



CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Towards a Legacy of Resilience

FAITH-LED FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION SUMMIT

December 4-5, 2025 | Kigali, Rwanda | Compiled by: Sophia Sanniti, James Wangu, Robert Mbeche, Carrick Reddin, Tina Nyunga, Eric Ruzigamanzi

Introduction

"If I don't interrogate myself as a faith leader, then it becomes difficult to go represent [food system transformation] to the community"

— Sr. Teresia Murungi, RGS, director of the Mission Development Office, Eastern Central Africa Province for the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

The Faith-led food systems transformation summit was convened by the World Resources Institute (WRI) and the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) in December 2024 in Kigali, Rwanda. This two-day event brought together a diversity of food system stakeholders, including faith actors, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and government representatives to discuss the opportunity presented by a faith-led food systems transformation. The summit was designed to explore how faith-based organizations (FBOs) are engaged in food systems transformation, with the goal of identifying accessible, relevant opportunities for intervention through inclusive multistakeholder collaboration.

Building from a recent WRI-KAICIID publication on the role of FBOs in food loss and waste (FLW) reduction (Sanniti et al. 2024), this summit aimed to achieve three main objectives: Examine the degree to which FBOs are involved in food system transformation; enhance food system transformation knowledge and awareness to demonstrate FBO mission alignment; and strengthen partnerships among FBOs and their Rwandan or East African food system stakeholders. As such, the summit included interactive workshops, presentations, and discussions designed to empower FBOs and stakeholders to take action within their communities. See Appendix A for the full summit agenda.

These efforts are part of a larger set of initiatives conducted by WRI and its partners to secure a sustainable food future. Through efforts such as the Accelerating Circular Economy for Food (ACE4Food) initiative, WRI is

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These conference proceedings reflect the presentations and discussions of participants and do not necessarily represent the views of the World Resources Institute or other participating institutions.

committed to catalyzing food systems transformation in Africa (Wangu et al. 2024). The initiative seeks to unlock the potential to promote circular food systems among farmers, SMEs, and global supply chains, including regenerative food production, FLW reduction, and the productive use of organic waste. More locally, the Circular Food Systems for Rwanda Program aims to improve the adoption of circular business models and practices by offering technical assistance and a multi-stakeholder policy platform (see <https://circularfoodsystemsrwanda.org/>). These ongoing activities demonstrate the strategic alignment, priority, and commitment from WRI with respect to this work and why WRI Africa presented a promising incubator for examining the deeper role of equitable and community-led partnerships, such as those with FBOs, in food system transformation.

Background

“It is high time for us to walk the talk and bring moral and spiritual dimensions to safeguard the well-being of all—especially access to water and food security—to all human beings and all life forms on earth.”

—Mussie Hailu, regional director of United Religions Initiative for Africa

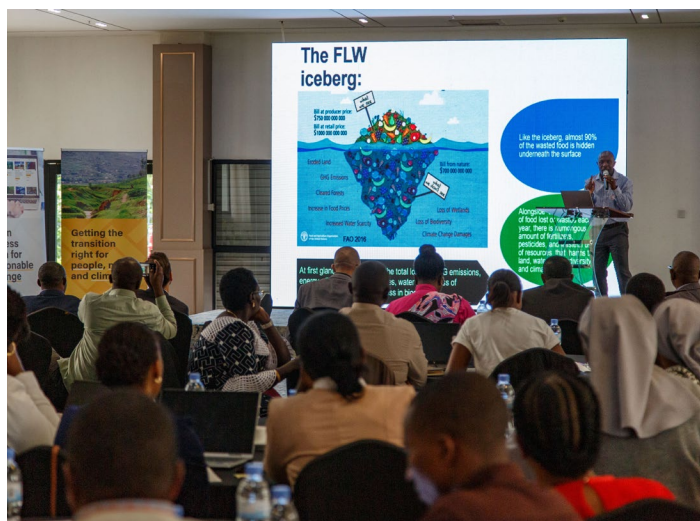
Sustainable food systems in Africa

Africa has vast land resources and the agricultural potential to feed its entire population. However, this self-sufficiency is often undermined by declining agricultural productivity as a result of unsustainable agricultural practices, climate shocks like droughts, conflicts, and a focus on export-oriented agriculture that is limiting local trade, local jobs, and local food security (Christiaensen 2020). A majority of African countries therefore face a paradox in their food systems: They consume what they do not produce and produce what they do not consume. Cash crops such as coffee, tea, tobacco, and cocoa are cultivated primarily for export, generating revenue that is then used to import subsidized staples like rice, maize, and wheat. This dependence on external markets perpetuates economic vulnerability and food insecurity through mass production at the expense of biodiversity and local population health.

Moreover, nearly 300 million people in Africa are going to bed hungry every day, which is compounded by about a third of Africa’s food being lost or wasted. These challenges are taking place while half of the youth population (about 200

million) are jobless. The food system is also associated with land degradation and conversion of forests and other ecosystems to agricultural lands and therefore high biodiversity loss (about 60 percent). This interconnected sector of agriculture, forestry, and other land uses contributes to 59 percent of the continent’s Green House Gas (GHG) emissions (FAO 2022).

FIGURE1 | Dr. Robert Mbeche of WRI speaking to the challenges facing Africa's food system



Source: Katie Garner for WRI.

Efforts to increase agricultural productivity are also associated with trade-offs—mainly high costs of agricultural inputs, decline in soil health, pollution of water bodies and soils, food safety challenges, and inequalities in the food systems. Africa's food systems remain unsustainable all the while projections anticipate Africa's population to double by 2050, further exacerbating food security issues (The Economist 2020).

The way food is produced, distributed, and consumed in Africa does not meet the needs of people, nature, or climate. By supporting regional crops and regional trade,

BOX 1 | Definitions

Food value chain: An integrated set of stages, activities, and stakeholders involved in getting food from its origins to the consumer's plate. This includes production, processing, distribution, and consumption, as well as various waste-management practices throughout the stages.

Sustainable food systems: Recognizing the interconnectedness of all stages of the food value chain, a sustainable food system aims to strike a balance among the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of food production and consumption. This includes minimizing the environmental footprint of food production; ensuring the economic viability of all stakeholders, including farmers, workers, and businesses; and addressing issues of food security and nutrition to ensure affordable access to all.

Food systems transformation: Fundamental changes to food system operations, including infrastructure, markets, and regulations, in ways that foster more equitable and sustainable alternatives.

Faith-based organizations (FBOs): Organizations, institutions, or actors whose values and mission are driven by spiritual or religious beliefs. FBO is an umbrella term for a wide range of actors, including religious congregations, schools, charities, or social service providers whose aim is to meet the spiritual, cultural, or social needs of its membership and community.

