

Ethiopia: A Personal Journey, 1983-2025 and Proposals for the Future Ireland-Africa Partnership.

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This paper is in memory of

MESFIN WOLDE-MARIAM (1930-2020)

A Patriot who envisioned and fought for a better future for the children of Ethiopia and Africa.

And

DAVID NABARRO (1949-2025)

An Inspirational Leader who devoted his life and career to improving the lives of others through improved food and nutrition security and better global health.

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Executive Summary

This paper consists of two parts: the first looking back over the past 50 years and drawing lessons from Ethiopian and African history; the second looking to the coming decades when Africa is likely to become a more significant geopolitical and economic player on the world stage. The connection between the two parts is that the lessons from the past are entirely relevant to the future.

The first part of the paper draws on the coincidence of five visits I made to Ethiopia over the 1983 to 2015 period which marked important points in Ethiopian history. In linking these occasions, the narrative covers Ethiopia's troubled history since the 1970s; a bloody period of authoritarian rule; and a major famine in the 1980s. Two visits post 2000, in 2004 for Kofi Annan's speech to an AU Summit on a 'Uniquely African Green Revolution' and in 2015 for the Ethiopian government's Seqota Declaration committing to the elimination of child stunting by 2030, were moments of great political and historical significance, specifically for Ethiopia but more generally for Africa.

The Ethiopian experience and success in its agrifood and social protection policies were taken account of in the development of the Kampala Declaration, a 10-year (2026 to 2035) transformation agenda for African food systems, adopted by the AU in January 2025.

The second part of the paper looks at the future Ireland-EU-Africa partnership. It discusses Ireland's historical relationship with Africa, citing the positive contribution made by Irish missionaries from the mid-19th century onwards and by Irish NGOs from the 1960s onwards. It notes the degree to which the Irish government and notable individuals and NGOs supported human rights for Africans, the decolonisation process, peacekeeping and the fight against famine and food and nutrition insecurity.

Looking to the future decades, for Africa to achieve its potential it will have to be successful in two key areas: preventing and resolving conflict and developing its agrifood sector and rural economy.

This is the context within which a judgement is made as to how Africa's needs and priorities should be matched with Ireland's strengths and capabilities. Four priorities are proposed: nutrition, sustainable food systems, food and climate, and an enhanced geopolitical relationship which would be key to the Ireland- EU- Africa partnership over the coming decades.

In the short-term - to end 2025- Irish political leaders and policy makers are faced with three obvious priorities: agree a coherent Irish position on food and climate for COP 30; prepare for the AU-EU Summit in Angola in November; and agree on the priorities for Ireland's 2026 EU Presidency including a distinctive African dimension

Part 1: Ethiopia: A Personal Journey, 1983-2025

I attended the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) +4 Stocktaking meeting, as a member of the Irish delegation, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 27-29 July 2025. The first UNFSS took place in New York in 2021. The 2025 meeting was symbolic in that it was the first UNFSS meeting to be held in Africa.

My first visit to Ethiopia was in 1983 when I was on a mission for the EEC Commission to examine Ethiopian agrifood policy. I was in the country on two other occasions in the 1980s, in 1986 engaging with the national debate on its post-Famine future and in 1988 leading an evaluation of Ethiopian agricultural research. In the 2001-2013 period I visited on a number of occasions when I was CEO of Concern Worldwide - hereafter Concern. One such visit was in 2004, when UN Secretary General (UNSG) Kofi Annan launched the 'Uniquely African Green Revolution': this led to the establishment in 2006 of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). In 2015 I was present in my capacity as Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement when the government launched the Seqota Declaration which committed to eliminate child stunting in Ethiopia by 2030.

The experience and connections made during these five visits in 1983, 1986, 1988, 2004 and 2015, are probably unique and merit recounting. In 1983, the report I wrote recommended that the EEC Commission should not support Ethiopia's agrifood strategy, policy-wise or financially. The Commission accepted my recommendation. In 1986 I was privileged to be present at the early stages of the national debate about the country's future post-Famine. In 1988, I led a team to evaluate the achievements of an important Ethiopian institution, the Institute for Agricultural Research (IAR), and made recommendations for its future. I do not know if these recommendations were acted upon. In 2004 and 2015, I was a witness to two important turning points for Ethiopia's future: respectively, Kofi Annan's speech on a 'Uniquely African Green Revolution' and the Seqota Declaration.

The paper attempts to build a thread of connection between these occasions, assess their historic significance, and derive policy lessons for the future. It traces the evolving political background which had a key influence on Ethiopia's economic and agrifood policies. The policy changes, particularly from 2004 onwards, laid the foundations for the country's agrifood sector and wider economy to perform well over the following two decades.

The paper discusses Ireland's positioning at the Summit. Learning from the Ethiopian experience was one influence on Ireland's positioning. Other influences - which are judged to be relevant to the future of African and international food systems - are Ireland's experience of the development of its own agrifood sector; its commitment to sustainable food systems under its domestic policy Food Vision 2030; Ireland's development cooperation policy and its positioning at other international meetings such as Nutrition for Growth (N4G) and the upcoming COP 30 on climate in November 2025.

The paper concludes by looking at Ireland's longer term relationship with Africa. It proposes four priorities which should be key to an Irish-European partnership with Africa. These are (1) that good nutrition should be recognised as being crucial to a country's

economic and social development and should be reflected in policy prioritization; (2) that a commitment to sustainable food systems should be foundational to African economic development and that Ireland-EU should partner with Africa to deliver on that commitment; (3) that the link between food and climate should be accorded higher priority in the years ahead; and (4) that, in an era of rapidly changing geopolitics, the Ireland-EU-Africa relationship should be invested in and brought to a new level of strategic importance.

These ideas should be considered in framing the Irish government's new strategy 'Global Ireland 2040' to be delivered by end-2025 and in the next iteration of Ireland's Africa strategy, the successor to 'Global Ireland: Ireland's Strategy for Africa to 2025' (2019), scheduled for completion in 2026.

Ethiopia's Historical Context

Ethiopia has one of the longest and most distinctive histories in the world. Modern state formation occurred in the late-19 century under a series of emperors, the most prominent of whom was Menelik II, who decisively defeated Italian invaders at the battle of Adwa in 1896. Emperor Haile Selassie was Ethiopia's leader for a number of decades in the 20th century and claimed his descent through 237 generations from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

Ethiopia is rare among African countries in that it was never colonised with the exception of a brief Italian occupation from 1935-1941: the other African country not colonised is Liberia. This is a core element of Ethiopian national consciousness and successive governments have invoked this legacy to legitimise their authority. Ethiopia became a beacon of hope for anti-colonial movements across Africa and for the African diaspora. This unique status contributed to the selection of Addis Ababa as the headquarters of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, which became the African Union (AU) when launched in 2002. Ethiopia has played a prominent role in African diplomacy, peacekeeping and regional integration.

When fascist Italy under Mussolini invaded Ethiopia in 1935, Emperor Haile Selassie appealed to the League of Nations, making Ethiopia a symbol of the failure of international law and the need for collective security against aggression. Ireland played an important role in supporting Ethiopian sovereignty and opposing Italy's invasion. Eamon de Valera, as President of the Council of the League of Nations, became one of the most outspoken international defenders of Ethiopia during what was termed the 'Abyssinian Crisis'. His advocacy helped to define the principles of Ireland's early foreign policy identity: a commitment to international law, neutrality and support for small nations.

The Holy Trinity Cathedral in Addis Ababa - the highest ranking Cathedral of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church - has a mural depicting Emperor Haile Selassie delivering his appeal to the League of Nations against Italy's invasion, with Eamon de Valera portrayed in the background. The inclusion of de Valera in the mural is highly symbolic. It reflects an admiration for de Valera's moral leadership at the League of Nations during the crisis and reinforces his stature in Ethiopian memory as a defender of justice.

Ethiopia 1973-1984: Prologue to the Great Ethiopian Famine, 1984-85

Between 1973 and 1984, Ethiopia underwent dramatic political, social and economic transformation, shaped by revolution, civil war, famine and authoritarian rule. In 1973 there was a major famine in the Wollo and Tigray regions, killing up to 200,000 people. The famine came to international attention through a TV programme 'Ethiopia - The Unknown Famine' made by Jonathan Dimbleby and broadcast in June 1974.

The government of Emperor Haile Salassie was widely criticised for its inadequate response to the famine. This led to a wave of strikes and civil unrest and in September 1974 the Emperor was deposed by the military. A Provisional Military Administrative Council, known as the Derg, took power, with Mengistu Haile Mariam emerging as its leader. The monarchy was officially abolished.

From 1975 the Derg aligned with the Soviet Union, declaring Ethiopia a Marxist Leninist state, and nationalised land, banks and industries. Over the 1976-1978 period, the Derg launched a brutal campaign called the 'Red Terror' to eliminate opposition. Tens of thousands were imprisoned, tortured or executed, with Mengistu emerging as the undisputed leader of the Derg.

