

# Leadership for Food System Transformation Concept note for a 15-month start-up phase

L4FST

Supporting leaders in Africa to deliver  
food systems transformation

Wageningen University  
& Research with Wasafiri  
Consulting, July 17, 2020



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# 1 Overview of our concept

We propose initiating a far-reaching multi-year programme to catalyse the leadership required for food systems transformation in East Africa. The programme called Leadership for Food System Transformation (L4FST) will be a co-owned partnership between African organisations and Wageningen University & Research (WUR), which combines commitment, science and action. This document outlines a 15 month start-up phase from Oct 2020 – Dec 2021 towards the full leadership programme.

Global, and African, progress in transforming food systems paints a concerning picture despite decades of effort and warnings. The 2014 African Union’s Malabo Declaration formulated bold and necessary steps to transform agriculture into a vital economic sector while also tackling hunger and poverty. Nonetheless, Africa’s own performance framework<sup>1</sup> shows that just four countries are on-track to meet the food system transformation goals set by Africa’s Heads of State. COVID-19 and locusts are further revealing how vulnerable current food systems are to shocks and stresses, and how leadership is struggling to respond appropriately. At the same time, there are many national and continental initiatives, dialogues and networks that are taking positive steps forward.

Our vision is to foster a professional movement of connected, motivated and capable leaders seeking such transformation and working collaboratively across food systems domains for the well-being of young and old in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda. High-quality, systems oriented leadership is critical to push forward efforts towards a transformed “new normal”. A new normal that within 20 years really does provide healthy food for all, regenerates critical natural resources and creates prospect for all working in food systems. In these four East African countries agriculture is still a critical sector for food security, jobs and livelihoods, which must be transformed in the face of some of the fastest growing populations globally, high levels of chronic poverty and malnutrition, and major climate change and other environmental pressures.

The start-up phase will work with relevant on-going initiatives and persons to define the overall focus and approach and develop the elements of the intended full programme. The approach will be based on principles based on working with systems and complexity, and successful partnership models that will:

- Meet genuine and evolving leadership needs
- Take an action-based approach to build individual and system leadership capacity, thus enabling emerging leaders to move into positions of influence.

African co-ownership of this leadership programme will be built in from the outset, from inclusion in the proposal development, through the start-up phase and into full implementation. Collective vision and country specific priorities creates the foundational focus for leadership support. Wageningen University and Research co-ownership brings to bear its strengths as a globally leading agricultural university, with extensive knowledge and global networks seeking food systems shifts.

*1] 2019 Second Biennial Review considered by African Union Heads of State at the African Union Summit, February 2020*

## 2 The need for East Africa food system leadership

Africa is undergoing enormous change with some of the world's highest rates of economic growth, population growth, urbanization, migration and conflict. With substantial threats also from climate change, soil degradation and biodiversity loss, more sustainable and equitable food systems are essential to provide a basis for health, stability, inclusive economic development and improving living standards. These factors are strongly present in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda.

The risk of food systems in these countries continuing on the current slow trajectory of change are high. Rapid change and established systems often lead to investment, innovation and policy choices that seem safe in the short term but bear the risk of not addressing structural issues. A focus on simple food security needs often does not generate other public goods such as nutritional security, healthy natural production resources or thriving livelihoods for those wholly or partially dependent on the agrifood system. Other choices can be made, with proven examples of innovation in informal markets, community-based programmes, inclusive business models, sector transformation processes, regenerative production systems and targeted strategies for different segments of domestic food systems.

To mainstream such choices requires local and national leadership that understands and operates within food systems and that acts collaboratively on the lesser known but necessary pathways. Strong leadership, proven alternative systems and new compelling narratives can lead to wider scale impact beyond East Africa.

Based on initial research, discussions with partners working on leadership in Africa, and WUR's own experience to-date, we observe there are multiple leadership initiatives but none that focus on food systems as a whole, and none that have an explicit long-term timeframe that connect into Africa's ambitions and institutional infrastructure to transform food systems. Likewise, we found no examples that explicitly aim to cultivate leadership across civic, public and private sectors, and so transition food systems through innovations that are far more inclusive and grounded within both private as well as public interests.

# 3 Supporting distributed, systems leadership

Food systems are complex and do more than feed people. They generate and are embedded in wider public values ranging from food traditions and culture, to landscape management and identity, jobs, and prosperity. Food systems therefore encapsulate a wide range of – often conflicting – issues: income vs equitability, human needs vs ecological boundaries. Moreover, food systems in practice are made up of and embedded within a wide variety of sectors, social interests and broader political-economic (inter)national currents.

