Africa Plant Health Systems Forum Communique

23rd and 24th October 2024

Nairobi, Kenya

KNOWLEDGE FOR LIFE

Summary

The inaugural **Africa Plant Health Systems (APHS) Forum**, held in Nairobi, Kenya, from October 23–24, 2024, aimed to provide a platform for international collaboration, knowledge sharing and learning to strengthen plant health systems in Africa. Organized by CABI under the theme **"Knowledge-Driven Solutions for Africa's Plant Health Systems"**, the forum built upon CABI's extensive legacy of collaborative efforts to enhance plant health. With over a century of experience, CABI has consistently demonstrated its commitment to managing plant health challenges for improved agricultural productivity, food security, and environmental sustainability. Partnering with its 48 Member Countries, development agencies, research institutions, local communities, and other stakeholders, CABI continues to address emerging plant health challenges through technical expertise and innovative knowledge solutions.

The APHS forum is strategically aligned with key policy developments across Africa that emphasize the critical role of plant health in ensuring food security, agricultural productivity, and environmental sustainability. Notable milestones include the adoption of the Africa Plant Health Policy in 2020 by the African Union (AU) under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and the Malabo Declaration (2014). In 2020, the AU launched a strategy for managing invasive species in Africa (2021–2030), and in 2024, the Inter-African Phytosanitary Council of the African Union (AU-IAPSC) launched its Plant Health Strategy and Implementation Plan, aimed at enhancing food security, nutrition, livelihoods, and trade through strengthened plant health systems. CABI has played a pivotal role in supporting the development of these strategies and continues to serve as a key technical agency, providing expertise to help the AU and its Member States deliver its plant health mandates.

The APHS forum brought together over 100 stakeholders, including representatives from some of CABI's African Member Countries (Kenya, Malawi, Uganda and Zambia), members of the Association of International Research and Development Centers for Agriculture (AIRCA), such as the World Vegetable Center and International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC), development partners, Regional Economic Communities (IGAD, COMESA), industry leaders and farmer organizations.

This diverse gathering provided a unique platform for shaping the future of Africa's plant health systems collaboratively. Discussions showcased cutting-edge tools and solutions, including biological control, artificial intelligence, drones, digital agriculture platforms, Horizon scanning and Pest Risk Analysis. These innovations promise to revolutionize plant health management in Africa, paving the way for sustainable and climate-smart solutions. Participants discussed strategies to tackle invasive pests, enhance food security, and address plant health capacity gaps. A notable highlight was the emphasis on leveraging innovation and technology to address plant health challenges in Africa. Key partnerships were launched among AIRCA members and CABI Member Countries, reaffirming the forum's role as a catalyst for impactful change.

Inclusivity was a central theme, with deliberate efforts to position women and youth at the forefront of plant health leadership. By ensuring that the benefits of strengthened plant health systems are equitably distributed, the forum emphasized resilience and sustainability across all demographics.

Looking ahead, the APHS forum represents more than a single event – it is the beginning of a transformative journey to build interconnected and robust plant health systems across Africa, contributing to both continental strategies and the UN Sustainable Development goals. The commitments and strategies established during the forum lay the groundwork for ongoing collaboration. Follow-up engagements are planned to bring additional stakeholders on board, ensuring sustained momentum and driving meaningful change.

As a trusted technical agency, CABI will continue to support the AU, regional institutions, national governments, and stakeholders in strengthening plant health systems. Together, these efforts will help build a resilient, inclusive and sustainable agricultural future for Africa.

CABI, along with its Member Countries, AIRCA partners, national agriculture research and extension systems and industry actors are committed to the following actions:

1. **Assessing and addressing infrastructure and human capacity needs** to strengthen plant health systems across Africa

2. **Advancing the regional harmonization of plant health policies** to ensure consistency and efficiency in addressing plant health challenges

3. **Promoting innovative pest preparedness, response and management strategies** to mitigate the impact of pests and diseases

4. **Fostering strategic partnerships and building synergies** to enhance plant health resilience across the continent

5. **Empowering women and youth** to create inclusive and equitable plant health systems in Africa

6. **Promoting integrated, climate-smart practices** and leveraging digital tools to enhance sustainability and adaptability

7. **Facilitating unified data and knowledge sharing** to support informed decision-making and collaborative action

Context and background for the Africa Plant Health Systems Forum

In Africa, plant health is a critical issue that directly impacts agricultural productivity, food security, ecosystem resilience and livelihoods. The continent faces a myriad of interconnected challenges, including the spread of pests and diseases, climate change and limited access to effective plant health management practices and advice. Invasive pests, such as the fall armyworm and tomato leaf miner, threaten crops and biodiversity, while habitat degradation exacerbates these issues. The transboundary nature of these pests, compounded by climate change and global trade, demands coordinated regional responses, early detection systems and robust pest management strategies. Meanwhile, advancements in digital technologies, such as drones, artificial intelligence and real-time data systems, are transforming pest surveillance and resource allocation, offering new possibilities for improving plant health.