Somalia invaded Ethiopia's Ogaden region in July 1977. Ethiopia, backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba, repelled the invasion by March 1978. The war consolidated Mengistu's power and resulted in increased Soviet support.

The above background heralded Ethiopia into the 1980s. There was continuous Civil War between the Derg and insurgent groups, especially the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).

By 1983 Mengistu was firmly entrenched in his personal dictatorship and the Derg had begun creating a single-party state aligned with Marxist ideology. He announced celebrations would be held in 1984 to mark the 10-year anniversary of the Revolution, at which Ethiopia's alignment with the Soviet Union would be highlighted and 'revolutionary achievements' including land reform, nationalisation, and expanded education and health programs would be showcased. This was also meant to legitimize the regime internationally, especially with Eastern European bloc allies and with revolutionary movements in Africa.

There were early signs of a major famine in the northern provinces of Tigray and Wollo from 1982 onwards. Drought had been a regular feature in these regions over years: it was evident in 1982 and the crop failures continued into 1983. The government concealed the scale of the food crisis, fearing that it would undermine the image of a successful socialist state. The failure to act on the impending food crisis and the grotesque celebrations would later be viewed as a stark example of regime denial and mismanagement.

Ethiopia and the EEC

In 1983 I was an official in the Food Policy division of the Directorate General for Development (DG 8) in the EEC Commission. Edgard Pisani, a former French Minister for Agriculture (1961-1966), was European Commissioner for Development (1981-1985).

In 1982, the Commission had launched a pilot initiative to promote national food strategies with a number of African countries. The initiative had emerged in the aftermath of the 1970s Sahel droughts and growing awareness of structural food insecurity in Africa. The Commission sought to go beyond emergency food aid and support long-term food security policies. It wanted to support African governments' capability to deliver coherent food security strategies, integrate food security into national planning frameworks, build institutional capacity for early warning systems, and pilot a partnership based approach involving governmental and non-governmental actors. This approach could be said to have predated by about 30 years what emerged from the UNFSS in 2021.

Ethiopia applied to the Commission to be included in the pilot initiative on national food strategies. The Commission agreed to consider the request, based on an analysis and subsequent judgement of how Ethiopian agrifood policy was in conformity with the principles underpinning the pilot initiative. I was tasked with producing the report upon which the Commission would make its judgement. I spent ten days in Addis Ababa in April 1983, speaking to a wide range of Ethiopian officials, various donor representatives and other people who could contribute useful opinions.

Ethiopia's agrifood policy in 1983 was shaped by the Derg's Marxist ideology and economic policy. That policy prioritised support of large scale state farms over smallholder agriculture; 96% of the national agricultural budget was allocated to these farms. There was a heavy emphasis on the formation of 'producer cooperatives', as part of a wider programme of mass resettlement and villagisation. Any surplus grain produced by farmers had to be sold through the Agricultural Market Corporation (AMC) which had legal monopoly rights to purchase key food staples, especially cereals, at state-set low prices.

My report reflected the above realities, concluding that the overall policy was seriously misguided; that the dominant resource allocation in favour of state farms was unlikely to lead to broad-based food security; and that the collectivisation and producer cooperative model of production was likely to fail. **I emphatically recommended that the Commission and EEC funding should not support Ethiopia's agrifood policy.** The Commission accepted this recommendation and Ethiopia was informed accordingly.

I had no inkling in April 1983 that the combination of the drought, deepening poverty and the disastrous policy being implemented would lead to a catastrophic famine in 1984.

The Path to the 1984-85 Famine

Concern had worked in Ethiopia from 1973 to 1977 with Fr Jack Finucane as its Field Director. Its withdrawal in 1977 was due to political and civil disturbances which made it difficult for an NGO to operate. However by 1982, Concern had returned to Ethiopia led by

Field Director Fintan Farrelly. In October 1982, Fintan visited the town of Koram in Wollo and discovered a makeshift camp outside the town with 28,000 famine refugees. Concern offered assistance to the local team responsible for health. Koram was the place from which Michael Buerk made his famous BBC broadcast in October 1984.

Famine was a frequent, almost endemic occurrence in many parts of Ethiopia during these years. In 1982 the official Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) - founded after the 1970s famine to monitor potential famine conditions - declared that 5.5 million people faced food shortages. In 1983 a joint UN appeal called for relief assistance for 1 million people in the 13 most affected areas. When the rains in 1983 and the short spring rains in 1984 failed, the RRC again appealed for international help. In May 1984 Jack Finucane, who had by then replaced Fintan Farrelly as Concern Field Director, told the New York Times about the threat of famine but they were not interested in the story.

At that point the government demonstrated no urgency in addressing the growing food crisis. The Derg were absorbed in the preparation for the celebrations for the 10th anniversary of the Revolution. To prevent any distraction from the celebrations, foreign aid workers were not permitted to leave Addis Ababa in August/September 1984.

Another inconvenient fact confronted the government in 1984: an update on the estimated size of Ethiopia's population. The general belief was that the population was about 31 million. This estimate was based on projections from the 1960/70s which had not been revised to reflect higher fertility rates. The revision of the population estimate from 31 million in 1981 to 45 million in 1984 was produced by the RRC, working with international partners, including UN agencies and western donors. The first comprehensive population census was conducted in 1984 although results only became available some years later.

Michael Buerk's BBC report on 23 October 1984 was the first international media account to reveal the full horror of the famine, showing starving children, emaciated families and overrun feeding stations. He described the situation as 'a biblical famine in the 20th century'.

The regime resented the international media portrayal of the famine, viewing it as humiliating to Ethiopia's sovereignty and image and a western political tool to undermine the Derg. However, faced with the reality of the crisis, the government recognised the opportunity to attract international aid. It invited international agencies and NGOs to assist, but they were required to work through the RRC, giving the regime control over relief distribution.

The government also used the crisis to advance its political and social engineering agenda, including its resettlement programs involving moving hundreds of thousands from the famine-affected north to the south and west and its villagisation programmes bringing rural populations into collective settlements.

The Buerk report was the trigger that stimulated Bob Geldof to initiate Band Aid (1984) and Live Aid (1985). This led to a massive surge in global donations, estimated to be about \$200

million. The money was administered through the Band-Aid Trust which worked with various UN agencies, International NGOs and local partners via the RRC.

Following on from the Buerk report in October, major aid mobilisation began in December, with the UK, EEC, Ireland and the USA pledging large food and cash contributions. Airlifts began and relief camps expanded. Band Aid's record 'Do They Know It's Christmas' was released in December and raised public awareness and funds worldwide.

By January 1985 significant volumes for food aid began to arrive at Ethiopian entry points, Assab (then in Eritrea) and Massawa (a Red Sea port); and through Djibouti for overland transport from Sudan and Kenya. UN agencies WFP, FAO, UNICEF and bilateral agencies became highly active. NGOs like Concern, Oxfam, MSF, Save the Children (SCF) and others scaled up their presence.

When the travel restrictions were lifted after the 10th anniversary celebrations, Fr Aengus Finucane, Concern's CEO, Jack Finucane, and Moira Conroy, Deputy Field Director, travelled to Wollo and saw the extent of the unfolding tragedy. On their return to Addis, they quickly got permission from the RRC to provide assistance. Concern set up its own camp outside Harbu, 365 km north of Addis. Within a month 10,000 people had sought aid and there were 500 deaths. In December, when Anne O'Mahony took over the medical administration of the camp, the death rate doubled due to heavy rain and cold, causing hypothermia and pneumonia, and diseases including measles, cholera and typhus. After each disease outbreak precautions were put in place to prevent recurrence, and eventually things took a turn for the better. By summer 1985 the camp was closed down. Anne went on to become one of Concern's legendary Country Directors and is still in 2025 serving Concern as a current member of its Council/Board.

From early 1985 the increased aid levels began to impact the situation. Aid was concentrated in areas the Derg controlled and permitted access to, in Wallo, Southern Tigray and part of Central and Eastern Ethiopia. Tigray and Northern Wollo, where the famine was most severe, remained underserved due to conflict with the TPFL and EPLF insurgencies and the government's refusal to allow aid into rebel-held territories. In mid to late-1985, limited aid began to reach Tigray and Wollo, often by covert NGO or church-led efforts.

Estimates of the number of deaths caused by the famine range from 400,000 to 1,000,000, although precise figures remain uncertain due to lack of reliable demographic and mortality rates at the time. The estimate by famine expert Alex de Waal is likely to be one of the most authoritative. De Waal estimates that approximately 500,000 to 600,000 died, from indirect deaths (disease, displacement) as well as starvation.