Sources: Woodhill 2023; Brandes et al. 2024.

African countries can stimulate local economies for employment and for the local provisioning of healthy and nutritious food. What is needed is a food systems transformation toward more resilient, productive, equitable, and environmentally sustainable food systems.

Sustainable production, distribution, consumption, and waste-management practices present the greatest opportunity to address Africa's issues of hunger and malnutrition, environmental degradation, and climate change. This includes agroecology and regenerative food production approaches that prioritize the needs and challenges faced by smallholder farmers and optimize sustainable interactions among plants, animals, humans and the broader environment. Sustainable production should also include efforts to reduce the rate of FLW through, among other efforts, improved transportation and storage; redistribution of food to new or alternative markets; and recovery, recycling, and reuse of the waste. Finally, shifting toward sustainable and healthy diets can reduce noncommunicable diseases, food safety issues, and diet-related mortality (WRI Africa 2025). The shift to sustainable food systems creates the opportunity for food production and consumption to move from being a driver of climate change to a critical solution.

WRI Africa works to catalyze sustainable production, distribution, consumption, and waste-management practices to address issues of hunger and malnutrition, environmental degradation, and climate change. WRI works with partners, including faith-based organizations and other diverse partnerships, across the food value chain to accelerate food system transformation.

Faith and food

FBOs encompass nonprofit organizations whose identities and missions are derived from religious or spiritual traditions. These FBOs are often involved in community development, social services, and humanitarian efforts. In Africa, FBOs are central to people's lives as key players in sectors such as education, peace building, agriculture, health, and the environment. In agriculture, FBOs facilitate essential services related to food security and poverty reduction including the provisioning of seeds and livestock, facilitating training, and nutrition education. FBOs can advance sustainable food systems through a variety of strategies from supporting farmers to produce food in ways that regenerate nature to reducing FLW and ensuring the productive use of waste. At the summit, a range of such strategies were shared, including advocating for policy reforms to support sustainable food practices; engaging in community-based food security efforts like local farming, seed banks, and direct food distribution; and promoting ethical agriculture through agroecology and fair trade. The importance of education and capacity building for resilient food systems was

FIGURE 2 | Opening prayer by Reverend Julie Kandema on summit Day 1



Source: Katie Garner for WRI.

circular food systems

However, a recent WRI study in Rwanda showed that there are gaps, barriers, and opportunities with respect to FBOs' actions on FLW (Sanniti et al. 2024). Through a survey with 236 Rwandan FBOs, two case studies, and an additional 20 interviews with representatives from various sectors (faith, NGO, government, private), WRI research found that FBOs play a crucial role in food security efforts in Rwanda, including nutrition programs, agricultural interventions, school kitchens and gardens, and resource distribution. Most FBOs surveyed considered FLW to be a relevant problem for their organization, but engagement remains mixed. In fact, 94 percent of FBOs surveyed lacked specific FLW reduction programs, but many reported several ongoing mission-driven initiatives supporting social and environmental well-being.

FBOs identified limited skills, knowledge, and awareness as the top barriers to engaging in FLW reduction, in addition to a lack of best practices, investment capital, and enabling policy environments. As such, opportunities for engagement include increased skills and knowledge, raising awareness, and establishing partnerships and networks. Strengthening partnerships among stakeholders is considered a primary contribution by FBOs to national and global development goals. This research initiated the beginnings of an ongoing dialogue with Rwandan FBOs to better understand the potential contribution of faith-led food systems transformations in East Africa and beyond. This conference marked an important milestone in this ongoing dialogue.

Summit background

Held over two days in Kigali, Rwanda, the summit featured a series of interactive workshops, presentations, and discussions designed to consult and empower FBOs and stakeholders to take action within their communities. A total of 70 people participated in the summit, representing faith, NGOs, the government, and private sectors mainly based in Rwanda and Kenya. On the first day, summit participants were introduced to the current state of food systems in East Africa and the opportunities for FBOs to act. This included two interactive workshops where participants mapped themselves onto the food value chain to identify ongoing and potential opportunities for engagement and action. On the second day, the summit began with reflections from various participants on what they learned from Day 1. Following this, a panel discussion was held exploring multisector collaboration for faith-led food systems transformation. The panel participants included members of the faith, government, private, and banking sectors. Participants then engaged in a

also emphasized, alongside the need for collaboration with NGOs, governments, and multistakeholder initiatives. Participants underscored how spiritual and ethical reflection, informed by theological frameworks, can drive environmental stewardship and food justice. Pursuing sustainable food systems provides a fertile space to engage in interfaith collaboration to maximize the effectiveness of such efforts.

The summit heard of many good practices of FBOs supporting sustainable food systems across the African continent. These include Catholic Relief Services-Uganda's solar-powered food dryers that reduced food loss and increased farmer income, Christian Aid's cold storage facilities for smallholder farmers in Kenya, and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency's promotion of drought-resistant agriculture and agroforestry practices, which increased productivity and smallholder farmers' resilience to climate change in Rwanda. These examples highlight how FBOs are making a significant impact in creating sustainable and

final interactive workshop where they developed action plans for engaging in food systems transformation. The summit concluded with a “fireside chat” between WRI global leadership representatives about how to sustain momentum for food systems transformation efforts through continued partnerships, policy advocacy, and long-term capacity building. More details on each of these sessions will be provided in the sections that follow.

We acknowledge there are many organizations and initiatives working in the faith and food space, and not all were able to attend the December summit. As the conversation continues, we will identify and engage these key stakeholders, many of whom were mentioned by summit participants as crucial to engage in the workshop learnings.

Mapping food value chain participation and aligning strategies

“Waste is not waste. Waste is gold.”

—Anonymous summit participant

On the first day of the summit, the participants were organized in small groups to conduct two mapping exercises. The first aimed to help participants understand the actual and potential areas that each actor engages in across the food value chains. Discussions from this exercise informed the second activity, which identified food system interventions of relevance to the participant organizations and their operations toward achieving sustainable food systems. Participants also explored potential areas for improvement and strategic alignment among organizational missions to enhance local food security. This section provides findings from these working sessions.

Ongoing points of engagement

Faith actors

The FBOs that participated in the workshop are actively engaged in food systems transformation, particularly by supporting smallholder farmers in adopting sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture and improving food security. Their efforts span across different aspects of the food value chain, from production to post-harvest handling, storage, and distribution. These observations demonstrate the great potential presented by interfaith collaboration to enhance and scale impact.