Africa has developed a robust policy framework within which plant health issues can be addressed in a holistic manner. The Africa Plant Health Policy, adopted by the African Union (AU) as part of its Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and the Kampala Declaration (2025), provides a foundation for enhancing agricultural productivity, safeguarding food security and promoting sustainable management of plant resources. Similarly, the Inter-African Phytosanitary Council of the African Union (AU-IAPSC) Plant Health Strategy and Implementation Plan, launched in 2024, and the AU Strategy for managing invasive species (2020–2030) aims to strengthen plant health systems across the continent to improve food security, nutrition, livelihoods and trade.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), established in 2021, presents a significant opportunity to harmonize plant health standards, facilitating the safe and efficient movement of agricultural products across borders. Globally, African plant health systems align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – particularly Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), Goal 13 (Climate Action) and Goal 15 (Life on Land) – and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) provides complementary guidance for managing plant health sustainably and collaboratively.

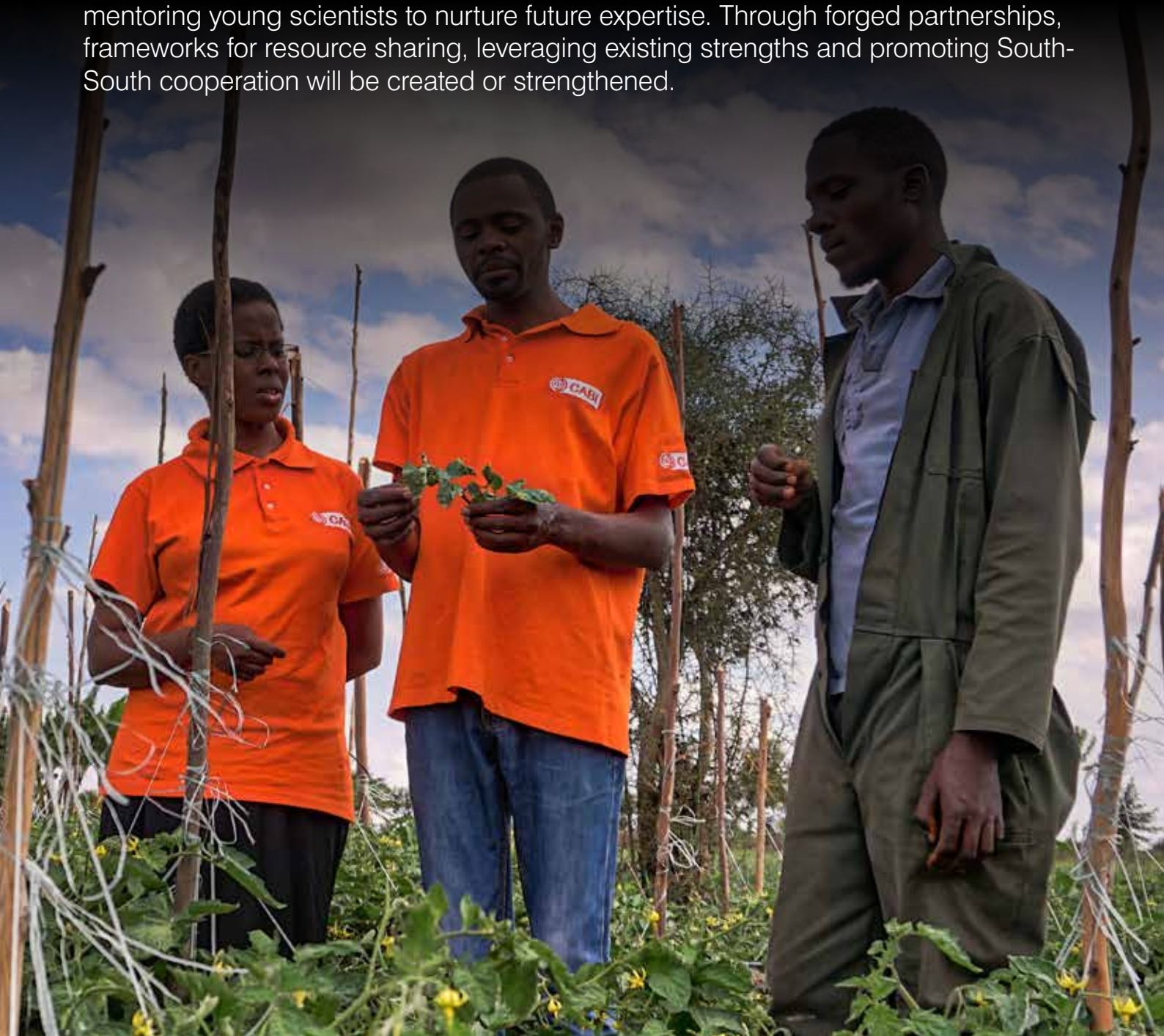
Within these policy contexts, the APHS was established to leverage existing frameworks and foster collaboration among stakeholders to comprehensively tackle plant health threats in Africa. By providing a platform for diverse actors, the forum aimed to share best practices, explore innovative solutions and develop actionable strategies for addressing plant health challenges.

