Scaling GFAiR Collective Actions through Public Funding and Private Finance

A financing and partnership strategy for Forgotten Foods, Agroecology and Inclusive Digital Agriculture

Discussion paper | November 2026

Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation (GFAiR)

Purpose of this report

This report contributes to discussions on partnerships between research and private finance. It examines three GFAiR Collective Actions (CAs): Forgotten Foods (CA FF), Agroecology (CA AE), and Inclusive Digital Agriculture (CA IDA). It asks how each CA can combine public funding, philanthropy, development finance, and commercially oriented private capital to move from research and pilot initiatives to durable, scalable systems, enterprises, and services.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

A2F Access to Finance

AAAP Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program

AATIF Africa Agriculture and Trade Investment Fund

ACB African Centre for Biodiversity

ACELI Agriculture Credit Enhancement Learning Initiative

AFDB / AfDB African Development Bank

AGRA Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa

AI Artificial Intelligence

AICC AgTech Innovation Challenges and Competitions

APAARI Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions

B2B Business-to-Business

B2G Business-to-Government

BIO Belgian Investment Company for Developing Countries

CA Collective Action

CAs Collective Actions

CA AE Collective Action on Agroecology

CA FF Collective Action on Forgotten Foods

CA IDA Collective Action on Inclusive Digital Agriculture

CAFF Collective Action on Forgotten Foods

CASA Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness

CFSA CGIAR Initiative on Climate Resilience / Climate-related programme abbreviation as cited*

CGIAR Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (historical expansion; today the organization generally uses CGIAR as its name)

COLEAD Committee Linking Entrepreneurship–Agriculture–Development

CPI Climate Policy Initiative

CSAF Council on Smallholder Agricultural Finance

DG RTD Directorate-General for Research and Innovation

EC European Commission

ECDPM European Centre for Development Policy Management

EFARD European Forum on Agricultural Research for Development

EIB European Investment Bank

EU European Union

FAO Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

FARA Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa

FfD4 Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development

FINAS Financing Agri-Food Systems Sustainably

FSD Financial Sector Deepening

GCF Green Climate Fund

GEF Global Environment Facility

GFAiR Global Forum on Agricultural Research and Innovation

GLF Global Landscapes Forum

IABW Italy–Africa Business Week

IBMA International Biocontrol Manufacturers Association

IDA Inclusive Digital Agriculture

IFAD International Fund for Agricultural Development

IFPRI International Food Policy Research Institute

IIMR Indian Institute of Millets Research

IPES-Food International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems

IRC-SC International Research Consortium on Soil Carbon

IUCN International Union for Conservation of Nature

IUNS International Union of Nutritional Sciences

LMICs Low- and Middle-Income Countries

MSMEs Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

NARES National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems

NARS National Agricultural Research Systems

NUS Neglected and Underutilized Species

PGS Participatory Guarantee Systems

R&D Research and Development

RAMP Research and Market Pathways

RSCF Restoration Seed Capital Facility

RTD Research and Innovation (in DG RTD, European Commission Directorate-General for Research and Innovation)

SAFIN Smallholder and Agri-SME Finance and Investment Network

SBFN Sustainable Banking and Finance Network

SDM Service Delivery Model

SME Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

SMEs Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

TA	Technical Assistance
TIFS	Transformational Investing in Food Systems Initiative
UN	United Nations
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization

1. Executive summary

Agricultural research does not scale through finance alone. It scales when research evidence, public policy, capable institutions, farmer demand, viable enterprises, market access and appropriate finance are connected. For GFAiR, this makes the Collective Action model particularly relevant: a CA can assemble actors that normally operate in separate funding and innovation systems and create a pathway from public-good research to adoption, enterprise development and investment.

This report focuses on three CAs with different but complementary financing profiles. CA FF works with neglected and underutilized species (NUS), indigenous food knowledge, nutrition, biodiversity, markets and value chains. CA AE addresses agroecological transitions, with a growing emphasis on biological inputs such as biopesticides and biofertilizers. CA IDA seeks to make digital agriculture farmer-centred and inclusive, with particular attention to women and youth. The financing challenge is therefore not to find one generic "private-sector partner", but to match each stage and type of activity with the capital best suited to it.

GFAiR's funding coverage shows why this distinction matters. Public grants remain essential for research, farmer participation, policy work, open knowledge, capacity development and early experimentation. At the same time, blended finance, public development banks, impact investors, commercial finance, corporate partnerships and innovation accelerators can help scale activities with a credible revenue model. Recent financing discussions increasingly emphasize de-risking, affordable credit, investment readiness, digital public infrastructure and the transition from pilots to scalable business models.

The proposed financing logic

Stage	Primary purpose	Most suitable finance
1. Evidence & co-design	Research, participatory priority setting, baseline data, policy evidence	Public research grants; development cooperation; philanthropy
2. Proof of concept	Pilots, prototypes, field validation, farmer testing	Grants; challenge funds; innovation funds; concessional finance
3. Enterprise readiness	Business models, quality assurance, certification, incubation, market testing	Technical assistance; accelerators; recoverable grants; seed capital
4. Scale-up	Processing, manufacturing, logistics, platforms, distribution, working capital	Blended finance; impact investment; debt; guarantees; corporate investment
5. System transformation	Public infrastructure, standards, regulation, data commons, extension and institutional capacity	Public budgets; development banks; multilateral finance; co-investment

Three investment propositions

- CA FF can turn biodiversity into viable food and nutrition value chains by connecting NUS research and farmer knowledge to processors, food SMEs, diaspora markets, public procurement and opportunity-crop investment facilities.
- CA AE can turn agroecological evidence into scalable transition services and biological-input markets by combining public investment in research, regulation and extension with private investment in manufacturing, distribution, quality assurance and farmer services.
- CA IDA can turn farmer-centred digital knowledge into inclusive advisory ecosystems by financing open/public digital foundations and locally relevant content while partnering with technology firms, telecoms, input/service companies, financial institutions and social enterprises for delivery and scale.

