



## National Agribusiness Conference on Selected Commodities

The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), organized a National Agribusiness Conference on Selected Commodities on 24 April 2025, at the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW) Hall in Asmara. The conference, held under the theme “Enhancing Agribusiness for Sustainable Food Systems”, brought together senior government officials, representatives from the United Nations, sector experts, and development partners to focus on seven selected commodities deemed critical to the transformation of Eritrea’s food systems.

Speaking on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Tekleab Mesghena, Director General of the Regulatory Services Department, emphasized that agriculture has long been central to Eritrean society. Nevertheless, the sector continues to face a range of significant challenges. These include the impacts of climate change, the urgent need for poverty eradication, the ongoing process of rural transformation, issues surrounding

food security, the depletion of natural resources, market fluctuations, unequal access to technology, infrastructure, and finance. He highlighted the importance of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, led by the FAO, as a program grounded in inclusivity, strategic partnerships, and evidence-based planning. He pointed out that the initiative focuses on three strategic pillars: inclusive development, resilient and sustainable systems, and fostering effective public-private partnerships.



Mr. Tekleab Mesghena

His Excellency Weldai Futur, Head of the Eritrean Investment Center, also delivered important remarks. He commended both the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO for convening a



H.E. Weldai Futur

high-impact event that can serve as a strong foundation for targeted—though initially limited—investment in selected agricultural subsectors. He stressed that such investment must support both smallholder farmers and large-scale agribusiness enterprises. Furthermore, he emphasized the pressing need for investments aimed at increasing productivity in other major agricultural commodities, which could have a far-reaching impact on achieving food security and reducing poverty across the country.

FAO Sub-Regional Coordinator for Eastern Africa, Ms. Farayi Zimudzi on her part, delivered





Ms. Farayi Zimudzi

introductory remarks and expressed appreciation for the Government of Eritrea's collaboration with the FAO in identifying and prioritizing agricultural commodities that could be transformed into promising agribusiness ventures. She underlined that the success of the Hand-in-Hand Initiative depends on the strengthening of partnerships that are not only innovative but also inclusive and equitable.

UN Resident Coordinator, Ms. Nahla Valji, delivered a keynote address in which she underscored the importance of sustainable agricultural practices and the



Ms. Nahla Valji

necessity of increasing investment in agribusiness to help overcome persistent barriers faced by smallholder farmers. She noted that investing in agriculture, food systems, and rural infrastructure is ultimately an investment in humanity. According to Ms. Nahla, each dollar directed toward sustainable development yields immeasurable

returns by fostering economic growth, improving public health, and contributing to a more just and equitable world. She also stressed the critical role of government-private sector collaboration in building resilient and inclusive food systems.

A total of seven presentations were delivered at the conference—four by experts from the Ministry of Agriculture, one by an expert from the Ministry of Marine Resources, and two by officers from the FAO. The topics covered were:

1. "Agribusiness and Value Chain Approach to Development: A Shift in Approach" – presented by Mr. Misghina Okbaslassie, Head of the Agribusiness Development and Investment Coordination Unit at the MoA.
2. "Hand-in-Hand Initiative: Global Perspective" – a pre-recorded presentation by Mr. Maximo Torero, Chief Economist at FAO.
3. "Country Update – Hand-in-Hand Initiative in Eritrea: Process and Results" – presented by Dr. Yonas Woldu, the Hand in Hand Focal Person at the MoA.
4. "Hand-in-Hand Initiative: Experiences of Zambia, Zimbabwe, and São Tomé and Príncipe" – presented by Mr. Kazuyuki Fujiwara, Regional Partnership Officer, FAO.
5. "Banana and Potato Value Chain Analysis and Business Plan" – presented by Mr. Ermias Asmelash, Head of the Horticulture Development Unit, MoA.
6. "Anchovy Value Chain Analysis and Business Plan" – presented by Mr. Kibrom Gebremeskel, Ministry of Marine Resources.
7. "Cactus and Pepper Value Chain Analysis and Business Plan" – presented by Ms. Saron Yemane, Horticulture Unit, MoA.

