its environment. This includes mechanisms for addressing challenges, improving capacity, and ensuring policies remain relevant despite changing circumstances (Nyeleker & Suswanta, 2025). In the context of this research, the aim is to examine the adaptation challenges of the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger in tackling hunger across the continent. The phenomenon is shown in Figure 3.

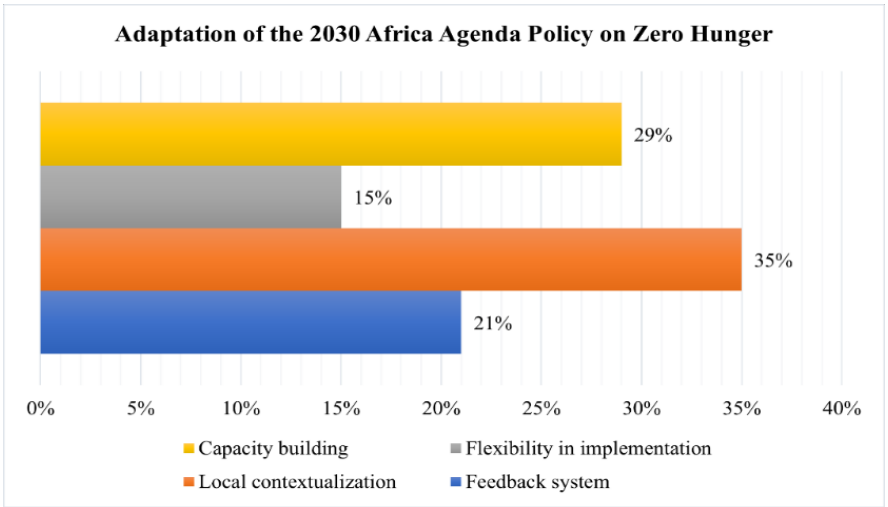

Fig. 3. The adaptation analysis of the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger
Source: Processed by the authors in NVivo 12 plus software

Based on Figure 3, *local contextualization (35%)* is the most pressing challenge in the adaptation process of the policy, particularly the failure to adapt the policy to local contexts. First of all, Africa is a highly diverse continent, with different climate conditions, cultural practices, governance frameworks, and economic structures. For decades now, policies designed at the continental and national level have consistently failed to align with local needs. The implementation of the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger has ignored Indigenous agricultural practices, favouring one-size-fits-all approaches that are ineffective in many regions (FAO, 2022). An agrarian specialist at AWAB stated that:

> *"This policy (the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger) is heavily reliant on imported farming models from China and the European Union. On paper, these models look impressive, but in reality, they require large-scale infrastructure, advanced machinery, and sustained financial investment, and most of our rural communities do not have these resources. The majority of our farmers work on small plots, dependent on seasonal rainfall, and follow indigenous techniques that have sustained them for generations. These realities are overlooked when foreign-designed, one-size-fits-all solutions are promoted, creating a gap between what is planned and what can be implemented. Instead of forcing these external models on us, our governments should adapt the policy to strengthen indigenous knowledge, enhance traditional practices with affordable technology, and build on systems that our communities already trust and understand."*

This lack of local content alignment is a key barrier to policy adaptation. Cooper et al., (2021) argued that African agricultural policies often fail to incorporate traditional farming knowledge, and lack communication and ownership, leading to resistance and poor outcomes. Therefore, local adaptation is crucial for the policy's success.

Subsequently, *capacity building (*see Figure 3) is another major issue, indicating insufficient knowledge sharing among policymakers, stakeholders, and local institutions. A successful policy adaptation requires training, infrastructure and institutional support (Rozikin et al., 2024). However, we found this lacking amongst stakeholders in the policy implementation. Particularly, local people, who are the backbone of African agriculture, lack technical skills, financial literacy, and access to modern farming techniques. In addition, human resources is another constraint, for both governments and local communities, limiting their ability to oversee the policy implementation effectively (FAO et al., 2024). For example, extension services are not equally funded and staffed in some regions (e.g. East Africa and West Africa), making it difficult for farmers to use climate-smart methods. A researcher from the Africa Policy Research Institute (APRI) narrated:

> *"Extension services remain critically weak in most Sub-Saharan African countries. In many rural areas, a single officer is expected to cover several districts, leaving farmers with little to no direct support. There are simply not enough trained personnel to teach local farmers essential practices such as climate adaptation strategies, integrated pest management, or modern soil conservation techniques. Without this guidance, farmers are left to rely on outdated methods passed down through generations. These methods may have worked in the past, but they are no longer sufficient under today's changing*

climate conditions. The result is reduced productivity, higher vulnerability to crop failures, and a widening gap in our ability to achieve national food security targets."