Discussions at the forum centred on three themes: Plant Health and Biodiversity, Plant Health Systems Policy and Leadership and Impact of Innovations and Scaling Up. These themes guided participants in identifying priority areas for action, fostering collaboration and generating insights to inform policy strategies for sustainable plant health management.

Recommendations and way forward

Assessing and addressing infrastructure and human capacity needs to strengthen plant health systems across Africa

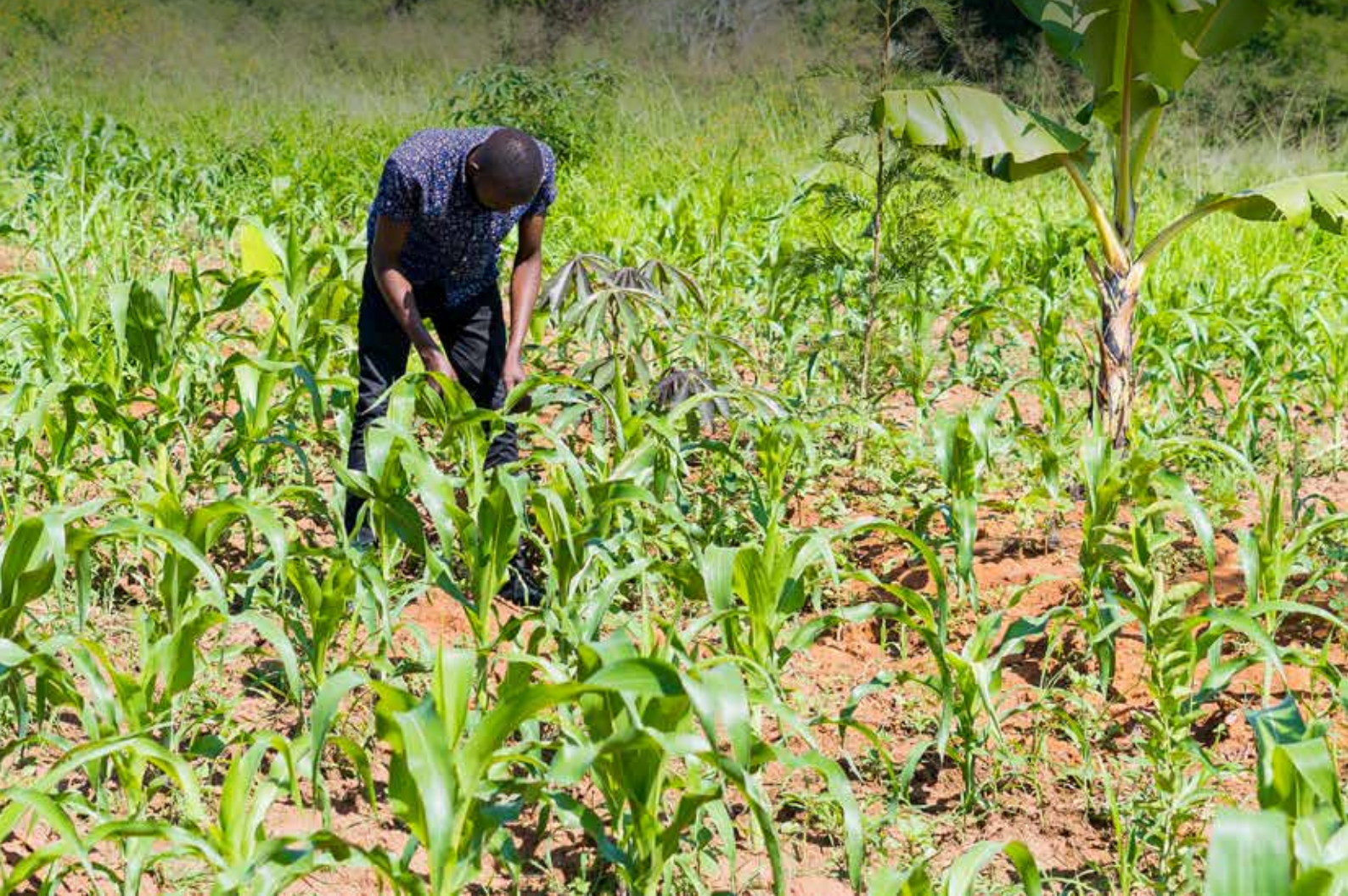
To drive resilient plant health systems across Africa, a strategic approach is needed to leverage existing strengths while addressing gaps in infrastructure and human capacity. CABI and its partners will facilitate a regional effort to assess and map the capacities of different countries, identifying key resources, expertise and opportunities for collaboration. This approach will promote cross-border partnerships, reduce duplication and foster the creation of shared centres of excellence. It will also guide targeted capacity-building initiatives, with a focus on mentoring young scientists to nurture future expertise. Through forged partnerships, frameworks for resource sharing, leveraging existing strengths and promoting South-South cooperation will be created or strengthened.