At the production stage, FBOs reported working with farmers to build resilient food systems by improving what they called “climate-smart” farming techniques, including organic, conservation, or regenerative techniques and hereby referred to as regenerative farming. One FBO runs school-based agricultural programs to teach students about sustainable farming and food conservation. Another FBO has conducted multiple educational and awareness campaigns on the benefits of organic products, including topics of seed heritage and local food sourcing. FBOs also reported the promotion of indigenous crop use to enhance food diversity and nutrition.

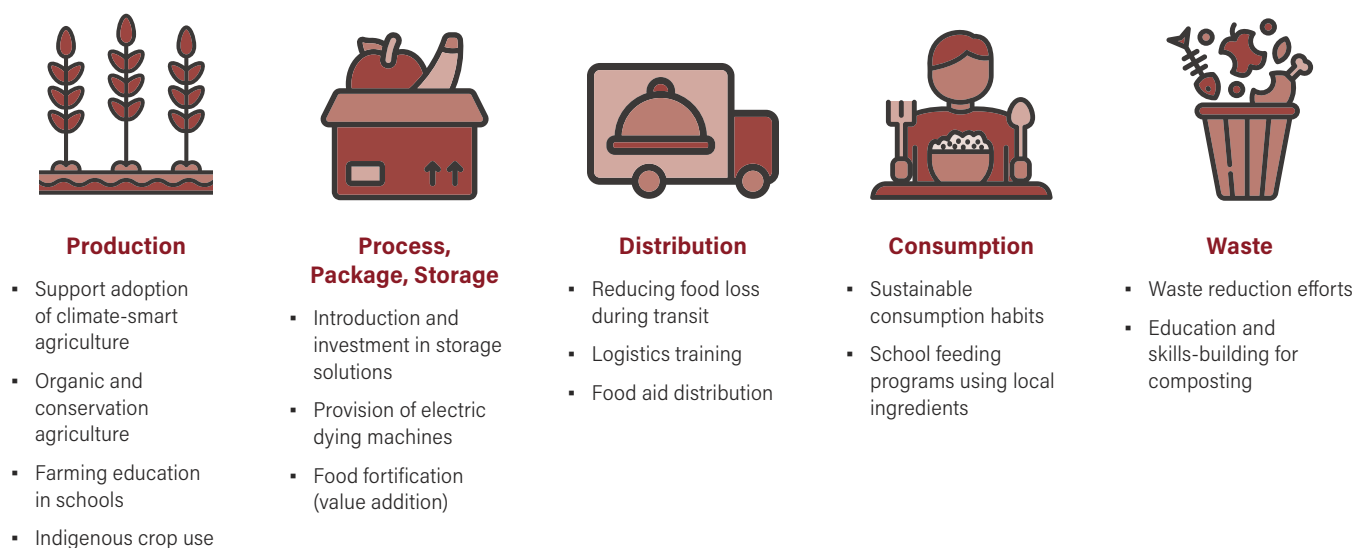
Many FBOs reported supporting farmers in the post-production stage, particularly on improving food handling, storage, and the prevention of loss and waste. Activities beyond the food production stage include supporting improved food storage and drying solutions;

FIGURE 3 | Summit participants engage in group discussions during workshops



Source: Katie Garner for WRI.

FIGURE 4 | Ongoing food actions identified by participating FBOs mapped along the food value chain



Source: Authors.

facilitating school feeding programs using locally sourced ingredients; promoting food fortification by engaging farmers in value-addition activities; and educating young farmers and communities on waste reduction, composting, and sustainable consumption habits. FBOs reported enhancing existing food distribution networks to minimize post-harvest losses by investing in cold storage and logistics training. Many FBOs are involved in the maintenance and distribution of emergency food aid.

Overall, it is indicative that the involvement of FBOs in food value chains is concentrated around production, post-harvest handling, and distribution stages.

Government and nongovernmental actors

The summit included several government actors providing services across various areas of the food value chain. These included an agency overseeing the food policy framework and supporting initiatives that promote a circular food economy. Another government actor present is engaged in applied research and policy development in the food sector, identifying gaps and proposing solutions for sustainable food production and distribution. Two others contribute to industrial food processing innovations and environmental sustainability initiatives. There were also two nongovernmental organizations present at the summit. One promotes climate-resilient agriculture by supporting farmers in adopting organic fertilizers, water conservation techniques, and sustainable farming practices to mitigate climate-change impacts. The other one leads food waste-management efforts by working with cooperatives to convert waste into organic fertilizers and biofuels. Additionally, the organization engages in advocacy for green sustainability, raising awareness, and educating communities, including with households and schools, on sustainable practices. Government actors were keen to connect with religious actors in order to develop policies and strategies that take into account the needs of various faith communities, leveraging the trust and access that they facilitate in their respective contexts.

Private-sector actors

The summit had strong private-sector representation, with SMEs operating across various stages of the food value chain, the majority of which are running a circular business model (Larsson 2018). Private-sector actors in attendance reported engagement in crop and livestock production; capacity building; and empowerment initiatives for local farmers,

storage, packaging, and distribution networks, including biodegradable food packaging solutions and waste processing for compost. Many SMEs were engaged in the value addition of cultivated crops through processing and dehydration, such as banana flour or using coffee husks to produce pellets. Some private-sector actors also support smallholder farmers by providing access to credit and financial literacy programs to enable investment. Other organizations reported tree-planting initiatives to enhance soil fertility, mitigate deforestation, and promote agroforestry to improve food production and biodiversity.

Potential points of engagement

Following discussions on ongoing food value chain activities, summit participants identified new areas for engagement to expand sustainable food system initiatives. These ideas included environmental sustainability, technological advancements, and policy support. Several organizations focused on improving agricultural practices. One FBO suggested that they further integrate regenerative agriculture while strengthening partnerships with cooperatives. Another considered scaling up food fortification programs and reducing supply chain losses. Several emphasized developing training modules to educate farmers on sustainable practices. One government agency sought to implement policies supporting circular food economies and climate adaptation.

Efforts to improve food distribution and logistics were also highlighted. Several FBOs and one private-sector actor mentioned enhancing food networks. The government actors indicated that they hoped to continue driving policy development for circular food systems. One of the private actors indicated interest in strengthening financial inclusion for smallholder farmers. Both FBOs and private-sector actors aimed to improve sustainable food production and market access for organic and value-added products. One of the FBOs expressed interest in supporting research on resource-efficient and technology-driven agriculture. Technological and infrastructure investments were key priorities in these conversations. One of the private-sector actors suggested expanding its distribution networks and adopting eco-friendly packaging. Another explored opportunities for integrating renewable energy solutions like solar-powered irrigation and expanding honey, milk, and organic manure processing. One of the FBOs saw potential in post-harvest handling facilities.