In his book 'Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine' (2018) de Waal states that 'The Ethiopian famine of 1984/85 was not a natural disaster, it was a second-degree war crime. The military regime of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam created and sustained the famine as part of its counter-insurgency. Famine was a tool, not an objective. The famine

killed at least 600,000 people and caused Ethiopian GDP to contract by nearly 3% in 1984 and almost 12% in 1985. At that time the population of Ethiopia was estimated to be slightly more than 40 million’.

Ethiopian Policy post-Famine

Following the famine the government made some changes to its agricultural policy but the shift was gradual, partial and constrained by political ideology. The key elements of the Marxist inspired policy remained. Land continued to be state owned and the emphasis on State Farms and collectivised producer cooperatives also continued. Policies such as resettlement and villagisation were maintained despite their links to the famine’s severity although after 1986 the emphasis given to resettlement reduced.

Peasant farmers still faced restrictions on selling surplus produce in markets and the government maintained a monopoly on grain marketing through the Agricultural Marketing Corporation (AMC) which forced farmers to sell at state-set low fixed prices. There was increased attention to agricultural research and extension, including through the Institute of Agricultural Research (IAR). International donors began to push for better famine early-warning systems and support for drought- resistant crops.

In 1983 during my visit for the EEC Commission I had seen an example of what life was like in a producer cooperative as part of a field visit. A peasant's work was classified into 64 different tasks and the local party cadre would use this list to assess what the peasant was contributing to the collective effort of the cooperative. This metric was then used to allocate earnings and benefits to the individual from the overall cooperative. All this with pencil and paper. It was madness of a high order!

In two further visits in 1986 and 1988 I had the opportunity to gain further insights into different aspects of Ethiopian life, politics and policy.

I attended a National Workshop on Food Strategies for Ethiopia organised by the Office of the National Committee for Central Planning on 8-13 December 1986. I did so as an observer on behalf of the EEC Commission, one of the sponsoring agencies of the Workshop.

In October-November 1988 I spent four weeks in Ethiopia leading a four-person team to conduct an evaluation of the Institute of Agricultural Research (IAR) in a study commissioned by the UNDP and FAO.

National Workshop on Food Strategies for Ethiopia, December 1986

The workshop was held in Alamaya University of Agriculture in Dire Dawa, Alemaya. Some 100 people attended, representing the Office of the National Commission for Central Planning; regional planning offices; government ministries (Agriculture, Health, Industry, Domestic Trade, State Farms), the Institute of Agricultural Research (IAR), RRC, the Science and Technology Commission, Addis University, Alemaya University of Agriculture, the Office of the Central Committee of the Workers Party of Ethiopia and 20 participants from international organisations.

The workshop proceedings revolved around three themes: food production systems; food consumption and nutrition, marketing and processing; information and databases improved planning and implementation. 30 papers were presented to the workshop, many of them of high quality.

While I recall the workshop as consisting of robust debate, my report on the proceedings, prepared for the EEC Commission, indicates that some politically sensitive topics were not seriously discussed. The role of State Farms was not debated to any degree. It was admitted that the rapid expansion of State Farms had given rise to a number of problems. The output of State Farms was channelled through the AMC. There were ambitions at that stage that State Farms should contribute to the future of export earnings.

My report concluded: 'In summary, the workshop was extremely useful in that it gathered together an enormous amount of data, previously unavailable to a wide audience. Its incapacity to reach clear and unequivocal recommendations on a number of the main issues facing the agricultural sector reflects the major political tensions and uncertainties surrounding these issues'.

For me, the best paper presented was 'Ethiopia's food security problems and prospects' by Professor Mesfin Wolde-Mariam.

Mesfin was born in 1930 and educated in Addis. He had a BA from Punjab University and a PhD from Clark University, USA where his doctoral thesis focus was on rural vulnerability to famine in Ethiopia, later turned into a classic book on the subject 'Rural Vulnerability to Famine in Ethiopia, 1958 to 1977'. A subsequent book was 'Suffering under God's Environment', a study of the plight of the rural peasant in North Central Ethiopia (1991).

His paper to the workshop demonstrated a deep understanding of Ethiopian culture, economy and society, its agricultural system and peasant motivation. It concluded by noting that 'It would be hard to transform agricultural production without solving the deeply ingrained subsistence mentality of the peasants. This will require development administrators who can win the genuine affection, respect and confidence of the peasants. It is only by planning and working with them rather than for them that it may be possible to weaken the subsistence mentality and to open the psychological vistas for new and greater possibilities'. **The paper concluded by a statement of 'eight possibilities'. Possibility Eight stated: 'It is possible for this generation to eliminate the threat of famine from Ethiopia and to re-establish the honour and dignity of its people'.**

It was obvious that Mesfin was highly regarded among the Ethiopian participants at the workshop. He had a history of independence and dissidence dating back to the era of Haile Salassie. He was regarded with suspicion and disapproval by the Derg, for his independent critique of government policy and advocacy of civil liberties. He was seen as a moral authority on human suffering, especially in the aftermath of the famine. He explicitly disentangled famine from natural causes, instead asserting that it arose from systematic oppression. This challenged the Derg's official narrative which blamed the famine on

drought and denied structural blame. Mesfin was part of a small cohort of Ethiopian intellectuals who pushed back against authoritarian control.

I spent some time - all too short - with Mesfin in 1986 and again during my visit in 1988. He retired from Addis Ababa University in 1991, which gave him more time to develop his activism. In 1991 he co-founded the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRC) and served as its chair until 2005. In 2005, he joined the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD). He was arrested and imprisoned on charges which were widely condemned as politically motivated: he was pardoned and released in mid-2007.

After his release, he continued writing, publishing essays and books until his death in 2020. The current Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed remembered him as 'An icon of the supremacy of thought' and 'a defender of nonviolent activism'.

It was an honour to have met and known him, even briefly.

Evaluation of the Institute of Agricultural Research (IAR), October-November 1988

I agreed to lead an evaluation of the Ethiopian IAR at a dinner party in Rathmines in July 1988. That was possible in those less formal days.

The IAR had been established in 1966 and was Ethiopia's first nationally coordinated agricultural research system. Its mandate included formulating national agricultural research policy, conducting research across multiple agroecological zones and coordinating a network of regional stations and sub centres.

Another guest at the party was a UNDP official who was responsible for organising the evaluation in partnership with FAO.

I was then at an important turning point in my career. I had spent 10 years (1973-83) working with the EEC Commission. Seven of those years had been working on development issues, three of which had been in Africa. I had been in two EEC delegations as agricultural advisor, two years in Ivory Coast and one in Malawi.

Returning to Ireland in 1983, I had served for five years as senior economist in ACOT, the farm advisory and education service. In 1987, major cutbacks were introduced to restore order to the public finances, including the merger of ACOT and An Foras Taluntais (AFT) to create Teagasc. As part of this process, the government had established a redeployment scheme enabling a limited number of ACOT and AFT officials to compete for positions in the civil service. I had been offered and had accepted the position of Chief Economist in the Department of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (DAFF). I had committed to take up that position on 1 October 1988.

The UNDP fellow guest judged my career profile sufficiently relevant to suggest that I lead the evaluation team he was setting up, even though I had no experience of leading evaluations. The evaluation was due to take place over four weeks in October - November.

He was still looking for other members of the evaluation team and eventually found three others: a former Minister for Agriculture from Sudan; a local Ethiopian civil servant; and the FAO Chief Economist.

In light of this unexpected development, my immediate challenge was to approach DAFF to say that while I was committed to starting with them on 1 October, two weeks later I wanted to take a month off to lead an evaluation in Ethiopia for UNDP/FAO. Fortunately, they agreed to this unusual proposal.

The evaluation process started in October with a briefing in the FAO in Rome. The evaluation team assembled in Addis mid-October. Over the next four weeks we travelled extensively within Ethiopia visiting a number of the main IAR research centres.

The evaluation team completed its report in mid-November covering institutional performance, organisational structure, research outputs, and recommendations for improvements. The report was published by UNDP/FAO in 1989, 'Institute of Agriculture Research, Ethiopia: Project Findings and Recommendations', accessible in the UN's Dag Hammarskjöld Library.

I do not know to what degree the report's recommendations were implemented.

In 1995, as part of the government's decentralisation policy, many of the IAR centres were transferred to regional governments, creating regional agriculture research centres (RIAs). In 1997 the IAR was restructured and renamed the Ethiopian Agricultural Research Organisation (EARO). In 2005, EARO was renamed the Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR), aligning with expanded federal coordination and advisory responsibilities. EIAR now coordinates the federal agricultural research centres, alongside regional Institutes (RARIs) and agricultural research in higher learning institutions (HLIs).