The strongest opportunity lies in combining the three. Forgotten foods need agroecological production and pest-management systems; both need inclusive advisory, local-language learning and digital feedback. A joint investment pipeline can therefore finance value chains rather than isolated projects: seed and biodiversity conservation, production, biological inputs, advisory services, processing, market development, finance and evidence generation can be designed as mutually reinforcing components.

Core recommendation

GFAiR should position the three CAs as an investment-readiness and partnership pipeline rather than as a set of grant-funded projects. Public funding should finance the public-good foundations and de-risk early stages; private finance should enter where products, services and value chains can generate cash flow; blended structures should bridge the gap between the two.

2. Why financing Collective Actions requires a portfolio approach

Not every research activity should become a business. Fundamental research, biodiversity conservation, policy analysis, open data, farmer participation and capacity development create public value even when they do not generate direct financial returns. Attempting to commercialize these functions can distort priorities or exclude groups that cannot pay.

Conversely, many outcomes of research can support commercial or social-enterprise activity: improved seed and planting material, processed foods, biological crop-protection products, advisory services, data-enabled services, logistics, certification, equipment and market platforms. The financing task is to identify where a revenue model is credible and then build the institutional conditions needed for responsible investment.

This is especially important because agricultural innovation faces a “missing middle”. Grants can fund research and pilots, while commercial lenders and investors generally seek proven demand, predictable cash flow and manageable risk. The gap between the two includes product validation, regulatory approval, certification, market development, farmer acquisition, working capital and early manufacturing. It is here that challenge funds, accelerators, guarantees, concessional capital and blended finance can be most useful.

Public funding and private finance play different roles

Public/development finance is strongest when…	Private finance is strongest when…
benefits are widely shared and difficult to monetize	a product or service has paying customers
research risk and uncertainty are high	technology and demand have been sufficiently

	validated
inclusion of smallholders, women and youth must be protected	scale can lower unit costs or expand margins
standards, regulation, data or extension are public goods	working capital, equipment, distribution or growth capital is needed
long time horizons are required	there is a credible path to repayment or exit

The implication is a sequencing principle: public finance should not simply subsidize private returns, and private finance should not be expected to pay for every public good. Instead, each instrument should finance the risks and benefits it is best equipped to carry.

A recent FAO Investment Centre study (Narayanan et al., 2026) highlights the substantial gap between financing needs and actual impact investment in agrifood systems. By the end of 2023, 81 dedicated food and agriculture impact funds managed USD 4.05 billion, while total agrifood investments, including those of multisector funds, were estimated at up to USD 6 billion. This represented only around 6% of private impact fund assets in low- and middle-income countries, despite estimated annual financing needs of USD 300–500 billion for sustainable agrifood systems. These findings underscore both the limitations of existing financing mechanisms and the opportunity to connect agricultural research, innovation, and emerging enterprises with impact investors.

3. GFAiR's role: from project funding to an innovation and investment ecosystem

GFAiR is not a bank, venture fund or commercial accelerator. Its comparative role is to convene agricultural research, farmer organizations, civil society, regional fora, universities, public agencies, development partners and private actors around shared innovation challenges. That convening function can make finance more effective by improving the quality of the pipeline before financing decisions are made.

The Collective Actions already provide several elements of such a pipeline: multi-stakeholder consortia; farmer and civil-society participation; regional connections; research and knowledge partners; practical pilots; policy engagement; and emerging links with enterprises and markets. The next step is to add a more explicit financing architecture.

Five functions for GFAiR

1. Opportunity identification: use CA networks and the Regional Fora to identify research outputs, enterprises and system bottlenecks with realistic potential for scale.
2. Partnership brokering: bring public research, farmer organizations, SMEs, investors, development banks, donors, accelerators and corporate partners into structured collaboration around a defined scaling challenge.
3. Investment readiness: help CA partners clarify value propositions, evidence, market demand, unit economics, governance, safeguards, intellectual-property arrangements and financing needs.
4. De-risking through evidence: organize field validation, farmer feedback, independent evidence, standards work and learning so that investors face less technical and market uncertainty.
5. Learning and accountability: apply GFAiR Partnership Principles so that scaling does not marginalize farmers, women, youth, indigenous knowledge holders or smaller civil-society organizations.

From funding calls to a continuously managed pipeline

CA FF proposal write-shops in Ghana and Nigeria demonstrate the value of helping consortia respond to grant opportunities. The next evolution is to maintain a living pipeline in which opportunities are grouped by maturity: grant-ready, pilot-ready, accelerator-ready, blended-finance-ready and commercially investable. This would allow GFAiR to approach funders with portfolios rather than isolated proposals and to direct private financiers only toward opportunities that fit their mandate.