Existing studies have revealed that the lack of training among extension workers and farmers reduces agricultural productivity, which undermines food security efforts (Sporchia et al., 2024). Therefore, investment in capacity-building programs can enhance policy effectiveness and sustainability, and improving human and institutional capacity is essential for achieving SDG #2.

Lastly, *feedback systems* and *flexibility in implementation* are major adaptation challenges of the policy (see Figure 3). While effective adaptation requires ongoing assessment and stakeholder engagement (Nyeleker & Suswanta, 2025), we identified a lack of robust feedback systems to monitor, adjust the policy, and incorporate input from local communities. This means that stakeholders, especially farmers and local communities, have little or no say in the policy process. For example, a study by Fagbemi et al. (2021) found that this policy has already failed in Malawi because policymakers did not integrate lessons from past failures. Therefore, there is a need for more adaptive, evidence-based policymaking in Africa. Also, there is a lack of flexibility in the policy implementation process. This means that the policy is too rigid and fails to adjust to changing circumstances. This is due to several factors such as climate change, market fluctuations, political transitions and armed conflicts in some regions (e.g. Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Somalia, Burkina Faso and Ethiopia). However, long bureaucratic processes make it even more difficult for the policy to adjust to these changing conditions (Sakila & Khaidir, 2024). For instance, in countries with armed conflicts, governments struggle or even have no time to modify food security programs quickly, leading to massive displacement of people and widespread hunger (Abdi et al., 2024). Therefore, there is a need for agile and data-driven strategies, with less bureaucratic red tape in responding to hunger in Africa.

The Attainment of Goals of the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger

The final indicator of the effectiveness theory, the attainment of goals, evaluates how well a policy is achieving its intended objectives. In this study, the assessment focuses on the extent to which the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger has contributed to reducing hunger in Africa. To measure the overall performance of the policy, this study quantitatively evaluates the progress of the policy's three core targets: (a) Healthy and well-nourished citizens, (b) Modern agriculture for increased productivity and production, and (c) Environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient economies and communities. The analysis is based on statistical data from 2015 – 2022, as data from 2023 – 2025 are not yet available.

(a) Healthy and well-nourished citizens

This target is to ensure that all citizens have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. The goal is to reduce hunger and undernourishment by addressing food insecurity through agricultural development, social protection programs, and sustainable food systems. However, statistical data indicate that hunger and malnutrition remain critical challenges across the continent, as shown below.

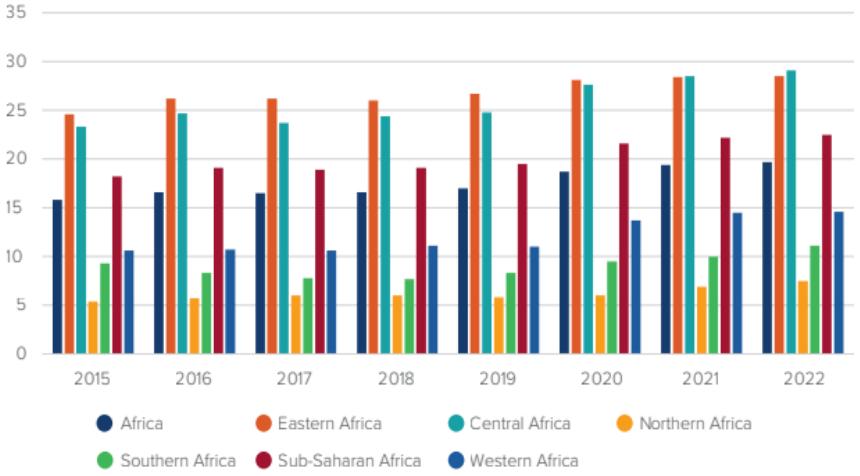

Fig. 4. Prevalence of Undernourishment in Africa (2015–2022)
Source: African Union, (2024)