Changing Ethiopian Politics and Agrifood Policy, 1991-2004-2015-2025

The late 1980s saw a series of internal and external events which led to the fall of the Derg regime. The TPLF grew in strength during the 1980s, becoming a key force in the armed opposition. The Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was formed in 1989 as a coalition of rebel movements led by the TPLF. Meanwhile, the EPLF was making major military gains in the north and took control of most of Eritrea by 1990. On 28 May 1991, EPRDF forces entered Addis, effectively ending the Derg regime. Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe for sanctuary, where he still lives, in his 80s.

A transitional government of Ethiopia was formed under Meles Zenawi, leader of the EPRDF and TPLF. Eritrea was allowed to hold a referendum and declared its independence in 1993, bringing to an end the 30-year struggle for independence from Ethiopia. A new federal constitution was adopted in 1994, enshrining federalism and the right of nationalities to self determination. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was formally established in 1995, with Meles Zenawi as its first Prime Minister.

In parallel to these internal political developments, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 meant that Ethiopia lost its main military and economic backers and became increasingly isolated internationally.

The change in government in 1991 led to major changes in agrifood policy, marking a clear departure from the Derg's centralised command and control model. Price controls were lifted, grain markets were liberalised, and farmers could sell produce in open markets without restriction. While land remained state-owned in line with the constitution, land redistribution ended in most regions.

The core post-1991 strategy was the 'Agricultural Development-Led Industrialisation' (ADLI) strategy. Agriculture was seen as the driver of economic transformation; there was a massive expansion of extension services and the promotion of high-yield varieties, fertiliser, irrigation and soil conservation. The emphasis on smallholders as the engine of growth was supported by public investment in roads, credit and safety nets.

The 1990s were a rebuilding decade for Ethiopian agriculture. While policy changes were more favourable to smallholders, the structural constraints of poverty, poor infrastructure, and institutional weaknesses limited the sector's growth potential. Agricultural GDP grew at an average of 2.5% to 3% per annum in the 1990s, better than during the Derg era but lower than the rate of population growth at 3%. However, the reforms of the 1990s laid the groundwork for the stronger agricultural growth achieved in the 2000s.

The launch of the 'Uniquely African Green Revolution' by UNSG Kofi Annan at the 2004 AU Summit in July 2004 was a milestone moment for African agricultural policies and of particular significance to Ethiopia. I was then a member of the UN Millennium Project's Hunger Task Force, formed to draw up a working plan to deliver Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 aimed at halving hunger by 2015. The Hunger Task Force was present for Kofi Annan's speech and for a subsequent meeting with him.

Kofi Annan's vision for a 'Uniquely African Green Revolution' was rooted in boosting smallholder productivity without repeating the ecological and social problems evident in Asia's and Latin America's earlier Green Revolution (1960s-1970s); focusing on sustainable, farmer centred, and market responsible agriculture; delivered by African leadership and institutions. This was the vision that led to the establishment of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) launched in 2006.

Kofi Annan's speech had particular significance for Ethiopia. While Ethiopia was already pursuing its ADLI policy since the 1990s, the speech provided continental legitimacy and global support for the approach. It reinforced Ethiopian emphasis on supporting smallholder farmers, improved seeds, fertiliser use, and infrastructure.

The speech was also a catalyst for greater donor and private sector engagement in Ethiopian agriculture. Ethiopia became a key partner in African wide initiatives such as the CAADP (Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme) which had been launched in

2002 and in AGRA when it was established in 2006. It reaffirmed Ethiopia's role as a regional agricultural leader and encouraged institutions and further reform.

This led to significant policy changes, most notably the introduction of the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in 2005 and the Seqota Declaration in 2015.

The **PSNP** was launched in 2005, with donor support, as a shift away from emergency food aid to a more structured, long-term social protection scheme for chronically food insecure households. Its main target areas were drought-prone and food insecure districts, primarily Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, and SNNP regions. The target population was initially 5 million people, but this was expanded to 8-10 million by the 2010s.

Numerous evaluations have shown that the PSNP has had significant and mostly positive impacts, including improved food security, asset protection, income diversification, shock resilience, women's participation and infrastructure development. There have also been criticisms, including payment delays and targeting issues.

The scheme is now in its fifth five-year iteration, PSNP V (2021-25). It is regarded as one of Africa's largest and most influential social protection programs. It has transformed the Ethiopian approach to food insecurity from crisis response to resilience building, with millions benefiting. While challenges persist, it remains a global model for safety net systems in fragile and food insecure contexts.

In July 2015, the government launched the **Seqota Declaration** which marked a landmark commitment to end child undernutrition by 2030. This reflected a shift towards integrated multisectoral nutrition programming, critical in a country where undernutrition had long been a major development challenge. The key official designing and driving this program was **Dr Sisay Sinamo Boltena** who was a senior programme manager in the Ministry of Health.

In 2015 I was serving as Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement and attended the launch of the Seqota Declaration. Ethiopia had been an early member of the SUN Movement which had been launched by Irish Foreign Minister Micheal Martin and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2010.

The Seqota Declaration is a major and ambitious political national commitment. During its innovation phase (2016-20) in 40 pilot districts, stunting levels among children under 2 years dropped off by an annual rate of 3%, significantly faster than before. By 2022 the programme was averting 95,000 cases of stunting. It expanded in 2021 to 240 districts and to 334 districts in 2024/25. As of July 2025, 1.4 million children and 2.8 million pregnant and lactating women have received services under the programme. The programme structure is based on a multisectoral nine-ministry framework, under the leadership of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Seqota Declaration represents a rare success story in accelerating stunting reduction, especially through its multisectoral coordination and its innovative delivery mechanisms. Its

rapid impact in the pilot areas propelled a massive scale up across the country, while building systems for sustainability and local ownership. The approach has been validated internationally and serves as a replicable model for other countries facing child undernutrition challenges. The African Development Bank (AfDB) designated it as a model initiative for Africa, committing \$48 million support in 2022 to expand the approach to six additional African countries.

In summary, over the past four decades Ethiopia has experienced a disastrous period of authoritarian rule, a major famine, but for most of the past 25 years has had a period of relative political stability which has delivered impressive economic growth.

Over the period 2004-2015, Ethiopia had one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, averaging 10-11% GDP growth per annum. The growth was driven by massive investment in infrastructure, agricultural growth, and the services and construction sectors. Agriculture's share of GDP fell from about 50% in 2000 to about 32% by 2020. The poverty rate dropped from 44% in 2000 to 23.5% in 2020, although rural/urban disparities, youth unemployment and gender gaps persisted.

The agrifood sector has made a key contribution to national economic progress. In 2000 to 2010, agriculture grew at an average annual rate of 6 to 7%: in 2000-2020, growth continued, though with more fluctuations due to climate shocks and market disruptions; post-2020, growth slowed due to conflict, (notably in Tigray), drought, and global price shocks. Yet, recovery efforts and climate resilience strategies were initiated.

Notable advances were achieved in productivity, food security and systems, and nutrition.

Cereal yields more than doubled between 2000 and 2020. Ethiopia achieved self sufficiency in cereals at points although food security remained vulnerable to drought and conflict. Child stunting reduced from about 58% in 2000 to about 37% by 2019, partly due to the success of the Seqota Declaration. The PNSP played a major role in reducing food insecurity

The African continent still faces major challenges of hunger and food insecurity: these are discussed in more detail below. Also discussed is the opportunity for Ethiopia, based on its policies and performance, to play a critical leadership role in promoting change at regional and continental level.

Ireland's positioning at UNFSS+4 Stocktaking Meeting, July 2025

Ireland has a strong track record of contributing to UNFSS meetings in 2021 and 2023 and to other food-related international meetings. In 2021, President Michael D Higgins and Taoiseach Micheal Martin both made notable interventions. In March 2025 the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) was held in Paris. Ireland committed €1 billion to nutrition over the four year period 2026-2029 which meant that, on a per capita basis, it was the largest contributor of all the countries present. Ireland also contributed to agreement on other policies seeking to raise the priority given to nutrition in other national and international fora.

At the UNFSS +4 Stocktaking, the Irish delegation was led by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) Secretary General Brendan Gleeson. His main priorities involved setting out a distinctly Irish position at a number of meetings organised by the Rome Based Agencies (RBAs) with whom Ireland has an ongoing productive relationship.

WFP: Building resilience in the context of protracted humanitarian crises; aligning financing with long-term transformation; and strengthening partnerships for inclusive action.

FAO: Putting agrifood strategies into practice, drawing on learnings from the AU, Zambia, Rwanda, Chile, Ireland and University College London (UCL)

FAO: Contributing to an investment dialogue organised on public private partnerships (PPPs) as a lever for food system transformation; driving co-benefits and inclusion in PPP design; and scaling PPP interventions during an era of shrinking ODA.

He also engaged in a wide range of bilateral meetings with Irish partners, at UN, Africa-wide and country level.

The Irish delegation also contributed to the final version of the Outcomes Document of the Summit. This Document asserts the commitment of all signatories to food system transformation and builds momentum for its delivery.