4. Collective Action on Forgotten Foods (CA FF)

4.1 The scaling challenge

CA FF brings farmers, researchers, civil society and private-sector actors together to revive neglected and underutilized species by strengthening farmer-led conservation and traditional knowledge, research and innovation, markets and value chains, and policy support. The financing problem is multidimensional: many NUS lack research investment, reliable seed systems, processing technologies, standards, consumer awareness, market data and finance for SMEs. This creates a circular constraint—limited supply discourages processors and retailers, while weak demand discourages farmers and investors.

CA FF therefore needs finance on both sides of the market. Public and philanthropic finance can protect genetic diversity, traditional knowledge, nutrition research and farmer participation. Enterprise finance can support aggregation, processing, packaging, logistics, certification and market expansion. Demand-side instruments—public procurement, school feeding, diaspora markets, hospitality and retail partnerships—can make investment more credible by creating predictable outlets.

4.2 Evidence that CA FF is building a finance pathway

In January and February 2025, GFAiR organized proposal write-shops in Winneba and Ibadan to help selected Forgotten Foods consortia target concrete funding opportunities. The Ibadan programme explicitly examined the research–private sector nexus, public funding opportunities and how research outcomes could be taken up by private actors. This is an important shift from advocacy for NUS toward organized resource mobilization and market engagement.

The CA has also begun to generate investable market intelligence. A 2026 study of the African diaspora food market in the United Kingdom, commissioned by GFAiR and conducted by The Food Bridge with European Commission funding and IFAD technical support, estimated a substantial and recurring market and argued for affordable finance, incubation and more supportive certification for diaspora agri-food entrepreneurs. This creates a concrete bridge between biodiversity objectives and commercial demand.

The 2026 CAFF Youth Challenge adds another layer: small grants, mentoring and capacity building allow young people to test practical ideas around indigenous foods, nutrition, biodiversity, entrepreneurship and local food systems. These pilots should be treated as an early-stage innovation funnel: a small number can progress into incubation, market validation and follow-on investment rather than ending when the grant closes.

4.3 Public funding priorities for CA FF

- Characterization, conservation and participatory evaluation of NUS and farmers' varieties, including nutrition and climate-resilience evidence.
- Farmer-managed seed systems, community seed banks and access to quality planting material where commercial seed markets are weak.

- Food composition, safety, processing and shelf-life research needed before SMEs can commercialize products responsibly.
- Market intelligence and consumer research, including diaspora demand, public procurement and institutional markets.
- Youth and women innovation grants, community-based pilots, training and knowledge transfer.
- Policy, standards and regulatory work that lowers barriers for safe commercialization without eroding farmers' rights or traditional knowledge.

Relevant public and philanthropic windows identified by CA FF include the Crop Trust's Power of Diversity Funding Facility, which supports opportunity crops, and research/development cooperation programmes that finance NUS, biodiversity and food-system innovation. CA FF should maintain a rolling map of such facilities and organize targeted consortia around their requirements.

4.4 Private-finance opportunities for CA FF

Investment area	Potential private partner	Revenue/scale logic
Seed and planting material	Seed enterprises, cooperatives, nurseries	Sales of quality seed/planting material where viable; service contracts
Processing and product development	Food SMEs, processors, ingredient companies	Value-added flours, snacks, beverages, ready-to-cook products
Aggregation and logistics	Aggregators, cold-chain/logistics firms	Volume, reduced transaction costs, reliable sourcing
Diaspora food corridors	Importers, wholesalers, retailers, diaspora investors	Established consumer demand and cross-border trade
Hospitality and institutional markets	Restaurants, caterers, procurement suppliers	Stable demand and product visibility
Enterprise acceleration	Incubators, impact investors, banks	Growth of validated NUS businesses and jobs

The FAO (2026) study found that 81% of financing provided by agrifood impact funds was allocated to working capital, compared with only 19% for capital expenditures. This distinction is particularly relevant for the Collective Action on Forgotten Foods, where emerging value chains require not only investments in processing equipment and infrastructure but also financing for seasonal procurement, aggregation, storage, packaging and distribution. Even when research has demonstrated the nutritional and environmental value of neglected and underutilized species, enterprises may struggle to scale without sufficient liquidity to purchase produce from farmers and fulfil market orders. The proposed Opportunity Crops Growth Facility could therefore consider a dedicated working-capital financing window, potentially combining concessional loans, guarantees and commercial lending, alongside investment in processing and market development.

4.5 A blended-finance proposition: Opportunity Crops Growth Facility

CA FF could develop an "Opportunity Crops Growth Facility" with three windows. A grant window would finance research, farmer organization, standards, youth pilots and market evidence. A technical-assistance window would prepare SMEs and cooperatives for investment through product development, food-safety

systems, certification, financial management and business planning. An investment window—managed by an appropriate financial partner rather than GFAiR—would provide patient debt, guarantees or equity to enterprises with validated demand.

CA FF scaling proposition

Public money protects biodiversity and builds evidence; catalytic finance prepares enterprises; private capital scales processing, distribution and market access. The investment case becomes stronger when CA FF aggregates multiple crops, geographies and enterprises into a portfolio rather than seeking finance crop by crop.