Energy-efficient storage solutions were also a focus. A private-sector actor in the energy sector proposed solar-powered cold rooms and dryers for improved post-harvest handling. Another planned to invest in better storage and drying technologies to meet rising demand. At the same time, one of the private-sector actors sought to expand operations with sorting machines and modern packaging facilities.

Strategies in alignment

Following actual and potential engagement along the food value chain, participants were then invited to discuss food system interventions that strongly align with their sustainability goals and organizational missions. One area of intervention was expanding the local organic food market. This could include organic fertilizer production, implementing Participatory Guarantee Systems, increasing the distribution of fortified food powders, and improving consumer awareness of organic products. A second intervention area was infrastructure development for improving waste-management practices, such as solar dryers and biogas facilities. Regarding

FIGURE 5 | The ongoing completion of a food value chain by summit participants



Source: Katie Garner for WRI.

waste management, participants also identified value addition as a critical focus area, such as value-added products like flour and cookies, to help minimize waste. The third and final area of intervention was awareness-raising and capacity-building initiatives to equip communities with sustainable agriculture knowledge. Participants agreed that outreach efforts leveraging various platforms, including social media and community gatherings, should be considered to maximize engagement. Overall, themes of resource efficiency, modernizing infrastructure, and improving production practices were vital components mentioned for a successful food system transformation. Participants emphasized a need for multistakeholder partnerships to strengthen knowledge sharing and co-develop of initiatives.

Participants were surprised by the overwhelming focus on production and waste management, mainly among SMEs, noting that fewer organizations were involved in high-value areas like processing, packaging, and distribution. The limited adoption of clean energy technologies, such as solar dryers and cold storage, was also highlighted as a key gap, considering their potential to address key bottlenecks in handling and storage. Additionally, many participants noted missed opportunities for collaboration, particularly in composting, waste management, and distribution. A key gap identified across organizations was the lack of modern infrastructure for post-harvest handling. Many participants relied on basic storage methods with minimal investment in packaging and processing. Market access was another critical issue as distribution networks remained weak, limiting the ability of producers to scale their operations. Also, rigid government policies around processing and packaging were noted as a factor that led many organizations, especially those smaller in size and capacity, to shy away from such investments.

However, opportunities for collaboration were evident. Organizations suggested that they could share storage and handling infrastructure, such as solar dryers and cold rooms, to improve efficiency. Processing and packaging facilities could be jointly developed to reduce costs and create higher-value products. Additionally, partnerships in distribution and market expansion could help scale production and improve economic sustainability. Waste-management initiatives also presented a strong opportunity for collaboration, with multiple organizations already engaged in composting and organic fertilizer production. Moreover, these findings demonstrate the ongoing involvement of FBOs in production and nutrition while SMEs had a greater emphasis on waste management. As such, cross-sector collaboration is key to implementing effective action across the entirety of the food value chain.

Action plan development

“We need to ask ourselves: How do we influence such communities who keep all kinds of animals and influence them to enter into this food value chain without trying to change their culture? The best that can be done is to enter into dialogue and encourage them to see this other side of food systems.”

—Sr Lydie Irakiza, Salesian Sisters of East Africa

On the second day of the summit, participants gathered in small groups to develop action plans for engaging in faith-led food systems transformation. This included identifying specific goals, actionable steps, necessary resources, potential partnerships, and existing opportunities for action. Each group had a facilitator from WRI, and the groups were encouraged to lead the conversation and take ownership of their action plans. There was strong representation of the diversity of sectors participating in the summit across groups, leading to increased opportunity for cross-sector collaboration and co-creation of solutions.

Faith sector

FBOs identified three main goals in their action plan for faith-led food system transformations: increased awareness, strengthened partnerships, and improved production.

Increased awareness: Aligning with WRI’s preliminary study finding that lack of awareness is a driving factor for FBO inaction on FLW, many FBOs considered awareness raising to be a key goal to mobilize a food system transformation across Rwanda. This could include, for example, building youth capacity through sensitization and awareness of caring for

nature through better food waste management so as to elevate food system transformation in Catholic parishes across Rwanda.

Strengthened partnerships: The second main goal for FBOs was fostering partnership, collaboration, and joint implementation. This could take place by partnering with local churches to implement educational or other social service initiatives. FBOs also highlighted the importance of empowering women farmers to build more sustainable and resilient food systems. To enhance nutritional sustainability, partnerships with global organizations like the United Nations Environment Programme's Faith for Earth were recommended. There was also a call to expand this venture beyond Rwanda and bring into play other countries within East Africa because each has its unique set of opportunities and challenges, especially in cases where farming may not be an option due to harsh climatic conditions.

Improved production: The third goal shared by the majority of FBOs was improving production practices with an explicit emphasis on sustainable approaches to agriculture, which is considered to be conservation, bio-intensive, and regenerative agriculture by FBOs. Regenerative agriculture is considered by FBOs as a distinct pathway for achieving food security for vulnerable communities, developing climate-resilient food systems, enhancing nutrition, and ending hunger in Rwanda. In line with the Laudato Si' Encyclical, many Rwandan FBOs already support small-scale farming endeavors and facilitate access to agricultural inputs, finance, and markets and could consider promoting improved production techniques across all programs, projects, and participating stakeholders. Summit participants expressed the desire to see an increase in the regenerative agriculture skills of 50 percent of Rwandan farmers through these goals.

To achieve the aforementioned goals, FBOs identified multiple action steps. The first one was conducting a needs assessment or situation analysis to better understand the kinds of knowledge, resources, and support that could best support a food system transformation. Other suggestions included mapping faith-owned land to better understand potential opportunities for further action. From here, various capacity-building activities can take place such as how to share resources like storage infrastructure or optimize faith-owned land for local food production. Additional steps, such as awareness programs for places of worship and developing training materials backed by scripture, were suggested actions for equipping faith leaders on food system transformation.

Some FBOs focused more on economic capacities, such as strengthening vulnerable families with critical supplies and skills development, facilitating access to markets, and promoting internal savings programs. Other FBOs suggested enhancing eco-green club activities in schools such as tree planting, which could be combined with the suggestion of fruit tree growing to link environmental sustainability with food security and self-sufficiency. From an administrative standpoint, one FBO suggested establishing memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with like-minded stakeholders to build stronger and mutually beneficial partnerships that have an impetus to act and mobilize essential resources. Another FBO suggested developing a five-year strategic plan on ecological interventions and food systems transformation. More generally, enhancing the capacity of FBOs on regenerative agriculture was seen as an essential step to faith-led food systems transformation, which is an actionable step that many participating FBOs are already implementing. The key here is to enhance and replicate at scale. More broadly, summit participants recommended developing a farming coalition of African FBOs with a focus on food.