There are no simple, singular technologies, actors or approaches that will enable a transition to more sustainable systems. Instead, a wide range of context-specific initiatives must invest, innovate, and share to pursue change in key aspects of food systems. This requires individual leadership on multiple fronts collaborating on the broader transformation required from a range of industries and sectors, as well as reshaping leadership within organizations and networks to be more flexible and act for the common good.

L4FST intends to enable and nurture a diverse range of people and sectors needed to orchestrate this transition to fundamentally new goals. Through diversity and intensified connections we can cultivate distributed leadership with a shared focus on accelerating positive systems change.

Coming from different sectors and walks of life, the future users of this programme are likely to volunteer and be selected based on their aspiration for food system transformation. They must be individuals with passion for this cause and the potential to make change happen. The programme will offer cutting edge expertise on key dimensions of food systems, but equally important is the safe and inclusive space it offers to creatively experiment with new behaviors and develop new networks. The design of the programme will focus on creating an excellent user experience for this type of creative personal growth and exploration, linking with influential institutions, and using a blend of African and international good practices.

## 3.1 Co-owned between African partners and WUR

Food system changes in Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda only happens from within, that is led and implemented by those who are active part of their own national and local systems. That is why the programme will have an anchoring co-lead each country. These co-leads will speak with and for national networks of diverse leaders in setting priority goals and actions and running national programmes. Relevant existing leadership programmes and networks, such as Generation Africa and ALU.

WUR's mission is 'To explore the potential of nature to improve the quality of life'. Over 6,500 employees and 12,000 students from more than hundred countries work everywhere around the world in the domain of healthy food and living environment for governments and the business community-at-large.

The strength of WUR lies in its ability to join the forces of nine specialized research institutes and the university. It also lies in the combined efforts of the various fields of natural and social sciences. This union of food system expertise leads to scientific breakthroughs that can quickly be put into practice and be incorporated into education. This is the Wageningen Approach. Furthermore, WUR has decades of active partnerships in East Africa, working together on agrifood research, capacity development, multi-stakeholder policy dialogue – ranging from high-level policy engagement to working directly with farmers and local activists.

WUR will be assisted by Wasafiri Consulting. Wasafiri is a leading systems change consultancy and think tank with strong relationships with influential African and international institutions seeking to transform Africa's food systems. They use systems-based approaches to help leaders and organisations generate impact at scale. For example, in 2018-20 Wasafiri designed and incubated Generation Africa to change the narrative on how youth perceive the agriculture sector in Africa. Generation Africa is now successfully handed over to the African led AGRF, Africa's leading platform for agricultural transformation.

A shared ownership of the programme will be safeguarded through a 5-member steering committee. This committee will represent each country and WUR. It will also reflect the system leadership of the whole programme with members coming from public, private, civil, farming and research backgrounds.

### **3.2 Principle based**

A shared set of principles framing the purpose and way of operating will ensure coherence across countries and over the years. The following are starting principles for future finalisation.

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#### **1. Locally-anchored, globally connected**

Scope, shape and ambition of the programme in each country determined and led by in-country actors building on existing national-level efforts. Inspiration, influencing and learning enhanced through regional connection.

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#### **2. Systems-focused, complexity-aware**

Ability to think and act in complex systems the focus of capacity development and action taken.

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#### **3. Adaptive, based on evidence**

Programme evolving through structured reflection on shifting needs and value.

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#### **4. Diverse**

Civil, private and public stakeholders all represented and highly diverse across gender, age, location, access to resources, education, and socio-cultural norms.

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#### **5. Strengthening individuals and networks**

Building capacity of individuals and strengthening relationships to generates new and influential networks.

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#### **6. Influential through action**

Focus on applied learning in on-going leadership situations to combine urgent action, individual capacity development relevant to their context and natural movement to positions of increasing influence.

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#### **7. Transparency**

Transparent about purpose, process and activities and a focus on common good.

## 4 Start-up phase

This section outlines the 15-month start-up phase. Should we receive an invitation, a complete proposal will be developed in August/September 2020.

The start-up phase will lead to a programme proposal for the overall 12-year strategy and an operationally ready programme for the first four years.

The overall approach of the start-up phase will be to start by finding a core group of active food systems leaders in each country to explore what transformational goals they are working on, and what leadership support is required. In one country with the strongest dynamic an initial programme of activities and support will be defined and set in motion. The networks in the other countries will remain connected to the initial programme activities, to learn at a distance and build relationships for future start-up. Initial experience and comparison across all countries will be used to design a full programme that can continue in the starting country and be phased in in other countries. While this is being written into a multi-year proposal, more detailed programme elements will be trialled in the starting country, with learning being regularly applied demonstrating our 'adaptive' principle.