The AgrEcoNUS+ concept provides a useful model because it explicitly combines NUS, agroecological value chains, market opportunities and financial mechanisms intended to de-risk investment and attract public and private capital. CA FF can connect to such initiatives rather than creating parallel structures. Hence GFAiR's initiative to create a consortium of NGOs from Ghana and Ivory Coast to submit a proposal for the €2.7 million call for proposals under the AgrEcoNUS+/LEAP initiative. Over 36 months, the selected consortium will drive value chain development by: (a) Supporting at least 60 cooperatives, producer groups, and small businesses (30+ per country); (b) Building capacity in business management, technical skills, and entrepreneurship; (c) Providing tailored financial assistance (up to €60,000 per organization); (d) Expanding market access through 10+ strategic partnerships, awareness campaigns, and regional food fairs. This initiative builds on frameworks like SUSTLIVES, CROPS4HD, and ORPH-CROP, with international actors including CIHEAM Bari, SWISSAID, and the Alliance of Bioversity International & CIAT.

5. Collective Action on Agroecology (CA AE)

5.1 The scaling challenge

Agroecology is simultaneously a science, a set of practices and a food-system approach. This makes its financing needs broader than financing a single technology. Farmers may face transition costs before benefits materialize; extension systems need new capabilities; markets may not reward environmental benefits; biological inputs require research, registration, manufacturing and quality assurance; and many ecosystem benefits are public goods. Purely commercial finance is therefore insufficient, but grant-only approaches rarely provide the working capital and industrial capacity needed for scale.

5.2 CA AE as a platform for public–private scaling

The March 2025 GFAiR CA Agroecology meeting in Brussels explicitly addressed public and private funding of agroecology research. Biopesticides and biofertilizers provide a particularly concrete scaling pathway. APAARI's and EFARD/FARA's biosolutions / biopesticides webinars stressed that successful commercialization depends on coordinated investment in research, regulation, manufacturing, commercialization, extension and quality assurance. Biodiversity or technical efficacy alone does not create a market. This is precisely the type of systemic bottleneck that a Collective Action can address.

5.3 Public funding priorities for CA AE

- Long-term and participatory research on agroecological performance across diverse farming systems.
- Public extension, farmer-to-farmer learning and transition support, especially where benefits accrue over several seasons.

- Regulatory science, registration pathways, reference laboratories and quality-control systems for biological inputs.
- Open evidence on soil health, biodiversity, climate resilience, nutrition and farm economics.
- Public procurement and policy incentives that create demand for agroecological products and services.
- Capacity of NARS/NARES, universities and farmer organizations to co-develop and evaluate locally adapted solutions.

5.4 Private-finance opportunities for CA AE

Investment area	Private-finance opportunity	Public/catalytic role
Biopesticide manufacturing	Production facilities, formulation, packaging, distribution	R&D, registration, standards, field validation
Biofertilizers/organic inputs	Local production, logistics, dealer networks	Quality assurance, extension, demand creation
Agroecology services	Advisory, soil testing, mechanization, traceability	Farmer training, data standards, inclusion
Value-chain transition	Off-take, processing, differentiated markets	Certification/PGS, producer organization, market evidence. Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) are locally focused quality assurance mechanisms that certify producers based on active stakeholder participation, trust, and knowledge exchange.
Landscape/climate finance	Results-based or blended investment where robust	Measurement, safeguards, public-good activities

5.5 Biopesticides as an investable CA AE flagship

A CA AE biopesticide flagship could link the Asia-Pacific Biopesticide Community of Practice, African and European partners, NARS, regulators, research laboratories and industry. The pipeline would begin with promising biological agents and formulations, then assess efficacy, safety, regulatory requirements, manufacturing feasibility, farmer demand and distribution. Only products that pass these gates would be presented to investors or manufacturers.

The example of Ntiligira Enterprise in Ghana illustrates the practical nature of the financing gap. The enterprise produces neem-based pesticides and other organic inputs and has participated in climate-innovation incubation, but scaling requires equipment and logistics to lower costs and meet demand. Such enterprises need more than research grants: they need investment readiness, equipment finance, working capital, market linkages and reliable quality systems.

At the same time, industry engagement can contribute field data, manufacturing know-how and distribution capacity. The technical report “Biosolutions in Afro-Eurasian Agriculture: Institutional Conditions for Scaling Biopesticides and Biofertilizers” synthesized a comparative review of 13 countries across Africa, Asia and Europe. It was complemented by findings from the EFARD/GFAiR/Collective Action on Agroecology webinar of 21 July 2026. Comparative experiences demonstrated that regulatory and commercialization bottlenecks

remain particularly important, while stronger public–private partnerships and international cooperation can help bridge research and market deployment..

5.6 Public development banks and blended finance

Public development banks are potentially important because agroecological transitions often generate environmental and social benefits that commercial lenders do not fully value. Concessional credit, guarantees and longer tenors can reduce the mismatch between transition periods and repayment schedules. Blended structures can then crowd in private capital for enterprises with revenue potential, while grants continue to finance research, farmer organization and public infrastructure.

CA AE scaling proposition

Use public finance to pay for transition costs, evidence, regulation and public goods; use catalytic capital to de-risk new markets; use private finance for scalable products and services such as biological inputs, processing, advisory and distribution. The CA's value is to ensure these pieces are designed as one transition system.