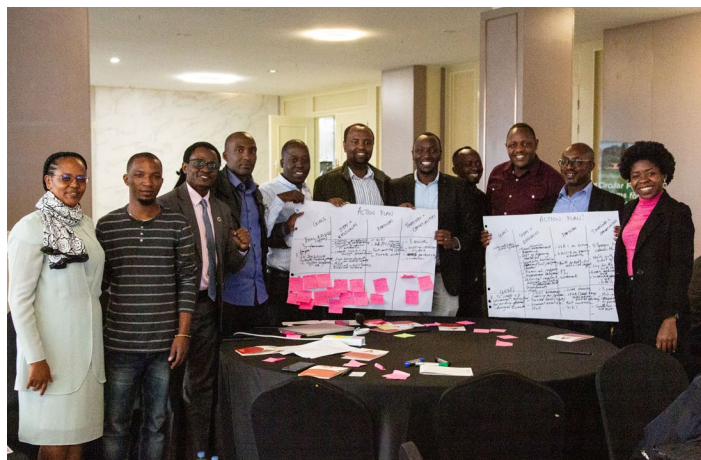
FIGURE 6 | Summit participant sharing feedback on their group's action plan



Source: Katie Garner for WRI.

When asked about potential partnerships to achieve the aforementioned goals, FBOs identified actors from a diversity of sectors including faith, governments, NGOs, private partners, and other public-sector entities like schools. For many, the church itself was considered a collaboration partner whereby parish schools could communicate directly with youth

FIGURE 7 | Breakout groups presenting their action plans



Source: Katie Garner for WRI.

on critical food system issues. Youth involvement was identified as critical to build awareness on sustainable food, replicate successful youth-led projects, and empower a new generation of leaders at the intersection of faith and environmental stewardship. Interreligious groups were also identified, such as government authorities like the Rwanda Environment Management Authority, the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources, and the Ministry of Local Government as important national public-sector opportunities for partnership and action, while foreign aid agencies were identified as a strategic external collaborator. Active collaborators, such as World Vision and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, were also mentioned and could be leveraged for additional actions.

Many ongoing efforts were identified during this workshop as potential opportunities to leverage more ambitious and effective action on a faith-led food systems transformation. Suggestions to consider partnerships with the umbrella bodies of the various religious groups were also put forward. In Kenya for example, this could include the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Religious Superiors Conference of Kenya, and the Association of Sisterhood of Kenya who all have strong grassroots connections and high membership levels.

Government and NGOs

Government representatives present at the summit largely focused on raising citizen awareness of food systems transformation through community outreach programs. Other sectors identified the government sector as essential to achieving the goals outlined in their action plans, particularly around raising awareness for the general public. The NGO sector was committed to broad goals around food security through actions like regenerative agriculture, capacity-building with rural women, promoting resource efficiency, and providing stronger market linkages, especially outside national borders. Conducting a market analysis, organizing and facilitating training, and promoting agricultural projects with university students were key actions to build momentum on these goals. Lastly, NGOs expressed the need for enhanced access to the bio-waste recycling market. Summit participants suggested developing policy

briefings to share with governmental councils such as the African Union’s Economic, Social and Cultural Council, an advisory arm of the African Union made of member states that play an active role in shaping the priorities and programs of the African Union.

Private sector

Multiple SMEs in attendance mentioned ongoing activities that align with the aforementioned needs of FBOs, governments, and NGOs, such as converting agricultural wastes into compost and fertilizer to support circular and organic production practices. Others discussed longer-term goals like developing local organic markets through participatory guarantee systems (third-party organic certification), facilitating environmentally sensitive farming practices, establishing organic waste recycling facilities, and producing 100 percent organic crops by 2030. Many expressed their desire to increase their productivity across their respective food value chains. There was a clear appetite to collaborate with other organizations and sectors in the sustainable food systems work.

Actionable steps toward meeting these goals include facilitating training to farmers and other stakeholders about sustainable farming and waste-management practices. SMEs identified the establishment of comprehensive waste-management policy to create a more institutional approach to the problem. They also described investment and development of district landfill infrastructure to help with waste management, while simultaneously mobilizing households to improve waste-sorting practices. Facilitating a needs assessment was a critical component to success, in addition to securing investment capital, conducting a social media campaign with youth, and securing support for research. Summit participants recommended identifying a trusted media or music personality spokesperson to assist in awareness building, and faith-led radio stations were mentioned as key avenues for increased circulation. The International Trade Centre’s environmental assessment tool was considered a helpful resource for facilitating the environmental assessment of various organizations. Attending ongoing events, such as the World Circular Economy Forum, was also suggested.

Finally, developing a policy advocacy framework was another recommended step to enable actors from various sectors to engage policymakers in a consistent manner. This means promoting ethical food policies that prioritize fair trade, environmental conservation, and food sovereignty. Such policy advocacy outcomes would encourage faith leaders to take active roles in shaping local and national agricultural policies.

Building connections

“Faith-based organizations can come in to provide linkages, one, to provide the first possibility of acquiring food, but the second point to ensure sustainability so that these people don’t become dependent on us, but so we can empower them to have something to eat and even provide for others”

—Sister Patricia Oyuga, FMA, executive director, Planning and Development Office, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians-Africa East Province

Collaborating with faiths

As described in WRI’s previous publication (Sanniti et al. 2024), strengthening partnerships among stakeholders is considered a primary contribution by FBOs to national and global food and sustainable development goals. On the second day of the summit, a panel discussion took place to explore multisectoral collaboration for faith-led food systems transformation.

A representative from Rwanda’s Interfaith Council on Health (RICH) discussed the traditional role that FBOs play in food assistance around the globe, including food production and distribution, to reach vulnerable populations and address critical issues of malnutrition. To move beyond this emergency response approach, RICH emphasized the importance of collaboration with other sectors, including the private sector, to improve access to markets and food production value, with research organizations to enhance scientific understanding, and even with other FBOs to gather community insights

on the challenges and opportunities presented in local food systems. RICH concluded by stating that the future of FBOs could involve enhanced understanding of local environmental challenges through stakeholder collaboration to develop evidence-driven solutions.