Steps to be taken in this start-up phase are outlined below.

Table 1: Start-up phase steps

What	Key questions	Activities	Result	When
<b>1.</b> <b>Identify on-going initiatives, common transformational goals and necessary leadership strengthening transformational goals are being worked on, by country and in region?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which relevant initiatives are on-going in each country?</li> <li>• What transformational goals are being worked on, by country and in region?</li> <li>• What do current food systems look like in each country, how are they performing against identified transformational goals?</li> <li>• What specific and collective leadership needs are there?</li> <li>• Where is there the strongest need, interest and dynamic this programme can connect with?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building engagement with exemplary efforts</li> <li>• By country map on-going initiatives seeking transformational change.</li> <li>• By country synthesis of current understanding of country FS: drivers, mechanisms, impacts</li> <li>• Collective visioning gatherings using forecasting and art</li> </ul>	Country- and regional priority initiatives to start with. Overview FS performance and transformational goals Leadership needs identification	<b>October - December 2021</b>
<b>2.</b> <b>Pulling together initial team of partners and champions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who can anchor the start up phase in each country?</li> <li>• Who wants to participate in the programme, for what purpose?</li> <li>• Which other partners are needed?</li> <li>• Which WUR departments are relevant for identified needs</li> <li>• What are specific roles, relations and responsibilities?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-country workshops and learning journeys with country teams &amp; prospective partners to develop country strategies</li> <li>• Set up local org/team to develop in-country plans, partnership long-listing</li> <li>• Cross-country learning / sharing between partners</li> </ul>	Start team in first country: participants and trainers High-level Champions Starting Organisation per country	<b>January 2021</b>
<b>3.</b> <b>Design initial programme in first country</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What initial programme of activities will meet the identified needs of initial partnering initiatives?</li> <li>• How to implement such a programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design workshop</li> <li>• Writing out details</li> </ul>	Prototype programme V1	<b>February 2021</b>
<b>4.</b> <b>Implementation initial programme</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How useful and effective is this leadership support?</li> <li>• How could it connect to needs in other countries?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prototype implementation</li> <li>• Regional exchange</li> <li>• First evaluation</li> </ul>	Impulse for initial partnering initiatives Experience with programme elements and implementation process	<b>March - June 2021</b>

*Continued >>*



What	Key questions	Activities	Result	When
<b>5.</b> <b>Framing initial model of necessary leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What type of leadership is necessary to drive food system transformation within each country, in East Africa?</li> <li>• Who needs supporting?</li> <li>• What are key goals for this programme, KPIs for first phase?</li> <li>• What is the research agenda related to FS transitions and the role of leadership?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country workshops (4x)</li> <li>• Regional workshop</li> </ul>	Country/regional vision of necessary leadership for food system transformation	<b>July 2021</b>
<b>6.</b> <b>Co-design programme</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What programme elements are needed?</li> <li>• Which topics are covered?</li> <li>• Who does what?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-country and remote engagement with country teams</li> <li>• Write-shop</li> </ul>	Leadership development curriculum (content areas; interaction design; proposed sequencing of activities; participant selection process; linkages with other events & networks).	<b>August - Sept 2021</b> Full proposal submitted September 2021
<b>7.</b> <b>Setting up programme implementation, governance structures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which governance structure matches purposes, principles and partnership?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-country and remote engagement</li> <li>• Partnering agreements</li> <li>• MEAL system development</li> </ul>	Implementation plan and structures in place, covering governance framework, fund management; coordination/partnering mechanisms. Elements of programme ready to run. Process to track programme progress and ensure necessary new development for next steps.	<b>October - December 2021</b>

# 5 Multi-year programme outline

The following is a topline description of how the programme will be structured. The programme will work on three areas:

- 1 Leadership training and support:** Cultivate leaders for food systems transformation through high quality and well-targeted programmes that enable and foster individual and food system leadership.
- 2 Leadership approach development:** Build a body of understanding and application on food system transition processes that must deliver on transformation goals, the role of different kinds of leadership in driving transitions and effective support for such leadership. Diagnostics as well as application.
- 3 Seeding a movement:** Catalyse and support alumni participants to seed a broader movement of food systems professional leadership, spreading this narrative, knowledge and networking more widely within the starting countries and provide a foundation for engaging the whole East Africa region and beyond.

Component 1 will be repeated in overlapping cycles, with start-up in the four priority countries staggered. Action and applied research will run throughout the programme, drawing on and feeding into the experiences and opportunities generated through the leadership cycles. Component 3 will build on and follow the progress of Component 1.