Recommendations and way forward

Advancing the regional harmonization of plant health policies to ensure consistency and efficiency in addressing plant health challenges

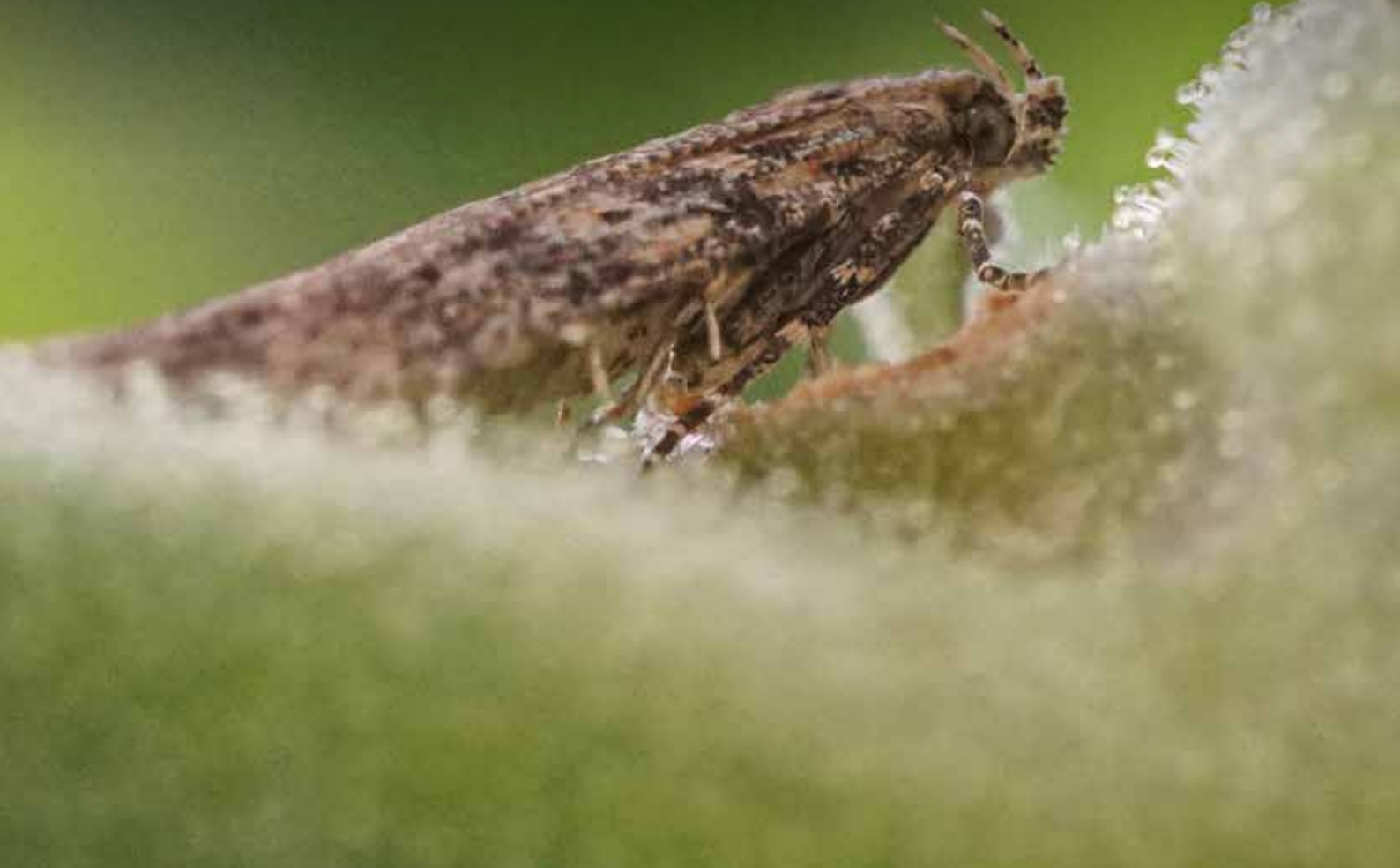
Harmonization can have substantial benefits, especially in Africa where countries share similar environmental conditions, agricultural resources and trade partners and where an enabling policy, the AfCFTA, has been adopted by AU Member States. Consequently, regional and continental harmonization in plant health is key to boosting agricultural productivity, promoting fair trade and ensuring stronger responses to shared challenges. Particularly, the harmonization of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures can ensure food safety through regionally accepted risk-based approaches. Harmonized policies in SPS can therefore reduce non-tariff trade barriers, making it easier for agricultural products to move across borders. Other areas in plant health of strategic interest for African countries, where harmonization could play a role, include access to germplasm for tolerant or resistant crops and registration of biopesticides. Harmonization could also allow countries to pool resources, share knowledge and invest in joint research and development, such as regional centres of excellence eg diagnostic labs for identified high risk pests. However, key barriers such as regulatory differences and sovereignty concerns need to be addressed.