A representative from the African Evangelistic Enterprise (AEE) described its organizational mission to foster holistic transformation among vulnerable populations, working in 29 of the 30 districts across Rwanda. In partnership with local churches, AEE facilitates various projects, including improved nutrition and regenerative agriculture practices, to build the capacity of local communities. This includes providing support to community groups such as women, youth, and church groups to ensure that knowledge on training and practices spreads further. For example, AEE brings farmers together through the cooperative model to facilitate a collective voice for advocacy to secure necessary tools and resources. This resulted in securing a solar-powered irrigation system for one farmers' cooperative, whereby the local government was able to subsidize 70 percent of the cost, and the cooperative supported the other 30 percent.

To facilitate better linkages between farmers and international markets, AEE identified physical farm infrastructure as essential to success, such as securing a drying machine. Smallholder farmers identified food storage as essential to food system resilience during rain seasons and other food security threats. AEE is an active member of Rwanda's Animal Resources Development Board Technical Working Group of Agriculture, further demonstrating the opportunities for collaboration among faith actors and other food system stakeholders. These initiatives will result in faith-based agribusiness ventures that generate income for food security programs, such as cooperative farming initiatives.

From a private-sector perspective, a representative from Glory Poultry Farm spoke about the farm's ongoing efforts to prioritize organic and local production and employ circular practices, such as compost. Glory Poultry Farm emphasized the importance of recovering and protecting local soil, considering soil as gold among Africans. Further, providing opportunities for local employment, especially among youth and women, was key to the business's success.

FIGURE 8 | Panel discussion at the summit featuring government, banking, private, and faith sector perspectives on multisectoral collaboration



From left to right: Eric Uwimana Willy, RICH; Diane Umutoni, AEE; Manasseh Manirakinga, Equity Bank; Agatha Mukagacinya, Glory Poultry Farm; Carrick Reddin, WRI (moderator)
Source: Katie Garner for WRI.

Commenting on the specific role of FBOs in food system transformation, the representative remarked that faith actors must consider their role in feeding bodies, not just souls, and that such a perspective could build much stronger momentum for the desired change in food systems.

Finally, the agribusiness manager from Equity Bank Rwanda spoke about the strategies and initiatives in place to help food system stakeholders overcome financial barriers to investment and action. This included addressing issues of high interest rates and stringent collateral requirements by supporting small and medium-sized agricultural enterprises with up to 70 percent of the collateral requirement and bringing interest rates down from 18 to 12 percent. The panelist explained how the bank blends its financial products to ensure that agricultural production risks are mitigated while providing adjustable policies that can be financed in various phases. Equity Bank Rwanda also applies an inclusion lens to its lending policy, assessing aspects of the buyer, the locality, the market, and past experiences to determine a fair lending rate on an individual basis. This includes a specific segment for public-sector institutions, including civil society organizations like FBOs. Regarding the empowerment of women specifically, Equity Bank Rwanda offers pregnant women farmers the opportunity to pause the counting of interest until they have returned from maternity leave and are prepared to work and pay again. The bank also facilitates training with women on business development services, environmental protection, and other topics, in addition to having focal units in charge of women and youth banking, agriculture, and the public sector.

Key collaborators

It was further demonstrated during this summit that FBOs and other sectors needed strategic financial, technical, and human resources support to achieve the goals and opportunities identified in the various workshops. A number of sectors and stakeholders were identified during the two-day summit that were deemed critical for engagement among participants for an effective faith-led food systems transformation.

In terms of faith-based partners, the All African Conference of Churches, United Religions Initiative Africa, Maison Shalom, World Vision, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Mennonite Economic Development Associates, the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya, and Catholic Bishops and Religious Superiors Conferences across Africa were all identified as key strategic partners for engaging with faith actors systematically. Such engagement is key to demonstrating the alignment between FBO missions and the goals and objectives of a sustainable and equitable food systems transformation. Faith-led radio stations were also mentioned as potential outlets for building greater awareness.

Many global institutions were named, including NGOs (WRI), intergovernmental organizations (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund, the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights), foreign governments and aid agencies, and international financial institutions (African Development Bank). These actors are key for facilitating research, capacity building, training, and channels for advocacy. Leveraging existing networks of organizations such as the African Circular Economy Network, was also deemed central to successful outreach. From the private sector, waste, compost, and recycling management organizations were identified

FIGURE 9 | Interactive booths where SMEs from the Circular Food Systems for Rwanda project share their products and practices



Source: Katie Garner for WRI.

as important partners for successful food systems interventions, as well as water-management services like the Water and Sanitation Corporation. Partnerships with banks were considered key opportunities to secure financing and invest in physical infrastructure and increase food distribution.

Governmental authorities—such as the Rwanda Environment Management Authority, the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board, and the Ministries of Agriculture and Animal Resources—and local governments were identified as key partners for implementing successful food system actions. This sector can be actively engaged to explore institutional and long-term approaches to food systems change. The Cleaner Production and Climate Innovation Centre under Rwanda’s National Industrial Research and Development Agency was also identified. Finally, connecting with mayors across various cities in Africa was mentioned as a strategic way to build momentum and engagement. Partnership with the national and local governments of summit-participant countries should also be considered.

Other suggestions included connecting with women and youth organizations, teachers’ associations, education and health care sectors, farmer cooperatives, the media, and social media influencers.

Recommendations and learning for future gatherings

“We really need to merge our faith and science and have the knowhow to have tangible facts for advocacy”

—Mr. Eric Uwimana Willy, program manager, Rwanda Interfaith Council on Health

Recommendations

There are five key recommendations for enacting faith-led food systems transformations in Rwanda and beyond:

1. Promoting regenerative agriculture

FBOs own and manage substantial amounts of land, including farms and areas of agricultural production. They also play an influential role with smallholder farmers, many of whom make up their congregations and receive support services including technical training, humanitarian relief, and economic development programs. FBOs should leverage their assets and deep-rooted connections with communities to adopt, scale, and disseminate regenerative agricultural techniques, especially for the local production of indigenous crops like vegetables to feed marginal communities. Partnering with agricultural experts, government agencies, and local cooperatives will enhance the impact of regenerative interventions, ensuring that faith actors and smallholder farmers have access to the necessary knowledge, tools, and resources to adopt regenerative approaches.

Moreover, conducting a needs assessment and the mapping of faith-owned assets will help identify opportunities for intervention. Such interventions could include establishing demonstration farms and pilot plots; providing training and capacity-building programs for local communities on regenerative agriculture techniques; and developing and implementing strategies for improved water management, soil conservation, and climate adaptation. These interventions should ensure the active participation and empowerment of women, young people, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups. Exploring synergies between ongoing efforts related to agroecology and regenerative agriculture is key here.