Figure 1: 12 year program outline

1	Set-up	Cycle 1			Cycle 2			Cycle 3			Review	Country 1
		Set-up	Cycle 1		Cycle 2		Cycle 3		Review		Country 2	
				Set-up	Cycle 1		Cycle 2		Review		Country 3	
				Set-up	Cycle 1		Cycle 2		Review		Country 4	
2	Management of interventions, network support, development of approach										Review	
3	Strategic alignment				Support to movement				Capture learning, review			
Phase 1 (year 1-4)				Phase 2 (year 5-8)				Phase 3 (year 9-12)				

More details per component:

### 1 Leadership training and support

This programme will include three components run over three years:

**a. Selection.** Potential candidates for the training identified through open and closed invitations.

**b. Intensive training.** Limited period of intensive action-oriented training sandwiched in on-going initiatives. Content knowledge, skills and capacities as well as building shared visions for FS transformation.

**c. Mentoring and enabling.** Working on targeted goal with intermittent training input. Mentoring, network support and financial means provided.

### 2 Leadership approach development

This component will use action, transdisciplinary and more fundamental *research to consider how do food systems make soft and hard transitions towards fundamental transformations, and what kinds of leadership can drive such processes effectively?* The purpose of this work is to add necessary diagnostic detail how get to the lofty transformational goals that are now generally accepted, but poorly acted on. An important dimension will be how softer transitions can be more deliberately instigated, thus avoiding highly disruptive shock-induced transitions. The iterative learning from this component will feed directly into the development of our approach, and shape the interventions foreseen in Component 1 and Component 3.

### 3 Seeding a movement

As the country level leadership cadre grows in terms of participants, alumni and traction, increasing focus will go to supporting and connecting to a wider movement of food system leaders. In due course the programme will aim to transition activities to other organizations. Three phases are anticipated:

**Phase 1 (year 1-4)** – Formal recognition of the leadership programme by major institutions such as AFDB, East African Economic Community and national governments as well in organisations and companies will be sought. A widening of action-oriented partnership will be the priority. The reputation of the programme must be established by the end of this phase.

**Phase 2 (year 5-8)** – Growing a movement. The overall programme will seek to support the interaction between initiatives, as well as play a stronger role in relevant dialogues. Joint and co-funded initiatives with others will be built up to expand the initial scope.

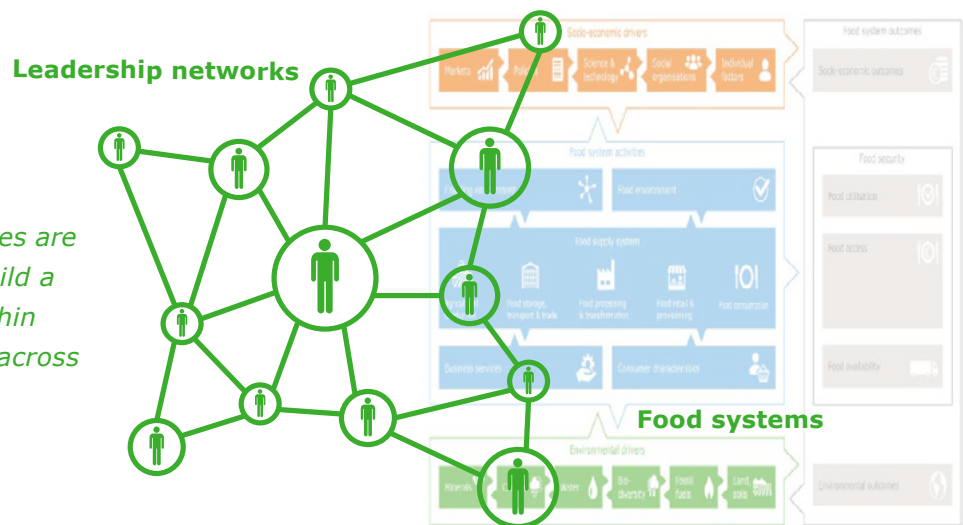
**Phase 3 (9-12)** – Strengthening influence. In the final phase the overall programme's setup will be primarily shaped by alumni and joint collaboration. It is likely to work towards a more distributed model of leadership support.