Part 2: Proposals for the Future Ireland-Africa Partnership

The historical relationship between Ireland and Africa

Ireland has had a multistranded relationship with Africa, mainly over the last two centuries, at governmental level and involving the legacy of missionaries and NGOs.

The contribution of Irish missionaries from the mid-19th century until the late 20th- early 21st century when their numbers declined, has been overwhelmingly positive. That contribution was mainly in education and health and, from the 1960s onwards as African countries embarked on their independence journey, in nation-building.

Ireland opened its first Embassy on the African continent in Lagos in 1961 following Nigeria achieving independence in 1960. Ireland's first experience of UN peacekeeping was the 1960 deployment to the UN operation in the Congo. In November 1960, nine Irish soldiers were killed in the Niamba ambush, the first combat victims for the Irish defence forces overseas. This had a big impact on Irish public opinion but its legacy was a strong public awareness of the importance of, and pride in, Ireland's contribution to international peacekeeping and a realisation that there could be a price to be paid in that role.

In the 1960s Ireland strongly supported Africa as part of the UN Decade of Decolonisation. From the 1970s onwards, the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) played a significant role in assisting certain African countries, particularly in strengthening public administration. Its work focused on capacity building and technical assistance, notably in Zambia and Tanzania.

Ireland's development cooperation program commenced in 1974: its two central priorities were Africa and food and nutrition security. The collaboration between Ireland and Africa strengthened over the subsequent four decades. The policy statement 'Ireland and Africa: Our partnership with a Changing Continent' (2011) marked a shift from a dominantly development-assistance focus toward a more comprehensive approach integrating political, economic and trade diplomacy alongside continued aid efforts.

This shift was further accentuated with 'Global Ireland: Ireland's Strategy for Africa to 2025' (2019) which set as an objective the doubling of Ireland's diplomatic footprint in Africa by 2025. In addition to expanding diplomatic presence, this strategy emphasised strengthening political partnerships, and enhancing trade and investment across the African continent in collaboration with an EU framework.

The Irish contribution went beyond what the government did. Many notable individuals and organisations have made major contributions to the Ireland Africa relationship.

Roger Casement played a pioneering role in exposing human rights abuses in the Congo (presently Democratic Republic Of Congo (DRC)) under King Leopold II of Belgium at the turn of the 20th century. His Congo Report (1903-1904) fuelled international reform campaigns and laid the foundation for modern human rights advocacy.

Eamon de Valera's support for Ethiopian sovereignty following the Italian invasion in 1935 has already been mentioned.

In 1984-1985, Bob Geldof aroused the conscience of the world about the famine in Ethiopia; organised Band Aid and Live Aid which raised \$200 million and helped save a large number of lives.

In 1992, Irish President Mary Robinson drew world attention to a famine in Somalia through her visit to the country and her subsequent visit to the UN.

In 2003, Bono played a critical role in influencing President George W Bush to introduce PEPFAR which is estimated to have saved 25-26 million lives until it was drastically scaled back in January 2025 as a result of the Trump Administration's aid cuts.

Ireland will hopefully continue to produce other outstanding individuals into the future.

Concern started as Africa Concern and was founded in 1968 by John and Kay O'Loughlin Kennedy in response to the Biafra famine. Concern started work in Ethiopia in 1973 and is still there 52 years later. It currently works in 15 African countries.

Trocaire and Goal played important roles during the 1984-85 Ethiopian famine and have continued working in the country since then. In 2025 Trocaire works in 9 African countries and Goal in 7. Self Help Africa works in 10 African countries.

All the major Irish NGOs have been obliged to review the scale and nature of their operations in Africa in light of the major aid cuts by most OECD countries in 2025. This review will also involve decisions on their mode of operation and an increased emphasis on localisation.

Looking to the future, it is expected that other Irish actors including the private sector and the universities will expand their relationships with Africa. In that context, the establishment by the government of the broad-based Ireland Africa Rural Development Committee (IARDC) in 2024 is a timely and relevant initiative.

Key elements of the Future Context: Conflict, Food Insecurity and Geopolitics

The Summit was part of a broader and longer-term context relating to food and climate involving four important international meetings during 2025, the N4G, the International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4), UNFSS+4 Stocktake and COP 30. That context is also framed by the rapidly changing geopolitical situation, influenced, largely but not exclusively, by major political and policy changes since the Trump administration took office in January 2025. One important dimension of this is the drastic reduction in Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) by most OECD countries, which is likely to severely impact the poorest African countries most dependent on ODA.

I have addressed the implications of this context for Irish foreign policy in a paper 'Changing Irish Foreign Policy in an Era of Turbulence' (June 2025). This paper has been

shared with a number of political leaders and senior officials. Tanaiste Simon Harris was positive towards the paper and suggested it should be taken into account when the 'Global Ireland 2040' strategy is being developed, due for completion by end-2025. I am sharing the June paper, along with this paper, for easy reference.

There are a wide range of issues which will influence the context within which Ireland will define its future African policy. This paper confines itself to discussing two key issues: the impact of conflict on hunger and food insecurity, and the changing geopolitics.

Conflict and its implications for hunger and food insecurity is a critical issue. Evidence is drawn from the '2025 Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC)', produced by the Global Network Against Food Crises, and the 'State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) Report - 2025'.

The GRFC covers 53 countries and deals with the situation in 2024. Some 295 million people - approximately 22.6% of the population - in these countries experienced acute food and nutrition crises insecurity (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) phase 3 or above). This marks the highest total and share in the report's nine year history, a 5% increase year-on-year over 2023. Conflict and insecurity remained the largest single driver, impacting about 140 million people across 20 countries. Economic shocks affected 60 million in 15 countries. Weather extremes, including El Niño related droughts and floods, were the main drivers in 18 countries, impacting 96 million people.

The level of conflict was most intense in regions like the Sahel, East Africa, and the Great Lakes. The Sahel saw record militant violence in 2024, responsible for over half of all Islamist-related conflict globally. South Sudan, Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia and Burkina Faso were among the global hotspots. The Global Peace Index (GPI) 2025 found that more than half of African countries reviewed showed a deterioration in peace, with increased militarisation and retreating peacebuilding investment.

Of the report's 53 analysed countries, 26 faced full-scale nutrition crises. Critical hotspots included Sudan, Gaza, Yemen and Mali. An estimated 37.7 million children (6 to 59 months old) suffered acute malnutrition, of whom about 10 million were severely malnourished and required urgent treatment.

The SOFI report estimated that 638-720 million people, about 8.2% of the global population, experienced hunger in 2024, a slight decline from 8.5% in 2023 and 8.7% in 2022. However, hunger rose sharply in Africa and Western Asia. In Africa, over 307 million people - some 20% of the population - were food insecure in 2024. By 2030, about 512 million people are expected to remain chronically undernourished, with nearly 60% of them living in Africa.

The implications of the **changing geopolitical situation** for Africa are complex. The US has signalled a significant reduction in its future engagement with Africa, as part of its foreign policy review in April 2025. The abolition of USAID and the massive reduction in aid programmes, as well as the scaling back of the highly effective PEPFAR (the US President's

Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) programme, will have negative impacts for many poorer African countries.

Certain US political and civic leaders are concerned that this policy shift will damage US Africa relations, will increase the possibility of greater Chinese and Russian influence in Africa, and will have negative implications for security. On the other hand, President Trump's style of 'strong man leadership' and his transactional approach to politics is popular with a number of African leaders.

On a more positive note, African leaders have made serious political commitments to improve the continent's hunger and food insecurity situation.

In CAADP, Africa has had a coherent policy framework for its agrifood policy since 2002. But as the bi-annual CAADP reviews have shown, implementation and delivery of impact have fallen well short of objectives.

In 2024, the AU Commission conducted a major review of CAADP through 13 working groups. Ireland provided technical assistance to this process. This was a broad-based process, involving AU officials, national representatives, development partners, civil society, youth, women's groups, experts and private sector actors.

The outcome has been the Kampala Declaration, signed off by an Extraordinary AU Summit in Kampala in January 2025. The Declaration is a 10-year (2026-35) transformation agenda for African food systems. Its overarching vision is a shift from traditional agriculture-led growth towards a holistic food systems approach, embracing the entire value chain from production to consumption, inclusive of nutrition, resilience, sustainability and trade integration. There is a strong emphasis on the need to make African agriculture more climate resilient.

The key objectives of the **Kampala Declaration** are to:

- Transform and build resilient and sustainable agrifood systems
- Tackle all forms of malnutrition.
- Boost food output and productivity.
- Reduce post harvest losses and expand trade.
- Increase processed local food share.
- Increase investment and inclusive finance, requiring an estimated \$100 billion from public and private sources over 10 years
- Advance inclusive and equitable livelihoods.
- Build institutional coherence and governance.

