

Comments to the African Union Commission on the Africa Fertilizer and Soil Health Action Plan

This submission has been compiled by AICCRA¹

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Overall suggestions

We suggest that the African Union Fertilizer and Soil Health Action Plan include and take note of the following key points:

- **Support and promote local organic fertilisers and soil improvers from organic waste**

We suggest that the Action Plan highlight the importance of the **biological cycle** and that it promotes the **use of recycled organic fertilisers and soil improvers**. This could be achieved by setting up **decentralised composting infrastructure** to produce organic fertilisers and soil improvers which are in the interests of smallholder farmers and agricultural communities,

Measures also need to be included that aim at **enhancing the natural cycles of nutrients** already present in nature and economy, notably through **Circular Economy**. The concepts of **composting or circularity** are largely absent in the current draft. It is of utmost importance to take a regenerative approach to improve soils health and fertility by reinjecting the nutrients that are results of our human existence, both in the municipal sewage sludge, biowaste in household waste and industrial/agricultural residues. In addition, separate collection at source of those streams, and not mixing it with other non-organic residues, is of utmost importance to further process it to a valuable natural fertiliser and soil improver.

There are various other new technologies that could also help achieve this, including the development of pilot projects on **small-scale green ammonia production**; the use of **novel fertilizer formulations** that may be taken up more effectively by the plant; the collection and

¹Building on 50 years of CGIAR research and innovation, [Accelerating the Impact of CGIAR Climate Research for Africa \(AICCRA\)](#) is an initiative that works to scale climate-smart agriculture and climate information services that reach millions of smallholder farmers in Africa. AICCRA is supported by a grant from the International Development Association of the World Bank.

utilisation of the **enormous quantities of organic waste streams from in and around cities**; and digesting/composting the material and getting it back onto the land.

- **Reform subsidies and incentives**

To promote the local production of fertilizers, **subsidies need to be repurposed** for manufacture and developing effective transportation networks so that rural small-scale farmers can obtain it cheaply and apply it when it's needed.

- **Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) innovations**

The Action Plan should include reference to relevant context-specific CSA innovations (with their triple wins) to ensure the cost-effectiveness of investments in fertilizer use, while mitigating the effect of climate change and variability.

- **Inclusion of gender and youth to promote soil health**

Gender-sensitive finance, technical support and information are needed to enable women to implement sustainable soil health practices. Lack of access to land and fertilizers, for example, is increasing the gender productivity gap in many African countries, including in Malawi. **Women's traditional approaches to soil health should be supported** rather than bypassed, in the form of tree planting, conservation agriculture, agro-forestry, and use of organic fertilizer and other practices.

Research on women's use of organic and non-organic fertilizers has found that women tend to have **less access to inputs required to use fertilizers effectively**. For example, they tend to not have access to information on non-organic fertilizer approaches, such as micro-dosing. In addition, increased labour requirements and lack of information influence their use of organic fertilizers. These constraints and barriers need to be addressed within the current Action Plan, which currently doesn't include gender and youth considerations, except in relation to fertilizer entrepreneurship.

- **Managing the risks associated with climate variability and climate change**

The Action Plan neglects to mention the issues of **managing risks associated with climate variability**, which should be factored into fertilizer and soil health management practices. It is important to **bundle fertilizer and soil health recommendations with Climate Information Services to reduce and address this risk**. In addition, it is important that the Action Plan highlights that increased productivity can play a role in reducing the equivalent carbon dioxide emission per unit of crop biomass

* Please note that **specific recommendations** have been made in the draft document attached.