Figure 2: Seeding a movement

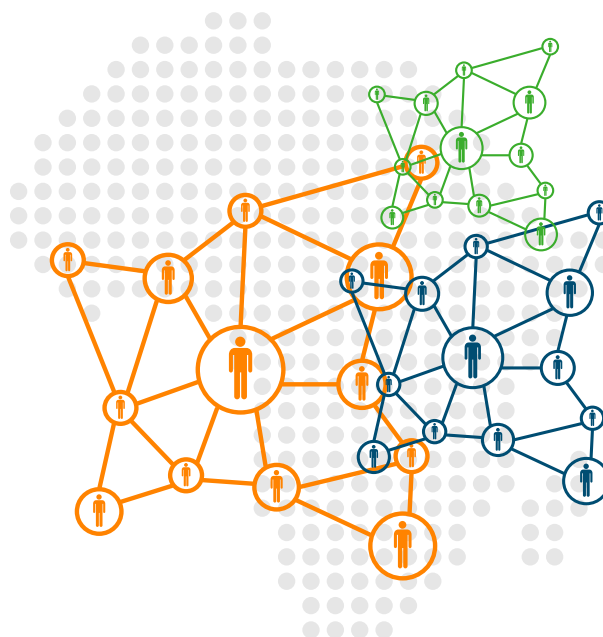
- 1 Selecting candidates to enable and nurture in 3-year leadership programmes



- 2 The programmes are repeated to build a movement within countries and across East Africa



- 3 which invites crowding in and building influence



## 5.2 Scope

We wish to work with kind of national and regional critical mass of people that has the potential for collective impact on prioritized areas of national food systems. Indicative targets are for 50 individuals reached directly per country per year, and between 500-1000 reached indirectly.

## 5.3 Programme domains

We see four main domains in which new leaders will benefit.

### Knowledge & learning

Much of the knowledge for sustainable food systems already exists. This programme will pull together a master-class oriented package of critical knowledge areas, such as (regenerative) farm production systems, market dynamics, food systems thinking, inclusive agribusiness, multi-stakeholder collaboration, power/governance/ political economics. The programme will be designed to stimulate life-long processes that extend far beyond educational institutions and teaching. It is intended to be integrated with leaders' entire career paths, rather than as an initial catalyst.

### Skills (soft, hard)

The nature of resilient systems is that leadership emerges as a quality in far more people than just the formal leaders (CEOs, directors, etc) and instead becomes embedded within a plurality of members of organizations and networks. Different skills are required that fit different roles to cultivate innovation and growth, whether it's with for- and non-profits. Underpinning all skills is the need for young leaders to be able to reflect, learn and continually develop.

### Networks

Youth networks that support the development of food systems already exist in abundance - well beyond the formal ones. These networks will be sought and supported.

### Experience & expertise

An inherent quality of leadership is supporting the growth of individuals or organizations. This can come in the form of guidance, mentoring, internships or peer-support to help develop the necessary expertise and experience of all those involved, and who in turn contribute to organizations' overall progress.

#### **5.4 Guidance, governance, coordination**

An in-country team and governing board including at least 75% East Africans will coordinate and oversee agreed activities per phase. Towards the end of each phase they will be responsible for a deep reflection on the need, focus, relevance and effectiveness of the programme and guide creative re-design of the next phase.

Coordination will include running and overseeing the training programme, review and approve proposals submitted by participants for funding, engage with leaders as they implement their projects, organize events to help strengthen the network and monitor how the activities of this network is (or isn't) fulfilling the intended strategy of shifting food systems in the country.

#### **5.5 Working with others**

Food system transformation, in the end, happens from within. A leadership programme in four African countries must be co-created and co-run by key partners in those countries. It also needs strong expertise on leadership development per se. WUR and Wasafiri Consulting will therefore use their extensive existing networks to seek key partners to be part of this initiative. An initial limited group will be part of the start-up phase, as needed this further partnership will be identified. In building pure leadership skills, WUR will look to collaborate with institutes and individuals who are specifically skilled in these domains. They will also be part of the core team that will build, implement and adapt the programme as it evolves. Overall programme coordination will lie with WUR.

## 6 Working on a full proposal

Wageningen University & Research will lead on the writing of a full proposal with support from Wasafiri Consulting. An inspiration/ideation committee representing the four targeted countries and WUR will be set up to provide high-level guidance on the multi-year intention and startup phase. Active consultation with potential anchoring and implementation partners will be built into the process.

### **The full proposal will include:**

- Partner embedding: How this programme will be anchored and governed
- Vision: Where do we want to be on January 1, 2022
- Context: Initial country and regional food system context
- Participant selection: Profiling, selection process
- 12-year programme: Key functions and structure of programme specified, exact form to emerge during startup
- Connecting: Connecting to other leadership and food system initiatives, specified by content and transition process
- Startup workstream: Fully detailed and planned
- Team: Startup phase
- Budget: Detailed

Wageningen University & Research  
with Wasafiri Consulting

**July 17, 2020**

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