6. Collective Action on Inclusive Digital Agriculture (CA IDA)

6.1 The scaling challenge

CA IDA was established to advance digital agriculture with farmers as central agents in a pro-poor transformation of agrifood research and innovation systems, with particular attention to women and youth. Its financing challenge differs from CA FF and CA AE because digital services can scale rapidly but often struggle with sustainable business models, fragmented data, connectivity constraints, language barriers, trust, recurring operating costs and the risk that farmers become data sources rather than beneficiaries.

The 2026 discussion on financing generative AI for agricultural advisory sharpened this challenge: moving beyond pilots requires coordinated investment in shared data and digital public infrastructure, together with governance frameworks that ensure accuracy, trust and accountability. This implies a deliberate division of labour. Public and philanthropic funding should support open or shared foundations and inclusion; private partners can finance and operate service layers where sustainable revenues exist.

6.2 Existing CA IDA assets

Access Agriculture, which leads CA IDA, already demonstrates a hybrid scaling model. Its localized farmer-learning videos, mobile access and solar-powered smart projectors extend knowledge to farmers with limited connectivity and literacy, while partnerships with research institutions, farmer organizations, media and private service providers expand reach. Youth entrepreneurship models can also create local service businesses around knowledge delivery.

Scientific knowledge can be combined with mobile and WhatsApp-integrated advisory and local-language farmer learning. For CA IDA, this is a strong partnership template because each actor contributes a different asset—validated content, technology, distribution, farmer networks or business capability.

6.3 Public funding priorities for CA IDA

- Digital public infrastructure, interoperable data standards and open/shared datasets where appropriate.
- Localization into farmer languages, including voice, video and low-literacy formats that commercial providers may not prioritize.

- Independent validation of agronomic content and AI-generated advice, including safety and accountability mechanisms.
- Digital inclusion for women, youth and remote communities, including offline and low-connectivity delivery.
- Capacity building for NARES, extension agents, farmer organizations and young digital service providers.
- Evidence on adoption, behaviour change, farmer value, cost-effectiveness and responsible data governance.

6.4 Private-finance opportunities for CA IDA

Partner type	Possible role in CA IDA	Commercial logic
Telecom/mobile operators	Connectivity, USSD/voice, distribution, payments	Customer acquisition, service use, ecosystem growth
AgriTech firms	Advisory, AI, farm management, market platforms	Subscriptions, B2B/B2G contracts, transaction revenue
Input/service companies	Sponsor validated advisory linked to responsible use	Market development and customer support
Banks/fintech/insurers	Digital finance, credit scoring, payments, insurance	Financial-service revenue with improved risk data
Media companies	Radio/video dissemination and localized content	Audience, sponsorship, service contracts
Impact investors	Growth capital for inclusive digital enterprises	Scalable models with measurable farmer outcomes

6.5 From pilots to digital public–private infrastructure

Past digital-agriculture innovation funds show that grants can help firms design, test and scale commercially viable services for smallholders. The lesson for CA IDA is not that every digital service should become commercial, but that pilots should explicitly test who pays, who benefits and what infrastructure must remain public or shared. A digital advisory service may be financed through government extension contracts, agribusiness subscriptions, farmer payments, bundled financial services, donor support or a combination of these.

CA IDA can add value by developing “minimum conditions for responsible scale”: farmer-centred design; evidence-based content; local-language accessibility; transparent data governance; inclusion metrics; interoperability; and a sustainable financing model. Services meeting these conditions can enter an accelerator or investment pipeline.

6.6 A financing model for Ask Agi and related advisory services

For farmer-facing AI or chatbot services, public/development finance should initially support knowledge curation, validation, language adaptation, farmer testing, monitoring and open learning. Private partners can contribute cloud/AI infrastructure, mobile distribution, product engineering, analytics and market channels. Over time, recurrent costs could be shared through institutional subscriptions, public extension contracts, responsible sponsorship, enterprise services or bundled offerings, while core public-good content remains accessible to farmers.

CA IDA scaling proposition

Finance the digital commons and inclusion as public goods; finance validated service layers through public–private contracts and catalytic capital; invest commercially only where recurring revenues and farmer value are demonstrated. Scale should be measured by useful adoption and outcomes, not downloads alone.

7. Cross-Collective Action opportunities

The three CAs should not be financed as separate thematic silos. Their strongest investment case emerges where they reinforce one another. NUS value chains need agroecological production practices and biological crop protection. Farmers and SMEs need digital advisory, training, market information and finance. Digital platforms need trusted research content and real use cases. Agroecology needs viable markets to reward transition. CA FF can provide those markets; CA AE can improve production sustainability; CA IDA can lower the cost of knowledge delivery and feedback.

7.1 A joint "NUS-to-market" pipeline

6. Identify priority NUS/value chains with farmer demand, nutrition relevance and market potential.
7. Use CA AE partners to define agroecological production protocols and biological-input options.
8. Use CA IDA to deliver local-language learning, advisory and feedback to farmers and extension agents.
9. Use CA FF market partners to test processing, products, diaspora demand, institutional procurement and consumer acceptance.
10. Aggregate evidence on yields, costs, nutrition, environmental performance and market demand.
11. Present validated enterprises and service models to accelerators, development banks, impact investors and commercial partners.

7.2 Shared financing infrastructure

A common financing platform can reduce transaction costs across the CAs. Instead of each CA separately mapping donors, accelerators and investors, GFAiR can maintain one finance intelligence function with thematic windows. The platform can include a funding-opportunity tracker, partner database, investment-readiness templates, safeguards, standard evidence requirements and a pipeline review process.