Recommendations and way forward

Promoting innovative pest preparedness, response and management strategies to mitigate the impact of pests and diseases

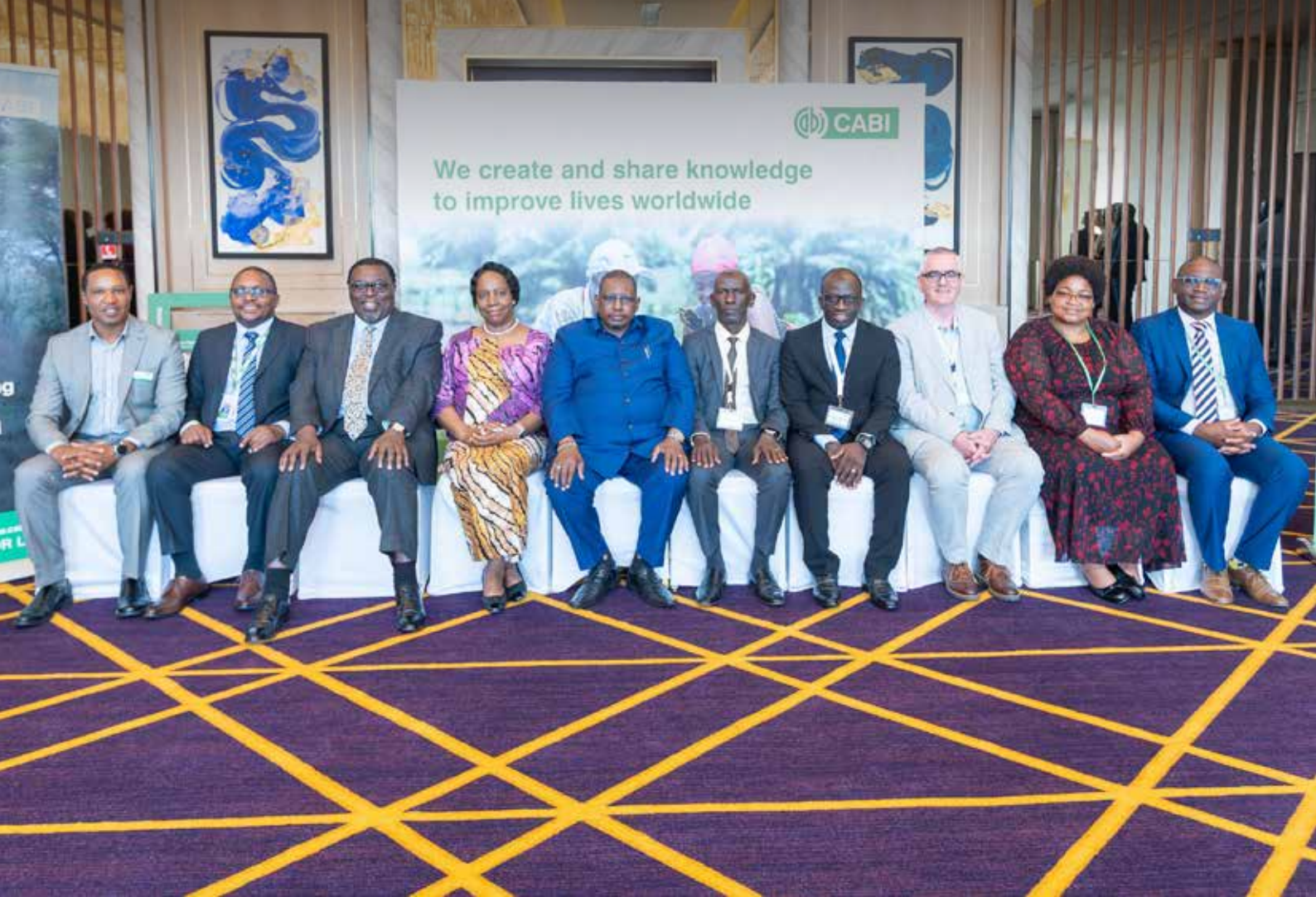
Threats to plant health systems, particularly from invasive pests, continue to affect many African countries, driven in part by a changing climate and free movement of plants and plant products. Being prepared for these threats requires better prevention, rapid response, management and overall coordination at regional, national and local levels. Prevention against invasive species is the first step to limiting their potential impact. However, with limited resources, not all threats can be prevented, making prioritization essential. By focusing on the biggest threats, countries can make the most of prevention and response efforts and investments. Systematic processes using innovative tools such as the Horizon Scanning and Pest Risk Analysis (PRA) Tools can help countries to better identify and prioritize these threats. Strategies such as improved early warning, rapid responses, communicating the risks and providing evidence of impacts are crucial to responding to these threats. The use of nature-based solutions for their long-term management will result in improved ecosystem health, reduce negative impacts on biodiversity when pesticides are used and result in overall safety for humans. Pest preparedness is key to ensuring long-term food security for the burgeoning African population.