Since the policy was launched, the number of people facing hunger has increased from 270.6 million in 2019 to 295 million in 2024, with a total increase of 61 million since the COVID-19 outbreak. The prevalence of undernourishment remains highest in Central Africa (29.1%) and East Africa (28.5%), indicating that structural food insecurity is concentrated in regions with protracted conflict, fragile governance, and heavy dependence on rain-fed agriculture. West Africa and Southern Africa, while recording lower percentages, still face persistent nutritional gaps linked to economic instability and high food prices. In contrast, Northern Africa has shown gradual improvements, largely due to higher irrigation coverage, stronger regional trade integration, and relatively greater political stability as compared to other regions in Africa, which together help maintain more consistent food supply chains. These figures indicate not only the failure to expand access to adequate nutrition but also a widening disparity between regions, suggesting that the policy's interventions have been unevenly implemented and insufficient to counter systemic drivers of food insecurity and have not translated into measurable nutritional gains across the continent. This outcome reflects what Steers et al. (2004) identified as low adaptation capacity, where policy fails to adjust interventions to diverse regional contexts. This mismatch between policy design and local needs has undermined effectiveness, leading to uneven progress and, ultimately, goal failure.

(b) Modern agriculture for increased productivity and production

This target is to promote modern agriculture, improving food productivity and production. The aim is to ensure that African countries can produce enough food to meet the needs of their populations, reducing reliance on food imports and strengthening food security. However, data show that food insecurity remains a major challenge in many parts of Africa, despite various policy efforts, as illustrated in the figure below.

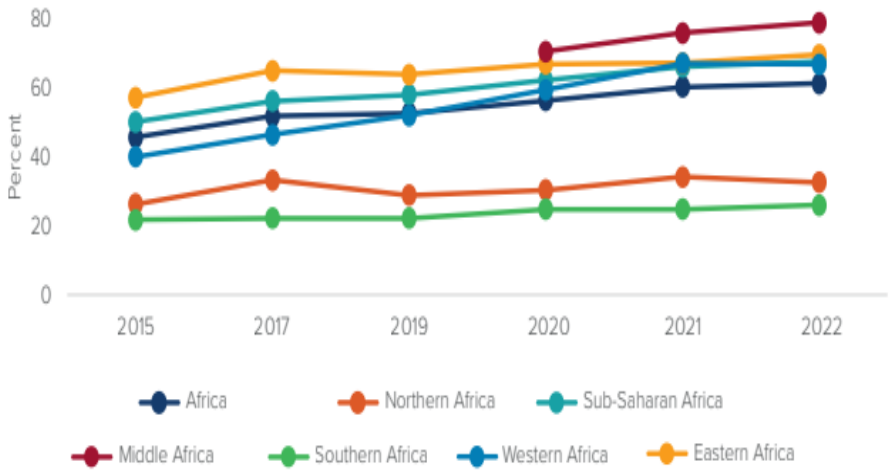

Fig. 5. Prevalence of Moderate or Severe Food Insecurity in Africa (2015–2022)
Source: African Union, (2024)

Based on Figure 5, in 2021, the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in Africa reached 57.9%, which is 2 percentage points higher than in 2020 and 5.5 points higher than before the COVID-19 pandemic. This persistent rise reflects structural weaknesses in the continent's food systems, where production growth has not kept pace with the rapid population growth and market demands. East Africa and Central Africa remain the most severely affected regions, with food insecurity driven by prolonged droughts, conflict-related displacement, and disruptions to agricultural supply chains. Middle Africa experienced the highest levels, exceeding 80% in 2022, a figure linked to heavy reliance on rain-fed agriculture and limited access to modern farming inputs such as improved seeds, fertilisers, and mechanisation. Even regions with comparatively better infrastructure, like Northern Africa, have seen recent increases due to global food price shocks and reduced wheat imports following the Russia–Ukraine conflict. The steady upward trend across nearly all regions indicates that agricultural productivity gains under the policy have been uneven, insufficient, and in many cases offset by the impacts of climate change, land degradation, and economic instability, leaving the continent far from achieving this target. From the perspective of Steers et al. (2004), this uneven productivity gains point to a dual weakness in integration – insufficient coordination between stakeholders, and adaptation, where the policy's agricultural strategies have not evolved effectively to counter climate and market shocks, leading to sustained goal shortfalls.

(c) Environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient economies and communities

The third target of the 2030 Africa Agenda on Zero Hunger is creating environmentally sustainable and climate-resilient economies and communities, which is directly linked to investing heavily in agriculture to achieve food security and economic growth in Africa. However, data show that investment in agriculture across Africa has been declining. This decline threatens Africa's ability to achieve sustainable food production and end hunger by 2030, as shown in Figure 6.