The FAO (2026) study demonstrates that dedicated agrifood impact funds remain relatively small, averaging USD 68 million in assets, compared with USD 121 million for private asset impact funds in other sectors. Smaller funds also face proportionally higher operating costs and transaction inefficiencies. These findings suggest that aggregating smaller investment opportunities into coherent regional or thematic portfolios could help reduce transaction costs and improve their attractiveness to larger financing institutions. GFAiR is well positioned to facilitate such aggregation through its Collective Actions, Regional Fora and Global NARS Consortium, bringing together enterprises, research-based innovations and service providers around common value chains or investment themes. Such an approach could be particularly relevant for Forgotten Foods SMEs, biological-input producers and inclusive digital advisory providers that may be too small individually to attract institutional investors.

7.3 Regional Fora and the Global NARS Consortium

The Regional Fora and Global NARS Consortium can help source opportunities from national systems, connect them to regional expertise and identify public policy or regulatory bottlenecks. This is particularly valuable for biopesticides, seed systems, digital advisory and NUS because scale often requires

harmonization and cross-border learning. Regional aggregation can also make smaller national opportunities more visible to larger funders and investors.

8. Financing instruments and partnership architecture

8.1 A financing continuum

Instrument	Best use in the CAs	Main caution
Research/development grants	Evidence, public goods, participation, policy, pilots	Avoid permanent pilot dependency
Challenge funds/small grants	Youth, SMEs, prototypes, local innovation	Provide follow-on pathway for successful pilots
Technical-assistance facilities	Business planning, standards, certification, investment readiness	Tie support to clear milestones
Concessional debt	Equipment, working capital, transition finance	Match repayment to agricultural cash flows
Guarantees/first-loss capital	De-risk lending to SMEs/cooperatives	Ensure additionality and transparent risk sharing
Impact equity/patient capital	High-growth enterprises with measurable outcomes	Protect mission and farmer value
Commercial debt/equity	Proven enterprises and mature services	Do not force immature innovations into commercial finance
Public procurement/contracts	Advisory, local foods, services with public value	Transparent procurement and performance metrics

8.2 Partnership principles for private finance

Private finance can accelerate impact, but partnership quality matters. NARS should screen potential partnerships for alignment with GFAiR's Partnership Principles and the objectives of the CAs. At minimum, agreements should clarify the problem being solved, expected farmer and public benefits, commercial interests, data and intellectual-property arrangements, risk allocation, evidence standards, conflict-of-interest management and exit conditions.

GFAiR's experience with KOKO Plus in a research proposal is instructive: a private actor may withdraw when a consortium's broad public-interest objectives do not align with the company's target market and commercial priorities. This should not be treated as a failure of partnership in itself. It demonstrates why motivations and expected benefits must be explicit at the outset. A company seeking sales growth, a philanthropic foundation seeking public health outcomes and a research consortium seeking evidence may collaborate, but only if the value proposition for each is clear.

8.3 Blended finance: use selectively

Blended finance is useful when a project creates significant public benefits but contains revenue-generating components that private investors consider too risky at first. Public or philanthropic capital can finance technical assistance, guarantees, first-loss protection or early infrastructure, thereby improving the risk-return profile. It should not be used simply to make weak business models appear investable. The underlying enterprise or service still needs credible demand, capable management and a path to financial sustainability.

The FAO study (2026) confirms the importance of public capital in mobilizing private investment for agrifood systems. Public investors accounted for 38% of the capital invested in dedicated food and agriculture impact funds, compared with 21% across private asset impact funds more broadly. More than one-third of agrifood funds incorporated blended-finance mechanisms combining public and private capital. This evidence supports GFAiR's proposed approach of using public and philanthropic resources to address early-stage risks, strengthen research-based innovations, and facilitate subsequent private investment. For Collective Actions, blended finance should therefore be designed around specific market failures and investment barriers, with concessional resources deployed strategically to mobilize additional finance rather than substitute for commercially viable investment.

9. From evidence to investable pipelines

9.1 Investment-readiness screen

Before introducing an opportunity to private financiers, the CAs should apply a common screen. This will prevent premature investor engagement and help identify what public support is still required.

Question	Evidence required
Problem and users	Clearly defined farmer/consumer need and target group
Research validity	Evidence of technical performance and limitations
Demand	Customer/off-taker interest, willingness to pay, procurement pathway
Business model	Who pays, unit economics, recurrent costs, margins
Team/governance	Capable organization, roles, financial controls
Regulatory pathway	Relevant approvals, standards, data/food/input requirements
Inclusion	Expected benefits and risks for smallholders, women and youth
Scale pathway	Distribution, partnerships, geography, capacity constraints
Finance ask	Amount, instrument, use of funds, milestones and repayment/return logic

9.2 A stage-gate process

- Discovery: identify promising research outputs, enterprises and system innovations through CA partners and Regional Fora.
- Validation: assess evidence, farmer demand, safeguards and policy/regulatory requirements.
- Co-design: build the scaling partnership and define public versus commercial components.
- Preparation: provide technical assistance, incubation and financial modelling.
  The FAO (2026) analysis emphasizes that technical assistance is a strategic component of agrifood impact investment, rather than simply a complementary capacity-building activity. Technical-assistance facilities can strengthen the operational and financial capacity of investees, improve the quality of investment pipelines, and align enterprise development with environmental, social and governance objectives.
- Financing: match the opportunity to grants, challenge funds, development banks, blended facilities or investors.
- Scale and learn: track farmer outcomes, commercial performance, inclusion and environmental effects; adapt and share lessons.