8. "Honey and Poultry Value Chain Analysis and Business Plan" – presented by Mr. Kahsay Negash, Director of the Crop and Livestock Development Division, and Mr. Zaid Tekle, Senior Beekeeping Expert, MoA.

In addition to the presentations, a panel discussion was held on the theme of catalyzing inclusive economic growth through strategic investment in the agriculture sector in Eritrea. The discussion covered key topics such as enhancing food security through agricultural investment, tackling poverty and climate-related challenges, building partnerships with both domestic and international stakeholders, and crafting effective policy frameworks to support sustainable agricultural transformation.



Mr. Semere Amlesom

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Semere Amlesom, Director General of the Agricultural Extension Department, expressed deep appreciation for the participation of all stakeholders who contributed to the success of the conference. He reaffirmed the Ministry's commitment to working closely with FAO to ensure the effective implementation of the selected commodity value chains. He also issued a call to action, encouraging all relevant stakeholders—both public and private—to collaborate actively in the success of the initiative.



## Reflections from Presenters and Participants

*Ms. Nahla Valji – UN Resident Coordinator, Eritrea*

Ms. Nahla Valji, the UN Resident Coordinator, expressed the UN's pride in being part of the partnership between the Eritrean Ministry of Agriculture and FAO. She affirmed the UN's strong support for the initiative, viewing it as a sound investment in Eritrea's agri-food systems.

She emphasized that food systems and food security are top priorities in Eritrea. Investing in food security value chains is seen as a pathway to increasing household incomes and promoting economic independence. Strengthening food security is also expected to yield positive effects in health and education, contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

"This is about identifying a specific number of commodities within Eritrea's agri-food system—bananas, potatoes, anchovies—and truly attracting investment while addressing existing obstacles, so that production can be increased. We can explore nutrition linkages, as well as export potential and income generation."

*Ms. Farayi Zimudzi – FAO Sub-Regional Coordinator for Eastern Africa*

Ms. Farayi Zimudzi, the FAO Sub-Regional Coordinator for Eastern Africa, described the conference as a landmark event for both FAO and Eritrea. She emphasized that the Hand-in-Hand initiative aims to position agriculture at the core of economic development in participating countries.

She noted that agriculture is a vital sector in Eritrea, not only for the national economy but also as the primary source of livelihood for the majority of its population. Through

the Hand-in-Hand initiative, FAO seeks to unlock the full potential of this sector by facilitating investment.

FAO is providing technical assistance to Eritrea, including support for investment planning and the identification of key agricultural value chains prioritized by the government. A significant aspect of FAO's role is connecting smallholder farmers with potential investors at both national and international levels to foster collaboration.

Ms. Farayi Zimudzi stressed the need to address challenges within the sector while pursuing opportunities, advocating for a comprehensive "food-systems approach." This involves examining the entire process—from production to consumption—identifying necessary actions at each step, and creating employment opportunities along the way.

She described the forum as a "fantastic opportunity" for Eritrea to boost its economy and issued a strong call for collaboration among the government, farmers, investors, development partners, and financial institutions to establish agriculture as a primary driver of economic growth.

*Mr. Kazuyiki Fujiwara, from the FAO Regional Partnership Office for Africa*

Mr. Kazuyiki Fujiwara, expressed his privilege in attending Eritrea's national conference on investment for the Hand-in-Hand initiative. He emphasized the event's importance as a significant milestone for Eritrea



Mr. Kazuyiki Fujiwara

in developing agricultural investment plans aimed at reducing poverty and enhancing food security.

Mr. Fujiwara highlighted that this national dialogue is crucial for attracting both public and private sector investment. It provides a platform to determine practical steps—"what needs to be done"—to transform challenges into investment opportunities, while also addressing risk management among stakeholders.