2. Raising awareness and educational initiatives

Beyond direct agricultural interventions, FBOs are uniquely positioned to lead awareness-raising and educational activities on food systems transformation, especially among underrepresented groups like women and youth. Developing tool kits that align scriptural principles with sustainable food systems interventions—including regenerative agriculture, reduction of FLW, sustainable diets, and productive use of waste—can provide important insights and tools to facilitate

long-term behavior change and advocacy. Based on these tool kits, FBOs should lead faith-based awareness campaigns through social media, school-based initiations, religious gatherings, community outreach programs, women's groups, and faith-based radio programs.

Women and youth remain underrepresented in agricultural leadership, and yet they are essential to the transformation of food systems. Faith-based institutions can bridge this gap by establishing vocational training centers focused on agribusiness, financial literacy, and cooperative farming models. Providing mentorship within faith communities and facilitating access to microfinance through faith-aligned financial networks can empower these groups to take leadership roles in agriculture. For instance, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd successfully integrate social entrepreneurship with agricultural development, fostering self-reliance among marginalized communities. Moreover, FBOs can integrate sustainable farming education into school programs to create long-term demand for organic products while cultivating environmentally conscious future generations. Indigenous crops can empower communities at the margins, especially women farmers, by growing small plots in urban or rural settings over a short amount of time.

3. Expanding existing efforts

To reduce food loss and improve food security, FBOs can play a pivotal role in developing and implementing post-harvest interventions, including handling facilities, storage, drying, processing, and waste-management systems. FBOs can strengthen existing food distribution networks to ensure equitable access to nutritious food while reducing post-harvest losses. To do this, FBOs can establish formal partnerships with other FBOs or sectors to collaborate, ensure coordination, and avoid duplication. Partnerships with local governments can improve access to funding or information on food safety, while partnerships with interfaith networks can shed greater insight on culturally sensitive approaches to food assistance. Expanding FBO services beyond, for example, emergency food provisioning can create unique opportunities to facilitate nutrition workshops, cooking demonstrations, community gardens, and even job skills training. Collaboration among FBOs, cooperatives, local businesses, and government agencies can facilitate resource sharing and joint investment in infrastructure, making these facilities more accessible and efficient. Such efforts not only reduce post-harvest losses but also strengthen local food markets and improve farmers' livelihoods.

4. Institutionalizing faith actors as key stakeholders

Including faith actors as key stakeholders in policy, governance, and development processes is essential to creating inclusive and effective food systems strategies. Ensuring their participation in platforms, such as the Circular Food Systems for Rwanda project and Joint Action Development Forums at the district level, can enhance policy coherence and leverage faith networks to support national and regional food security agendas. As trusted community voices, faith leaders can bridge the gap between policymakers and grassroots communities, advocating for food systems policies that reflect both ethical principles and practical solutions. Policy and advocacy are key to ensuring a regulatory environment that supports food sustainability.

Faith leaders also hold significant influence in shaping just and sustainable food policies. They can drive systemic change by creating multistakeholder advocacy platforms that engage governments, civil society, and the private

FIGURE 10 | A summit participant asks a question to the panel of speakers



Source: Katie Garner for WRI.

sector. Promoting ethical food policies that emphasize fair trade, environmental conservation, and food sovereignty ensures that food systems align with both humanitarian and spiritual values. Mobilizing interfaith action for grassroots food security initiatives further strengthens advocacy efforts.

5. Facilitating partnership building and multisector collaboration

Finally, fostering strategic partnerships between FBOs, SMEs, government agencies, and other stakeholders can unlock opportunities for scaling up impactful food systems interventions. The summit showed a clear alignment between the needs of FBOs and the offerings of other stakeholders, revealing the opportunity to create matchmaking mechanisms that connect FBOs with private-sector actors, donors, and research institutions to facilitate funding, technical expertise, and innovative solutions. Such collaborations could include promoting community-based composting and biogas initiatives to manage organic waste effectively, supporting the establishment of women-led and youth-led agribusiness ventures, partnering with waste recycling firms and agricultural cooperatives to create market opportunities for compost and organic fertilizer, and engaging with local financial institutions to develop faith-based financing mechanisms tailored for sustainable food system initiatives. While many of these actions fit within the recommendations previously mentioned, the authors thought it was essential to reiterate the importance of collaboration as a key pillar to mobilize sustainable food systems. FBOs identified potential partnership opportunities with global organizations like Faith for Earth, WRI, and the African Circular Economy Network to access technical expertise and resources, as well as to highlight best practices and success stories in faith-led food systems transformation.

Future gatherings

This was the first conference-style gathering co-facilitated by WRI and KAICIID. Participants experienced a good balance between educational seminars and engaging workshops, allowing for a dynamic program. Participants represented a number of faith traditions as well as sectors and shared great enthusiasm for engaging with the summit agenda and topics. The topic of food was considered by many as a critical cross-cutting issue that can lead to a multitude of co-benefits, while the summit's emphasis on dialogue encouraged many participants to consider how such conversations can be recreated in their local communities and houses of worship.

FIGURE 11 | Summit participants gather for a group photo



Source: Katie Garner for WRI.

Participants appreciated receiving direct and consistent communication leading up to and after the summit's conclusion, especially regarding next steps and sharing information. As such, future gatherings should consider publishing proceedings or event reports in order to keep the attendees engaged while disseminating the topics and findings to a wider audience. Future gatherings should also consider offering translation services for both keynote talks as well as workshops, ideally having facilitators who can speak the local language and remain inclusive to all participants.

This event demonstrated the deep curiosity and interest of FBOs in engaging in food system transformation. However, other sectors, especially funding agencies, still need to be better sensitized to realize the critical role that FBOs can play in achieving development objectives. Intermediary organizations like WRI and other nonprofit entities can therefore identify and share opportunities with FBOs to continue demonstrating their essential input and ability to support project implementation at the local level and especially at the margins of society. Finally, with regard to collecting feedback, it is recommended that short surveys be conducted during the event itself to maximize the response rate.

“Sustainability is not about technical solutions only but shifting mind-sets and how we view our food. Sustainability is no option; it is essential to respect our planet’s finest resources and ensure justice for all. The role of FBOs can be powerful agents of change not only for addressing hunger and food insecurity but driving long-term systemic transformation.”