10. A practical roadmap for 2026–2030

Phase 1 – 2026/27: Organize the pipeline

- Create a CA finance and investment map, building on CGIAR and GFAiR's funding intelligence and existing partner networks.
- Select 3–5 flagship scaling opportunities per CA, with at least one cross-CA flagship.
- Apply the investment-readiness screen and identify evidence/finance gaps.
- Form financing consortia that include research, farmer organizations, SMEs, public agencies and appropriate financiers.
- Use proposal write-shops not only for grants but also for blended-finance concept notes and investment memoranda.

Phase 2 – 2027/28: Demonstrate blended scaling models

- Launch one Opportunity Crops/NUS blended facility or partner window in collaboration with Crop Trust.
- Launch a biopesticide/biosolutions commercialization pipeline linking research, regulators and industry in collaboration with IBMA (International Biomanufacturers Association).
- Test at least two sustainable financing models for inclusive digital advisory, including public-service contracting and private/service bundling.
- Build a common monitoring framework covering farmer value, inclusion, environmental outcomes and financial sustainability.

Phase 3 – 2029/30: Institutionalize and replicate

- Replicate validated financing models through Regional Fora and the Global NARS Consortium.
- Aggregate smaller enterprises and national initiatives into regional portfolios attractive to development banks and impact investors.
- Use evidence from the CAs to influence public development banks, national agricultural investment plans and donor programming.
- Create long-term co-investment partnerships that allow successful CA innovations to graduate from project funding without losing their public-purpose orientation.

Suggested success indicators

Dimension	Illustrative indicator
Public funding mobilized	Grant/concessional resources secured for CA public goods and pilots
Private capital mobilized	Debt/equity/corporate co-investment into validated CA enterprises/services
Leverage	Private/catalytic capital mobilized per unit of grant funding, interpreted cautiously
Pipeline quality	Number of opportunities progressing from validation to investment readiness
Farmer value	Farmers reached with demonstrated income, resilience, nutrition or cost benefits
Inclusion	Share of women/youth-led enterprises and participating smallholders
Sustainability	Services/enterprises continuing after initial grant support
System change	Policies, standards, procurement mechanisms or financing products changed

11. Conclusion

The central question is no longer whether agricultural research should engage private finance. The more useful question is which parts of an innovation pathway require public funding, which can sustain private investment, and how the two can be connected without compromising public purpose. GFAiR's Collective Actions provide a practical structure for answering this question because they begin with shared problems and multi-stakeholder partnerships rather than with a predetermined financial instrument.

For CA FF, the pathway runs from biodiversity and traditional knowledge to seed systems, processing, markets and NUS enterprises. For CA AE, it runs from research and transition support to biological inputs, advisory, sustainable value chains and investment in agroecological businesses. For CA IDA, it runs from trusted knowledge, data and inclusion to scalable digital advisory and service ecosystems. Each pathway needs public finance at its foundation and private finance where a viable product or service emerges.

The strategic opportunity for GFAiR is to become a broker of investable, equitable innovation pathways: building evidence, convening the right partners, preparing opportunities, protecting inclusion and directing each financing need to the instrument best suited to it. In this model, grants are not the opposite of investment; they are part of a financing continuum that allows public-good research to generate durable impact at scale.

Annex 1. Financing matrix for the three Collective Actions

Collective Action	Grant/public finance	Catalytic/blended finance	Private finance
CA FF	NUS research; seed conservation; nutrition; farmer knowledge; policy; youth pilots	SME incubation; certification; guarantees; market development	Processing; aggregation; logistics; retail; diaspora trade; growth capital
CA AE	Long-term research; extension; regulation; soil/biodiversity evidence	Transition credit; guarantees; TA; first-loss; results-based mechanisms	Biological inputs; advisory; equipment; processing; distribution
CA IDA	Digital public goods; open/shared data; localization; validation; inclusion	Innovation funds; accelerators; public-service contracts; concessional growth capital	Platforms; telecom delivery; fintech; B2B services; enterprise subscriptions

Annex 2. Illustrative cross-CA investment pipeline

Pipeline opportunity	CA FF contribution	CA AE contribution	CA IDA contribution	Potential finance
NUS youth enterprise accelerator	Crops, markets, food products, diaspora links	Sustainable production practices	Digital marketing/advisory	Grants → accelerator → seed/impact capital
Biopesticides for NUS value chains	Priority crops and farmer networks	R&D, efficacy, biological inputs	Farmer advisory and feedback	Public R&D → TA → equipment/working-capital finance
Diaspora opportunity-crop corridor	Demand, SMEs, trade and product development	Production standards and sustainability	Traceability, market information, e-commerce	Market research grants → guarantees/debt/equity
Inclusive AI advisory for agroecology	NUS content/use cases	Agroecology/biopesticide knowledge	AI, local languages, delivery and monitoring	Public digital infrastructure → contracts/sponsorship/service revenue

Annex 3. Selected sources used

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Annex 4. Webinars & events

6 July 2026. The Financing Agri-Food Systems Sustainably (FINAS) 2026 Dialogue

26 June 2026. The RAMP (Research and Market Pathways) webinar

3 June 2026 Resource Mobilization: Evaluating funding landscapes for food and nutrition research in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)