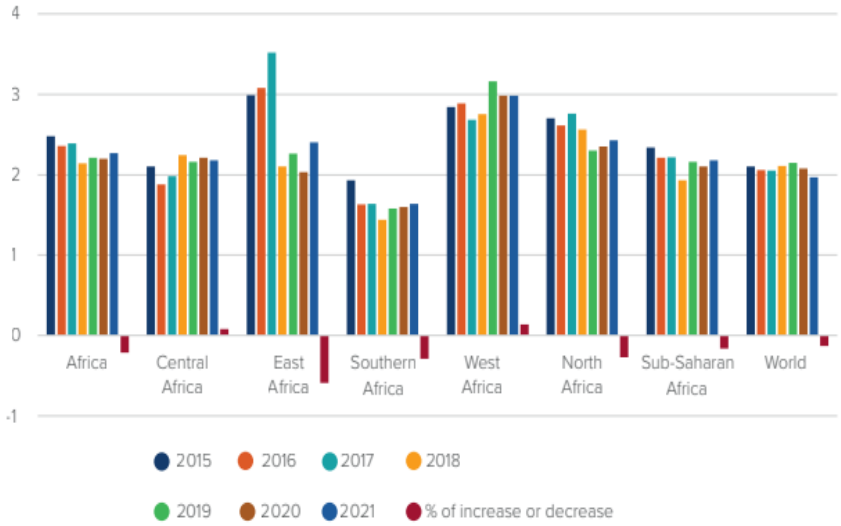

Fig. 6. Agricultural Share of Government Expenditure in Africa (2015–2021)
Source: African Union, (2024)

Figure 6 shows that between 2015 and 2021, the share of government spending on agriculture in Africa fell by 2.69 percentage points, a sharper decline than the global average of 2.23 percentage points, signalling a weakening political commitment to the sector despite its central role in achieving Zero Hunger. East Africa experienced the steepest drop at 3.58 percentage points, a reduction that has constrained irrigation expansion, mechanisation, and the provision of subsidised inputs, all of which are critical for building climate resilience. While Western and Northern Africa maintained relatively steady investment levels, this stability has not translated into significant productivity gains, suggesting that the quality and targeting of spending are as important as the quantity. In Southern Africa, investment cuts have been partly offset by stronger private-sector participation and regional trade integration, which have helped buffer some of the negative impacts. The overall downward trend in public agricultural investment has direct consequences: it slows the adoption of sustainable farming practices, limits farmers' access to credit and technology, and undermines long-term strategies to adapt to climate change. Without reversing this trend, Africa risks further entrenching its vulnerability to climate shocks and food insecurity, making the achievement of this target by 2030 increasingly unlikely. This trend illustrates a breakdown in policy integration as defined by Steers et al. (2004), where limited resource mobilisation and poor alignment of investments with long-term sustainability goals weaken the system's resilience and reduce the likelihood of achieving Zero Hunger by 2030.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the implementation challenges of the 2030 Africa Agenda in achieving Zero Hunger by 2030. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study examined the integration, adaptability, and goal attainment of the policy using Richard M. Steers' Effectiveness Theory as a framework. The findings reveal that the policy's integration is weak, caused by poor communication, and limited consensus-building among stakeholders, while adaptation is constrained by inadequate local contextualisation, disregard of indigenous knowledge, and insufficient capacity building for implementers. In terms of goal attainment, hunger has worsened, with the number of affected people increasing from 270.6 million in 2019

to 295 million in 2024, undernourishment rising to 19.7%, food insecurity reaching 57.9%, and agricultural investment declining by 2.69%, particularly in East Africa at 3.58%. These findings suggest that the policy has failed to meet its objectives. Instead of making progress, Africa faces a deepening hunger crisis and is unlikely to reach Zero Hunger by 2030. This study contributes to the understanding of policy implementation by showing how weak implementation contributes to policy failure - lessons other countries can learn.

Our findings highlight the urgency of reforming communication mechanisms between local and central governments, investing in decentralised agricultural extension services to strengthen capacity at the grassroots level, and redesigning policy frameworks to integrate indigenous agricultural systems, ensuring interventions align with local realities and build long-term climate resilience for food security in Africa and beyond. However, this study has noticeable limitations. First, we focused on the continental trends rather than country-specific contexts. Second, our informants are limited and were purposively selected based on our criteria and their availability; and third, the study lacks field observation, which could have helped with direct engagement with local authorities and communities for deeper insights. This means that our findings may not capture the unique and deeper challenges faced by individual African countries. Therefore, future research should adopt country-specific studies, regional and or countries comparisons, examine governance–stability–climate linkages, or even explore bottom-up approaches that integrate indigenous knowledge and enhance local capacity for deeper insights on achieving sustainable food security in Africa.

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