Recommendations and way forward

Fostering strategic partnerships and building synergies to enhance plant health and agricultural resilience across the continent

Participants at the forum recognized the urgent need to prioritize plant health as a cornerstone of food security and agricultural resilience in Africa. Aligning plant health management strategies with national policies and development priorities is crucial for advancing the economic goals of African countries, ensuring long-term sustainability, and supporting the broader vision of growth. The participants strongly advocate strengthening government partnerships to advance these efforts and urge increased collaboration among local, regional and international partners – such as AIRCA, FAO, CGIAR and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) – to address plant health challenges, share expertise and develop integrated solutions. These partnerships are key to creating effective, scalable interventions that benefit all stakeholders. Additionally, fostering private sector engagement is essential to unlocking investment in plant health, driving innovation and accelerating the adoption of new technologies. By supporting research dissemination and co-creating business opportunities, we can accelerate agricultural growth and foster sustainable, impactful solutions.



Recommendations and way forward

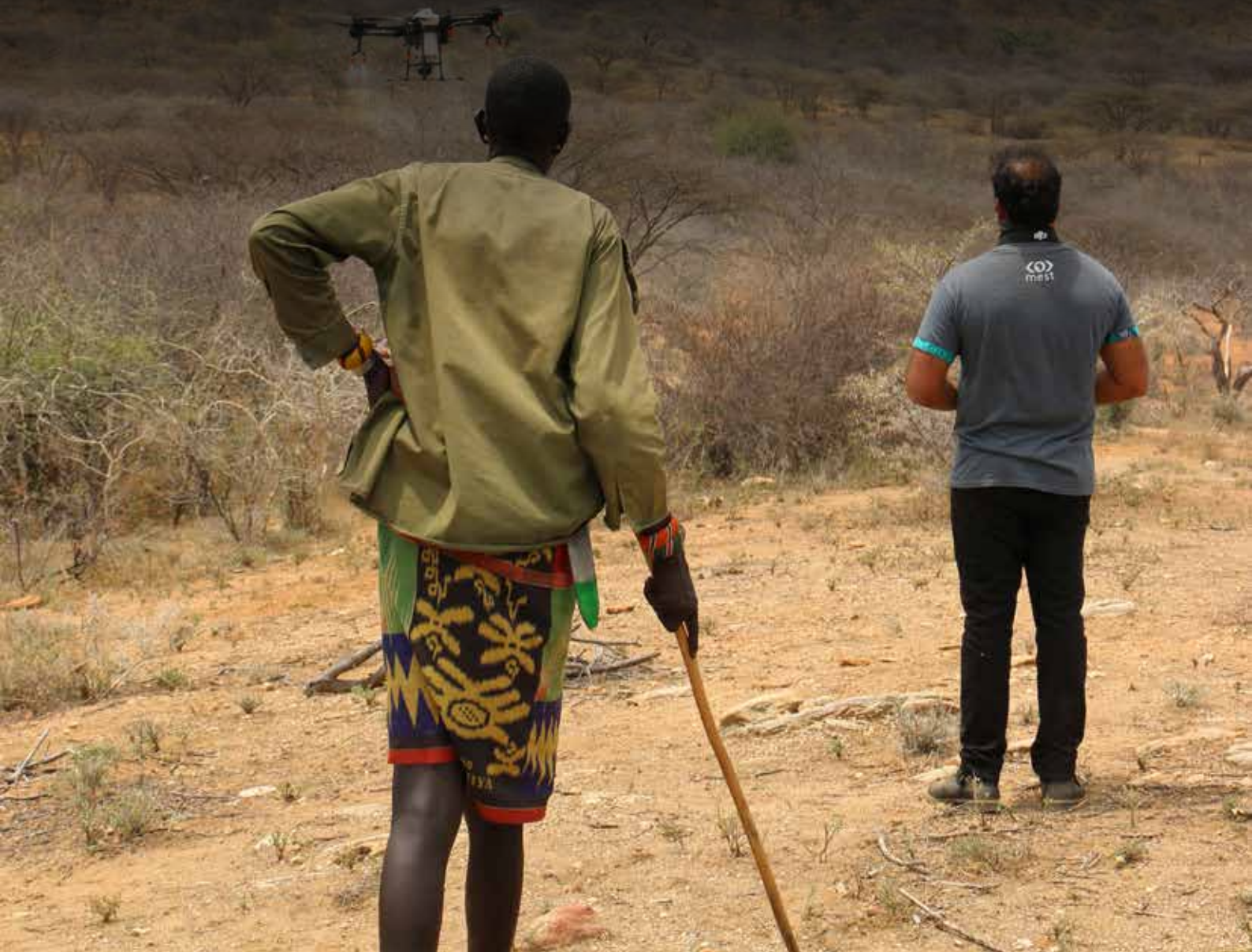
Empowering women and youth to create inclusive and equitable plant health systems in Africa

Women and youth are vital contributors to Africa's agricultural production and food supply chains, contributing about 70% of the labour force. Yet they frequently face obstacles in accessing essential plant health information, productive resources, financing and technologies. To build truly inclusive plant health systems, it is crucial to incorporate gender considerations beyond training programmes, ensuring that policies and practices support equitable access to resources and unblock barriers to equitable participation. Empowerment initiatives should prioritize developing strong female leaders in agriculture and policymaking, creating advocates and strengthening their capacity to influence decisions and drive systemic change. Similarly, empowering young people – particularly in agricultural service provision – connects extension services with hands-on experience while making careers in plant health more accessible and appealing.

Recommendations and way forward

Promoting integrated, climate-smart practices and leveraging digital tools to enhance sustainability and adaptability in plant health