—Divine Uwase, Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa

Appendix

Full Summit Agenda

| Day 1—Wednesday, December 4, 2024

9:00 AM–9:30 AM | Registration and welcome coffee

9:30 AM–10:00 AM | Interfaith prayer: Reflections on faith and food systems

10:00 AM–10:30 AM | Opening remarks

- Dr. Cosmas Milton Obote Ochieng, Global Director, Center for Equitable Development, WRI
- Mr. Agustin Nunez-Vicandi, Official Spokesperson and Senior Program Manager for the Africa Region, KAICIID
- Mr. Christophe Mugongori, Head of Department, National Industrial Research and Development Agency, Rwanda

10:30–11AM | Keynote address: Current state of food systems in East Africa, and opportunities for the role of faith-based organizations

- Dr. Robert Mbeche, Director, Food Program, WRI Africa

11:00 AM–11:30 AM | Presentation: Evidence on faith and food systems: Findings from the baseline study on food loss and waste in Rwanda

- Dr. Sophia Sanniti, Research Associate, WRI Faith and Sustainability

11:45 AM–12:30 PM | Presentation on food systems and value chains

- Dr. James Wangu, Food Systems Transformation Associate, WRI Africa

[Lunch break]

1:30 PM–2:30 PM | Mapping participation along the food value chain

2:30–3PM | Food systems transformation interventions for FBOs

- Mr. Eric Ruzigamanzi, Project Manager, Circular Food Systems, WRI Africa

3:15 PM–4:00 PM | Interactive strategy session

4:00 PM–4:30 PM | Group reflection and wrap-up

| Day 2—Thursday, December 5, 2024**9:00 AM–9:30 AM | Recap and objectives for the day****9:30 AM–11:00 AM | Panel discussion: Multisector collaboration for faith-led food systems transformation**

- Moderator: Mr. Carrick Reddin, Acting Head of Faith and Sustainability, WRI
- Mr. Eric Uwimana Willy, Program Manager, Rwanda Interfaith Council on Health
- Ms. Diane Umutoni, Director of Resources Mobilization and Business Development, AEE Rwanda
- Ms. Agatha Mukagacinya, Founder and Director, Glory Poultry Farm
- Mr. Manasseh Manirakinga, Agribusiness Manager, Equity Bank

11:15 AM–12:30 PM | Workshop: Action planning for food systems transformation

[Lunch break]

1:30 PM–2:30 PM | Group presentations of action plans**2:30 PM–4:00 PM | Building momentum for faith-led food systems transformation**

Fireside chat: Dr. Cosmas Ochieng, Global Director, WRI Center for Equitable Development, and Dr. Robert Mbeche, Food Program Director, WRI Africa

4:00 PM–4:30 PM | Closing and next steps

Summit Participant List by Affiliation

	ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION	WEBSITE
Faith	AEE-Rwanda	https://www.aeerwanda.ngo/mission
	Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa	https://www.cynesa.org/
	World Vision Rwanda	https://www.wvi.org/rwanda
	Salesian Sisters of East Africa	http://aesfma.com/
	Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd	https://www.olcgs.org/
	Interreligious Council of Kenya (IRCK)	https://interreligiouscouncil.or.ke/
	Calvary Wide Fellowship Ministries	https://calvaryfellowshipministries.org/kigali-perish/
	Caritas Rwanda	https://caritasrwanda.org/
	Rwanda Interfaith Council on Health	https://www.rwandainterfaith.org/
	Evangelical Alliance of Rwanda	https://allianceevangelicalrwanda.org/
	United Religions Initiative-Africa	https://www.uri.org/region/africa
	Catholic Relief Services	https://www.crs.org/
	Adventist Development and Relief Agency	https://adra.org/
	Association of Baptist Churches of Rwanda	https://baptistworld.org/member/association-of-baptist-churches-in-rwanda-aebr/
	The Rural Development Interdiocesan Service	https://www.rdis.org.rw/
	The Presbyterian Church in Rwanda	https://epr.rw/
Government	Cleaner Production and Climate Innovation Center	https://cpcic.rw/
	Rwanda Ministry of Local Government	https://www.minaloc.gov.rw/
	National Industrial Research and Development Agency	https://www.nirda.gov.rw/
SMEs and Technical Assistant Providers	Glory Poultry Farm	https://www.gloryfarm.rw/
	Golden Insect	https://goldeninsect.com/
	Domestica	N/A
	Rwanda Biosolutions	N/A
	Kigasali Coffee	https://kigasalicoffee.rw/index.html
	Ineza Mushroom	N/A
	Zean Limited	N/A
	Triumvirate	N/A
	Elim Plus Farm Ltd.	N/A
	Next Farm	N/A
	Gisuma Coffee	www.gisumacoffee.rw
	MNB Ltd.	N/A
	NjordFrey	https://njordfrey.com/
	RCID	https://rcidcentre.com/index.html

	ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION	WEBSITE
SMEs and Technical Assistant Providers (cont.)	Madamwaste	https://madamwaste.com/
	Real Bridge Systems	https://realbridgelttd.com/
	Green Resources	www.greenresources.rw
	Center for Agroecological Practices and Conservation of Nature (CAPCN)	N/A
NGOs	The Rwanda Organic Agriculture Movement	https://roam.org.rw/
	WRI	https://www.wri.org/
	KAICIID	https://www.kaiciid.org/
	African Circular Economy Network	https://acen.africa/
	Korea International Cooperation Agency	https://www.koica.go.kr/koica_en/3386/subview.do
Associations	National Cooperative Confederation of Rwanda	https://www.nccr.coop.rw/
	Rwanda Climate Change and Development Network	https://rccdnetwork.org/
Media	The New Times	https://www.newtimes.co.rw/

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Acknowledgments

We are pleased to acknowledge our institutional strategic partners that provide core funding to WRI: the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

The faith-led food systems transformation summit was convened by WRI with support from KAICIID. We would like to thank all conference organizers from WRI Africa, WRI US, and WRI Europe who made this event happen: Eric Ruzigamanzi, Robert Mbeche, James Wangu, Tina Nyunga, Bernadette Muteteri, Gloria Kantengwa, Nicole Ihrwe, Carrick Reddin, and Sophia Sanniti. Thank you to all participating individuals and organizations for your meaningful and intentional participation and input. Thank you to Ms. Jackie Lumbasi, our master of ceremonies, who kept the summit running smoothly over two days. Thank you to Katie Garner for capturing significant moments on camera. Thank you to those participants who made time to review the draft version of this document to ensure that the conference report aligned with participant experiences. Finally, many thanks to the WRI communications team for publishing these proceedings.

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World Resources Institute works to improve people's lives, protect and restore nature, and stabilize the climate. As an independent research organization, we leverage our data, expertise, and global reach to influence policy and catalyze change across systems like food, land and water; energy; and cities. Our 2,000+ staff work on the ground in more than a dozen focus countries and with partners in over 50 nations.



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