AUDA/NEPAD and the AU Commission are mandated to support national domestication of the agenda and integration into national plans.

Proposed priorities for Ireland's future Partnership with Africa

Ireland's foreign policy should aim to be as impactful as possible in line with Irish core values. The forthcoming strategies, Global Ireland 2040 (end-2025) and the new Africa strategy (2026) will provide the political framework for Irish foreign policy for the next decade. The link between conflict and food insecurity will be a crucial part of the unfolding context.

Given its likely increasing geopolitical and economic importance, Africa should feature more prominently in Ireland's future foreign policy. My June paper argues that, over the next five years - the projected term of the current government - Ireland has an opportunity to make a distinctive contribution to international affairs.

In 2025 Ireland has already made a significant contribution to N4G, FfD4 and the UNFSS+4 Stocktaking conferences and it has the potential to help make COP 30 a success. The 2026 Irish EU Presidency is a major opportunity to shape the EU's direction across a range of political and economic issues, including towards Africa. Ireland will campaign to be a member of the UN's Human Rights Council for 2027-2029 and will hopefully be elected. Work will commence in the next couple of years on framing the successor strategy for the SDGs in the post-2030 period.

This range of opportunities will represent a considerable challenge to the Irish political and official systems. But having an Irish policy which gives a high priority to African development possibilities, and which also serves to influence Irish input to EU policy, should be a significant advantage.

This paper proposes that **four key priorities** should feature within both the Global Ireland 2040 and Ireland's future Africa strategy:

1. Maintain Ireland's leadership in nutrition policy and practice.
2. Be a major supporter of Africa's move to sustainable food systems in implementing the Kampala Declaration.
3. Partner with Africa in an increased priority for the food/climate agenda.
4. Invest in the Ireland-EU-Africa relationship and bring it to a new level of strategic geopolitical importance

These proposed priorities are consistent with long-standing Irish policies which have been successful. A strong crosscutting agenda of gender equality, a key feature of Ireland's current development policy 'A Better World' (2019), should operate across the four priorities. For each of these priorities, Ireland should seek to be a policy and thought leader in its advocacy.

Nutrition

Ireland introduced its development cooperation strategy in 1974. Since then, the strategy has had two central priorities: reducing hunger and improving food security; and Africa.

These two priorities coincided with each other during the 1970s/80s/90s when responding to famines and food crises, such as occurred in Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia, was central to Ireland's aid programme. Such crises became less frequent during the 2000s with early warning systems and response capacities in operation. Irish policy on food and nutrition security accordingly evolved to reflect the changing nature of the global food economy and the recognition of the triple burden of malnutrition - undernutrition, micronutrient deficiency, and overweight and obesity - 'Malnutrition in all its forms'.

Over the past 20 years, a more specific nutrition focus has been prioritised within Irish strategy. This has drawn on international insights about the crucial importance of good nutrition on early childhood development and on the long-term damaging impact of inadequate early nutrition on a person's physical and mental development. The same argument applies at the level of a country's economy

The 2006 World Bank report 'Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development: A Strategy for Large Scale Action' was a landmark publication that significantly shifted how nutrition was viewed within development policy. Its importance lay in elevating nutrition from a narrow public health issue to a central pillar of economic development, poverty reduction and human capital investment.

Meera Shekar, Lead Health and Nutrition specialist at the World Bank, was the principal author and team leader of the report.

In 2007, another nutrition development occurred with an important Irish dimension- the adoption by the UN of a new policy to deal with severe acute malnutrition. In 2001, Valid International (Dr Steve Collins) and Concern (led by Howard Dalzell) initiated a research project aimed at developing a better model than the existing one to deal with severe acute manifestation. Irish Aid financially supported the project. Pilot projects were established in Ethiopia and Malawi. The early results indicated that a community based approach rather than the-then current model based on therapeutic health centres gave reduced mortality rates and increased the share of the population affected by undernutrition that could be reached. Further positive results emerged over the 2003-2006 period. In 2007, the UN adopted its new policy 'Community Management of Acute Malnutrition' (CMAM). Going from a pilot project over a six year period to a new international policy, which is now integrated into health systems worldwide, was an extraordinary achievement.

In 2007-2008, an international food price crisis occurred. Prices of the main staple crops, wheat, maize and rice, increased dramatically: there were food riots in over 30 countries. Food and nutrition security, having been largely taken for granted for the previous 30 years, was back on the political agenda.

In 2007 the Irish government set up a Hunger Task Force to identify how Ireland's foreign policy and aid budget could have its maximum impact on hunger and poverty. Its report concluded that hunger could be tackled by increasing the productivity of - mainly female - smallholder farmers in Africa; implementing programs focused on maternal and child

nutrition; and ensuring political commitment, at national and international level, to give hunger the absolute priority deserved. It recommended that Ireland, through its government and civil society organisations, should seek to provide leadership on hunger and nutrition issues, at national and international level.

The report was launched at the UN by UNSG Ban Ki-moon and Taoiseach Brian Cowen in October 2008 as the food price crisis was receding. The report's recommendations were regarded as timely and relevant. This led to Ireland attaining considerable political and policy influence, at EU and international level, in the following years.

In September 2010 the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement was launched at the UN by Irish Foreign Minister Micheal Martin and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The person who conceived of the SUN Movement and got it to the point of launch was the late Dr Sir David Nabarro who sadly died on 25 July 2025 as he was preparing to attend the Summit. The Irish government has been a key supporter of the SUN Movement. As of July 2025, the SUN Movement includes 66 member countries, 4 Indian states and is supported by some 4,000 civil society organisations.

It was during that five year period 2006-2010 that Ireland committed to having nutrition as central to its development cooperation policy. In the intervening years up to 2025, that centrality has been consolidated, most recently exemplified by Ireland being the largest per capita contributor at the N4G Summits in both 2021 and 2025. In addition to financing, Ireland has been at the forefront of policy innovation in regard to nutrition. This leadership position is valuable and should be maintained in future Irish foreign policy.

Africa's push for sustainable food systems

As outlined above, high-level political commitments have been made by African leaders to reduce hunger and food insecurity. The Kampala Declaration represents an impressive and ambitious agenda. But the key question is, can it be delivered upon or will it fall short in its delivery and outcomes as was the case of CAADP?

In addition to the high-level political commitment, there are grounds for optimism that the Declaration can be successfully implemented. A number of African countries, with Ethiopia a notable example, have shown that growth in the agrifood sector and rural economy can underpin wider economic growth.

There is an appropriate emphasis on **HOW** the Declaration can be delivered with AUDA/NEPAD and the AU Commission allocated responsibilities to support implementation at national level.

There are grounds for important partnerships between Africa, the EU and Ireland in delivering on the potential of the Declaration.

In 2018 the EU Commission and the AU Commission established the Task Force on Rural Africa (TFRA). The Task Force delivered its report 'An Africa- Europe Agenda for Rural

Transformation’ in March 2019. It proposed a new, equitable partnership between Africa and Europe focused on sustainable rural development and agrifood systems transformation.

The report outlined four core areas of actions:

- Supporting job creating economic activities in rural areas
- Investing in sustainable land and natural resource management
- Improving access to infrastructure and basic services.
- Supporting territorial governance and institutions.

The report recommended a three-stranded approach towards implementation: government to government; business to business; people to people.

The report was endorsed by the June 2019 AU/EU Agricultural Ministerial meeting and by subsequent ministerial meetings in 2021, 2023 and 2025. Its findings remain a solid basis for Africa-EU partnership.

Ireland has the potential to make a valuable contribution to Africa’s push for sustainable food systems. Irish Aid has seven long-term partner countries in sub-Saharan Africa, many of which involve programmes on food security, nutrition and sustainable food systems. It also supports projects and civil society engagement in an additional 15-17 African countries.

Ireland is committed to learning from its experiences of working in Africa. In April 2025, Ireland co-hosted with the government of Malawi and the World Bank a Regional Dialogue on Food Systems Community of Practice. Delegations from 10 East and Southern African countries participated, 5 of which at ministerial level.

The Dialogue aimed to share lessons learned, successes and challenges involved in transforming food systems across East and Southern Africa. The Dialogue featured a ‘Climate Resilient Innovation Marketplace’ showing innovative food system solutions from across the region, with participation from SMEs, research institutes and NGOs. This model of engagement should be extended to other African regions in any future expansion of Irish partnership with Africa on sustainable food systems.

Ireland’s own experience of agrifood transformation is of significant interest to a number of African countries. The agrifood sector has been an important part of Ireland’s wider economic transformation. It has moved from being a producer and exporter of commodity products some decades ago to the current modern food industry, increasing its value added, and exporting to nearly 200 countries worldwide. Food Vision 2030 has as its core objective that Ireland will be an international leader in sustainable food systems. Ireland is increasingly seen as a leader in achieving value added through its bioeconomy and agritech sectors.