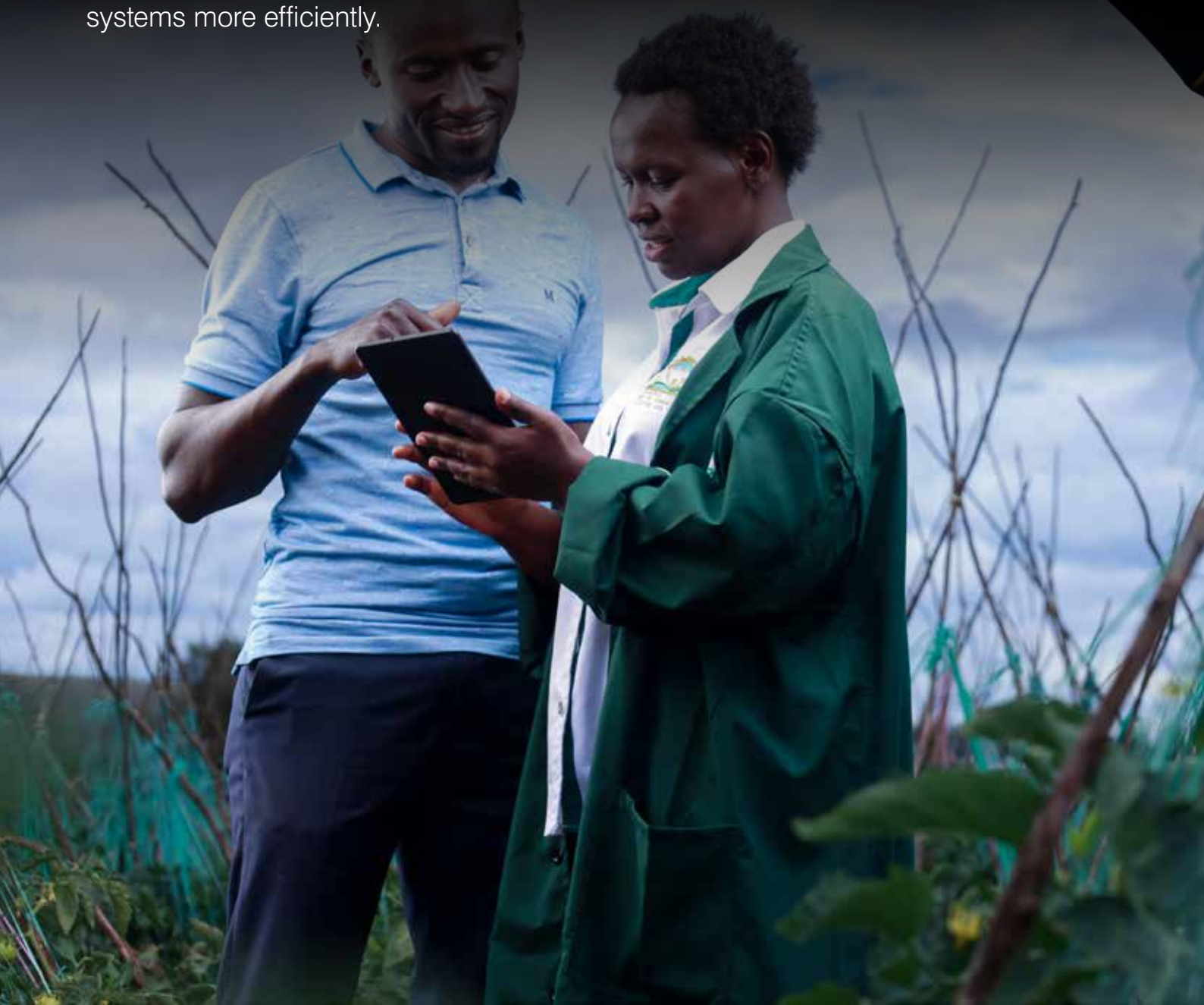
To sustainably manage plant health challenges, there is an urgent need to promote integrated, climate-smart practices that enhance the health of soils, crops, animals, humans, and the environment under the One Health perspective. Production practices should leverage digital solutions like AI, drones and decision-farming tools, to reduce food losses and optimize resource use. Key strategies include improving digital education, expanding germplasm/seed availability, boosting production of nature-based solutions and strengthening plant health research. An important part of this strategy is the need to ensure that the technologies are available to farmers, including those with a low-income. Together, these actions will establish a resilient foundation for managing plant health challenges across the continent.



Recommendations and way forward

Facilitating unified data and knowledge sharing to support informed decision-making and collaborative action

The building of resilient plant health systems at national, regional and global scales is being hampered in Africa due to a lack of access to FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) data. To effectively address these challenges, countries should implement a unified strategy for data collection and knowledge sharing. Establishing a centralized, accessible repository will enhance predictive modelling, enabling faster, data-driven responses to emerging threats. Standardizing data across borders will foster collaboration, streamline policymaking, and optimize resource allocation. The collective insights from such a knowledge hub would empower countries to optimize plant health systems, and ultimately secure food systems more efficiently.



About CABI

CABI is an international not-for-profit organization that improves people's lives by providing information and applying scientific expertise to solve problems in agriculture and the environment. Through knowledge sharing and science, CABI helps address issues of global concern such as safeguarding the environment and improving global food security. We do this by helping farmers grow more and lose less of what they produce, combating threats to agriculture and the environment from pests and diseases, protecting biodiversity from invasive species, and improving access to agricultural and environmental scientific knowledge. Our 48 Member Countries, of which 17 are in Africa, guide and influence our core areas of work. These include development and research projects, scientific publishing and microbial services.

CABI is part of the six-member Association of International Research and Development Centers for Agriculture (AIRCA) that also includes World Vegetable Center, ICBA – International Center for Biosaline Agriculture, ICIMOD – International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, icipe – African Insect Science for Food and Health, and IFDC – International Fertilizer Development Center.