29 May 2026. Power of Diversity Grants

24 March 2026. New global opportunities for Belgian agri-food: how can BIO support you?

19 March 2026. Financing Flows for Sustainable Food Systems

4–6 March 2026. 9th edition of the Italy–Africa Business Week (IABW)

20 January 2026. Webinar: The Value of Adopting a Systems Approach for Agrifood Finance

12 December 2025. Investing in the Future of Agrifood Systems: New directions for development finance

10 December 2025 Unlocking the Global Market Potential of Africa's Adapted Crops

22 October 2025. Bridging Continents through Innovation: Africa–Europe Innovation Dialogues

20 August 2025. The Neycha Accelerator & Fund to support agroecological enterprises in East Africa

13 August 2025. COLEAD's Access to Finance (A2F)

18 July 2025. Vyakulani II event by Foodbridge

30 June - 3 July 2025. The 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4)

20 - 22 May 2025. Financing Agri-Food Systems Sustainably, FINAS 2025, Summit

17 - 21 March 2025. Financing Smallholder Farmers Conference

14 March 2025. Investing in innovative solutions for nutrition-sensitive agriculture

13 March 2025. AAP Recherche Sols 2025-2028: call for research projects Fonds de Dotation Roullier

10 March 2025. InfoPoint Hybrid Conference: "Investing in Africa's agriculture - The role of AATIF & blended finance"

3 March 2025. Promotion of agricultural finance for agri-based enterprises in rural areas

28 February 2025. Discussions on Role of Biopesticides in Agriculture.

20 February 2025. Strengthening Collaboration on Soil Carbon: Roles and Opportunities for the Africa Chapter of the International Research Consortium (IRC-SC)

2-13 December 2024. Harnessing science and public-private partnerships to advance agri-tech innovations for drought resilience and sustainable land use in the Middle East and North Africa

5 December 2024. Nutrition-sensitive food value chain in the Africa region – investing in MSMEs for delivering healthy diets by IFAD

27 November 2024. 7th Asia-Pacific Biopesticides Community of Practice event

26 - 27 November 2024. Financing Food Systems Transformation and Rural Revitalization

26 August 2024. CGIAR Capacity Sharing Accelerator Partners Consultation Online Session

30 May 2024. Navigating Co-Investment Grants: Lessons from Market Systems Development Programs

16 May 2024. Designing and Implementing AgTech Innovation challenges and Competitions (AICC)

9-10 May 2024. East Africa Carbon Markets Forum, a premier event bringing together key stakeholders in the region's carbon markets.

8 May 2024. Nudging the local financial marketplace

25 April 2024. Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Sustainable Soil Health

24 April 2024. Innovations Session n°18: Innovations in packaging: opportunities for African entrepreneurs and SMEs

11 April 2024. How Can Businesses Secure a More Sustainable, Equitable and Resilient Future for the Food Sector?

25 March 2024. Carbon Markets Clinic on carbon markets in Kenya

5 March 2024. Climate Change and the African Financial Sector

22 February 2024. Small tickets, big returns: Innovative tools to reduce the overall cost to serve small agri businesses

20 February 2024. Financing urban and city region food system actions

14-15 February 2024. Africa Tech Summit Nairobi

8 February 2024. Building startup ecosystems to leverage the private and public sector for the transformation of our food system – A guidebook

11 December 2023. By Africa, for Africa: A new approach to collaboration between Africa's institutions and CGIAR for climate action in agriculture

7 December 2023. Strengthening the entrepreneurial capacities of Research and Innovation project.

5-6 December 2023. Food 2030: Green and resilient food systems

24-28 April 2023. Good Food Finance Week 2023

7 March 2023. 6TH GLF Investment Case Symposium

27 February 2023 Building Resilience for Future Generations: The Need for Increased Investments in Public Agriculture Research

8-9 December 2022. 5th East African Banking & Microfinance Forum

6 July 2022. Agri-SME finance: Navigating volatility in the wake of the war in Ukraine

30 June 2022. Building and financing climate-resilient agriculture and food systems in Africa

29 to 30 June 2022. Boosting responsible investment in agriculture and food systems in Africa

9 June 2022. Digital Agriculture Platform to Enable Access to Capital, Improved Production, Aggregation, and Trade for Smallholder Farmers

25 May 2022. Food security in West and Central Africa and the need to reinforce value chain finance.

19 May 2022. Financial Solutions for Women in Rural and Agricultural Livelihoods: Evidence and Experience

24 March 2022. How banks assess climate risks and integrate them into credit risk assessments

7 July 2021. Contractual relationships and contracting arrangements in the agrifood sector

30 June 2021. Agri-investment in Asia and beyond by Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness (CASA)

23 June 2021. Global investment gap in agricultural R&D

31 May-4 June 2021. How research can better support innovation for the transformation of the agrifood systems in Africa?

3 June 2021. The AgriFI Kenya Challenge Fund

26 May 2021. Building evidence for transforming agricultural innovation systems under climate change

26 May 2021. Five routes to profitable sourcing from smallholder farmers: investor perspectives on the 'deal'

19 May 2021. Agri finance for transformation: Partnering along sustainable value chains

4 March 2021. The Secret to Mobilizing Funds for Agri-SMEs