This learning from both Ireland’s experience in Africa and its own domestic experience is why the paper proposes that Ireland should take a ‘political big bet’ in partnering with Africa in the implementation of sustainable food systems as part of

the Kampala Declaration agenda. Investing in developing relationships with AU Commissioner for Agriculture Moses Vilakati and the AU Special Envoy for Food Systems Dr Ibrahim Mayaki should be an essential part of this.

The food-climate agenda

The food-climate agenda is of great importance to Africa. The first Africa Climate Summit was held in September 2023 resulting in the Nairobi Declaration which formed the basis of a common African position at COP 28 in Dubai. An African Climate Summit will be held in Addis Ababa on 5-7 September, 2025. The aim of the Summit is to shift the discourse on Africa with respect to climate change, portraying the continent not merely as a victim of climate change but rather as a leader in solutions. The intended outcome is an 'Addis Ababa Declaration' which will provide for a common African position at COP 30 in Brazil next November.

The threats that climate change poses for food production are well-known. These are enshrined in the objective and goals of the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 2015 Paris Agreement. But it is only in recent years that COPs have started to treat agriculture as both a driver and a victim of climate change, pushing for integrated solutions under the COP 27 Sharm el-Sheikh joint work programme on implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security.

An advance was made in COP 28 in Dubai, which recognised food systems in the climate agenda, pledging to increase the number of countries including food and agriculture in their national climate plans. A major outcome of COP 28 was the 'Emirates Declaration on Sustainable Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems and Climate Action', signed by 159 countries, including Ireland.

For the upcoming COP 30 meeting, the link between climate, food and agriculture will be a central focus. In addition, the Brazilian Presidency has proposed that the 'Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty' should play a pivotal role, highlighting sustainable food systems, mobilising resources for climate adaptation, and strengthening global partnerships.

Ireland was an early joiner of the Global Alliance. Each country joining the Alliance is required to sign a Statement of Commitment covering three areas: policy cooperation and support; financial support; and knowledge support. Ireland's Statement noted its work on child wasting with UNICEF and WHO; its financial commitment of \$350 million over 2024-2027 to fight hunger and poverty; and its global effort to support food system transformation

The Brazilian Presidency has set out its priorities for COP 30. Its proposed **Action Agenda** has six thematic axes covering mitigation, adaptation and means of implementation. Theme 3 is 'Transforming Agriculture and Food Systems'. The sub-objectives for Theme 3 are: land restoration and sustainable agriculture; more resilient, adaptive, and sustainable food systems; and equitable access to adequate food and nutrition for all.

Obviously, the full Action Agenda will be the basis for Ireland's response at COP 30. This goes beyond the scope of this paper, but for food-climate issues and a response to Theme 3, some ideas are set out below.

Ireland has played a prominent role in recent COPs, with its main focus on increasing climate finance and putting in place a Loss and Damage Fund, and supporting the development of alert and early warning systems in developing countries. Progress on these issues were made at COP 28 in 2023 and COP 29 in 2024. Talks on climate finance at COP 30 will likely focus on leverage and mobilization of investments.

In its positioning on COP 30, Ireland should build on the progress made in domestic policy and should indicate future Irish intentions which resonate with the Brazilian Presidency's ambitions for COP 30.

A starting point is that Ireland has credible climate and agrifood policies which are integrated: the Climate Action Plan 2023 with its annual updates and Food Vision 2030 which publishes annual implementation reports. While both policies face challenges, they are in place and the government is fully committed to their implementation.

Food Vision 2030's central objective is that Ireland should be an international leader in sustainable food systems by 2030, a policy which it applies in its domestic and foreign policies. The first of its four core missions is to deliver a 'climate-smart environmentally sensitive agrifood system'.

Ireland has engagements in other international fora which should be factored into its positioning at COP 30. The internal workings of the UNFCCC are frustratingly slow. Hence support for the Brazil Action Agenda including its Mission 1.5° is essential. Frustration has led to many related initiatives being established which can move more rapidly and which bolster the work of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. The Brazilian Presidency is committed to these various initiatives and to advance them as part of COP 30's outcome.

Ireland works closely within the EU to advance the various UNFCCC initiatives and is a signatory to many of them. Ensuring that these are making progress as well as taking further initiatives that may be practical and useful should be core to Irish planning for COP 30 and for the forthcoming EU presidency in 2026.

The **FAO** has a highly influential role in policy on sustainable livestock production. . Former DAFM official Donal Coleman is chair of the FAO sub-committee on livestock. The FAO has developed a Global Agenda for Sustainable Livestock. The Global Agenda does not operate in isolation. Although it focuses on livestock, its connections with other areas, such as crops and forestry, are recognised. It also recognises the interdependence between different sectors, through the One Health approach which acknowledges the interconnections of human, animal, plant and ecosystem health.

The **Global Research Alliance (GRA)** on agricultural greenhouse gases is focused on research, development and extension of technologies and practices that will help to grow

more food and more climate resilient food systems without growing greenhouse gas emissions. Ireland is the current chair of the GRA, holding the position from 1.1.2025 until 30.6.2026.

These various perspectives, linking domestic climate and agrifood policy and at international level taking account of the FAO and GRA work, need to be synthesized into a coherent narrative relevant to the priorities of COP 30 and reflecting a considered Irish national position. There is an urgent need for a political decision that this narrative should be produced. Given the short time until COP, this work, which will require intensive and sustained collaboration between DCEE, DAFM and DFA, should start in early September.

Returning to the connection with Africa, areas of similarity between what emerges from the Irish narrative and the common African position arising from the Addis Ababa Declaration in September should be examined. One of the likely areas of convergence is probably around the issue of sustainable livestock production and land management. This potential area of common interest may be the basis for a shared advocacy at COP 30 and indeed into the future.

From the facts outlined above, this paper contends that Ireland has a highly relevant contribution to make to the success of COP 30. Ireland has already made an excellent contribution during 2025 to the N4G, the FfD4 and the UNFSS+4 Stocktaking meetings. Over and above what this means to the progress for each of these meetings, there is another important contribution: the reaffirmation that the multilateral system has a critical role to play in addressing global problems. This is a continuation of Ireland's support for the multilateral system which has been at the centre of Ireland's foreign policy since it joined the UN in 1955.

The strategic relationship between Ireland, Europe and Africa

This section of the paper focuses on Africa's role in a rapidly changing geopolitics and global economy. It discusses how the EU, with full Irish engagement, should aim to position itself as a privileged partner with Africa's own development agenda and in working within the Europe- Africa global region to maximise peace, promote political stability and economic progress.

Africa has many deep-seated problems, including conflict and related food and nutrition insecurity, undernutrition, acute poverty, and the negative impact of climate change. On the other hand, a convergence of demographic, economic, environmental, technological, and strategic factors suggest that Africa's geopolitical and economic importance is set to grow significantly over the coming decades.

Africa's population is projected to reach 2.5 billion by 2050, from just over 1.25 billion in 2025, accounting for a quarter of the global population. Over 60% of Africans are under 25, providing a 'youth bulge' and a massive workforce and consumer base, assuming adequate

investments in education, health, and employment. This also presents African governments with major challenges in generating jobs for its young people.

Africa's economic potential is exemplified by having some of the world's fastest growing economies e.g. Ethiopia, Rwanda, Côte d'Ivoire. Rapid urbanisation is expanding consumer markets. Africa's middle class is projected to reach over 1 billion by 2060. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTA) is set to become the world's largest free trade area by population, potentially boosting intra - African trade by over 50%.

Africa holds vast reserves of critical minerals (e.g. cobalt, lithium, rare earths, platinum), essential for the green and digital transitions. Africa has 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land, making it vital for global food security.

With the right investments and partnerships, the continent has the potential to become a key driver for global growth, innovation and strategic influence in the 21st century.

Unsurprisingly, many countries are seeking to engage with African countries to secure resources and markets through investments; establish geopolitical alliances and engage on climate and development agendas. The list is long.

Over the past 20 years, China has become Africa's largest trading partner, with trade surpassing \$250 billion in recent years. Africa is central to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with major investments in railways, ports, roads and energy. On the political and diplomatic front, there is an annual China Africa summit in Beijing which a large number of African heads of state and government attend.

India's engagement model revolves around capacity building, health, digital technology and trade. There is a large and influential Indian diaspora in East and Southern Africa.

Other significant players include the Gulf States (investment in agriculture, ports, logistics, and food security); Japan (technology, governance, human development); Russia (military cooperation with certain African countries, energy, grain diplomacy); Turkey (construction, education, religion, cultural diplomacy) and Brazil (agriculture, south south cooperation).

The EU's partnership with Africa is a strategic priority, focusing on investment, education, migration, and peace. There is a long tailed historic background to the Africa - Europe current relationship, dating back to arrangements which followed the colonial relationship which lasted up to the 1960s. The Lome Convention between the EEC and the African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states, signed in 1975 on behalf of the EEC by Irish Foreign Minister Dr Garret Fitzgerald during the first Irish Presidency, marked the start of the post-colonial era. Subsequent conventions were also signed by Irish Presidencies in 1979 and in 1984.

The AU-EU political relationship has evolved significantly since 2000, shifting from a development-focused donor-recipient dynamic to a more strategic partnership. Before the AU was founded in 2002, the relationship was framed by the ACP- EU framework under the

Lome Convention and later the Cotonou Agreement (2000). These relationships were rooted in trade, aid, trade preferences, and historical ties.

The first AU-EU Africa Summit in Cairo (2000) initiated a formal political dialogue between the two continents. In 2007, the joint Africa EU Strategy in Lisbon marked a major turning point with the aim of the AU and EU being equal strategic partners. The Strategy covered eight partnership areas, including peace and security, governance, trade, migration and climate. It sought to move beyond aid to mutual interests and global cooperation.

A number of AU-EU Summits have been held since 2007: Brussels (2014); Abidjan (2017); and Brussels (2022) which re-launched the partnership post-Covid. The main decision at the 2022 meeting was the agreement on the Global Gateway Initiative (GGI), committing €150 billion investment in African digital, green and transport infrastructure. This could be seen as Europe's counterpart to China's BRI. The leaders also adopted a 'Joint Vision for 2030 for a Renewed Partnership', aimed at building a common future through solidarity, security, peace, and sustainable prosperity. They also offered support for multilateralism and for Africa's role in global governance.

The seventh AU-EU Summit is scheduled for 24-25 November 2025 in Luanda, Angola. This will mark the 25th anniversary of the first Summit in Cairo in 2000.

In relation to agrifood and climate policies, the AU and EU have developed a mutual strategic partnership over the past two decades, reflected politically in the holding of six AU-EU Agricultural Ministerial conferences 2016- 2025.

The major areas of cooperation over the period included,:

- 2007: Joint Africa EU Strategy (JAES) covering a commitment to continental political partnership. The EU began budget support for sector- wide approaches, aligning with CAADP. A key programme was the Food and Nutrition Security, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation (FIRST) initiative (FAO-EU-AU)
- 2018 to 2021: New priorities emerged on transforming food systems, nutrition, resilience, and climate adaptation. The EU Green Deal 2019 positioned the EU global leader on climate, with Africa seen as a strategic partner. The AU began shaping its Africa common position on food systems, with EU support.
- 2019: The 3rd AU-EU Agricultural Ministerial conference signed a political declaration and launched the Rural Transformation Action Agenda with nine focus areas aimed at transforming rural Africa. This agenda was based on the report of the Task Force Rural Africa
- 2022: The GGI investment package of €150 billion included strong allocations for sustainable agriculture and food systems, climate adaptation, energy transition and biodiversity.

Ireland should continue to actively support the AU-EU institutional arrangements, both at Summit and at sectoral level.

Summary

This is an unusual paper, consisting of two parts: the first looking back over the past 50 years and drawing lessons from Ethiopian and African history; the second looking to the coming decades when Africa is likely to become a more significant geopolitical and economic player on the world stage. The connection between the two parts is that the lessons from the past are entirely relevant to the future. This is the context within which the paper concludes with proposals for what Ireland's priorities should be, in association with the EU, to partner with Africa for a better shared future.

The first part of the paper draws on the coincidence of five visits I made to Ethiopia over the 1983-2015 period which marked important points in Ethiopian history. In linking these occasions, the narrative covers Ethiopia's troubled political history since the 1970s; a bloody period of authoritarian rule; and a major famine in the 1980s which impacted not just Ethiopia but also led to the international community putting in place arrangements - early warning systems, response capacities - amounting to significant improvements in preventing future famines and responding to food crises

The two visits post-2000, in 2004 for Kofi Annan's speech on a 'Uniquely African Green Revolution' and in 2015, for the government's Seqota Declaration committing to the elimination of child stunting by 2030, were moments of great political and historic significance, specifically for Ethiopia but more generally for Africa.

The Ethiopian experience and success in its agrifood and social protection policies were taken account of in the development of the Kampala Declaration.

The second part of the paper proposes four priorities - nutrition, sustainable food systems, food and climate, and an enhanced strategic Ireland-EU-Africa geopolitical relationship - which should be key to an Ireland and European partnership with Africa over the coming decades.

For Africa to achieve its potential over these coming decades, it will have to be successful in two key areas - preventing and resolving conflict and developing its agrifood sector and rural economy. Both areas play to Irish strengths and should be central to Ireland's vision for its strategic relationship with Africa.

It is not suggested that Ireland, on its own, can play a significant role in conflict prevention and resolution in Africa. But Ireland should advocate, at African, UN and EU level, that conflict prevention and resolution should move up the political agenda, should be integral to the development agenda and should be better resourced. Where Ireland has the capacity to contribute to certain conflict situations in Africa, it should do so.

This paper has taken a long-term perspective in its analysis. In 2025, it will be 70 years since Ireland joined the UN and 52 years since Ireland joined the EEC, later EU.

The paper presents in some detail Ireland's experience and contribution over these two time perspectives and political frameworks.

The conclusion which may be legitimately drawn from the above narrative is that Ireland has a very credible record in promoting human rights, conducting peacekeeping, fighting against hunger and food insecurity, and generally operating as a good global citizen including serving on four occasions on the UN Security Council. In the past two decades, Ireland has made a notable contribution in prioritising food and nutrition security and in promoting sustainable food systems.

In assessing the present era of geopolitical flux and looking towards the future, the paper proposes that Ireland should build on its legacy and established strengths. It should identify a limited number of areas where Ireland has the credibility and capacity to have an influence on international policy which is disproportionate to its size.

In respect of Africa, a judgement must be made as to what are Africa's key needs and priorities and how Ireland's established strengths can be matched with them. This is the basis for the priorities proposed in this paper - nutrition, sustainable food systems, food and climate, and an enhanced Ireland-EU-Africa geopolitical relationship.

Looking to the months until end-2025, there appear to be three obvious priorities for Irish political leaders and policy makers:

Agree a coherent Irish position on food and climate for COP 30. This will require intensive collaboration between DCEE, DAFM and DFA, starting in early September. The Irish position should link domestic climate and agrifood policies with Ireland's international work involving the FAO and the GRA. The Irish position should be cross checked with what emerges from Africa's Addis Ababa Declaration, to be adopted in September, to see if there is a basis for a common Irish- EU- Africa advocacy at COP 30.

Prepare for the AU-EU Summit in Angola in November 2025. Preparations are in train for the AU-EU Summit in Luanda, Angola in November. A preparatory meeting of AU-EU foreign ministers in Brussels in May 2025 reaffirmed priorities such as peace and security, economic integration, green transition, digitalisation, migration, mobility, multilateralism and shared governance. While it is difficult for Ireland to secure a decisive influence, it would be important that the priorities advocated for in this paper are reflected in the preparation and the outcome of the Summit.

Agree on the priorities of Ireland's EU Presidency in 2026. Work has started but decisions need to be made on Ireland's priorities for its EU Presidency. There should be a distinctive African dimension included in the Presidency priorities, as has been the case in previous Presidencies. Such a dimension should be consistent with the vision Ireland will bring to its input into the preparation for the successor strategy to the SDGs.

23 August 2025.

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About the Author

Tom Arnold currently serves as Chair, Ireland Africa Rural Development Committee (IARDC); Chair, Governance Committee, Co-Centre for Sustainable Food Systems; board member of the Global FoodBanking Network (GFN); member, Global Panel for Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition (GLOPAN); member, Malabo Montpellier Panel; board member, John and Pat Hume Foundation; board member, Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation.

His previous roles include serving as Ireland's Special Envoy for Food Systems; Chair, Food Vision 2030 Strategy Committee; Chair, Ireland's National Task Team on Rural Africa; board member, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN); board member, Sight and Life Foundation. For the EU Commission, he chaired the High-level Expert Group for Food Systems Science (2021) and the Task Force Rural Africa (2019); Coordinator, Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement; Director-General, Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA); Chair, Irish Constitutional Convention; board member, Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice; member, Millennium Project's Hunger Task Force; member, Irish Hunger Task Force; member, Irish Government's Commission on Taxation; CEO, Concern Worldwide; Chair, Irish Times Trust; board member, Irish Times. Chief Economist and Assistant Secretary General, Irish Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM); Chair, OECD Committee of Agriculture; Administrator, EU Commission.

Tom has a degree in agricultural economics from University College Dublin (UCD) and master's degrees from the Catholic University of Leuven and Trinity College, Dublin. He is a member of the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) and an Honorary Life Member of the RDS.