He stated that the conclusions from this conference will equip the Eritrean delegation for the upcoming global Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum, scheduled for October 2025 in Rome, Italy.

*Misghina Okbaslassie – Head of the Agribusiness Development and Investment Coordination Unit, (MoA)*



Mr. Misghina Okbaslassie

This conference is highly significant as it marks a strategic shift for the Ministry of Agriculture. Previously, the Ministry focused primarily on boosting production among smallholder farmers. However, recognizing the growing global emphasis on agribusiness in policy and strategy, the Ministry has adapted.

Reflecting this change, the Ministry recently finalized its Strategic Development Plan for 2024–2028. The new plan explicitly prioritizes agribusiness development and has formally incorporated the Hand-in-Hand initiative as one of its key supporting programs.

*Dr. Yonas Woldu – Hand-in-Hand  
Focal Person, MoA*

The initiative holds great importance for Eritrea, as it targets key



Dr. Yonas Woldu

commodities with significant production potential. It addresses all stages from farm to consumer, including production, processing, handling, and management. This comprehensive approach is critical for the relevant departments of the Ministry, and the nation as a whole.

*Mr. Mohamed Aw-Dahir – FAO  
Representative Ad-Interim in Eritrea*

Mr. Mohamed Aw-Dahir, the FAO Representative Ad-Interim in Eritrea, highlighted the strong potential of the Hand-in-Hand initiative in the Eritrean context. He noted that, under the guidance of the Eritrean Government, the program strategically seeks to identify key investment opportunities in agricultural value chains, aiming to generate both social and economic benefits.

Despite climate change challenges common across Africa, Eritrea has made significant investments in



Mr. Mohamed Aw-Dahir

its water sector. To fully capitalize on these efforts, Mr. Aw-Dahir emphasized the need to strengthen agricultural value chains, which could foster employment and wealth creation.

He expressed optimism about attracting diverse investments—from public and private sectors, as well as grants from international partners. He envisions a promising future for Eritrea's agricultural sector through targeted investments in the government-identified priority value chains.

Mr. Aw-Dahir also underscored the importance of Eritrea's participation in the upcoming investment forum in Rome and reaffirmed FAO's commitment to providing ongoing technical support to ensure an effective presentation of Eritrea's investment proposals.

*Mr. Kahsay Negash – Director of Crop  
& Livestock Development, MoA*

Mr. Kahsay Negash, Director of Crop and Livestock Development at the Ministry of Agriculture, provided insights into the conference's focus on identifying investment opportunities across key agricultural and marine commodities. The gathering brought together stakeholders from various ministries, organizations, the private sector, and academia. Its primary objective was to refine existing development plans into viable national investment proposals.

The conference addressed six agricultural commodities and one from the marine sector—specifically pelagic fish. Mr. Negash emphasized the significant potential of these commodities to drive economic growth and create substantial employment opportunities across rural and urban communities.

He also highlighted the role of the conference in facilitating the expansion of agribusiness, particularly in sectors



Mr. Kahsay Negash

such as vegetables, horticulture, poultry, and small pelagic fisheries, all of which are ripe for business growth and investment.

*Mr. Ermias Asmelash, Horticulture  
Development Unit Head, Ministry of  
Agriculture*

The conference focuses on key agribusiness opportunities, including banana and potato.

My presentation was on Banana and potatoes. Banana has been cultivated in Eritrea, mainly in Gash Barka, for over 70 years and was once exported. Under the initiative, a business plan is being developed to attract investment. Four globally approved varieties (Dwarf Cavendish, Williams, Grand Nain, Lady Finger) are grown on 1,168 hectares, producing 31.4 metric tone per heactare to meet an annual demand of 54,000 metric ton. With vast land and water resources, Eritrea can expand cultivation to 10,000 hectares and resume exports, supporting food security and poverty reduction.

Potato, is a widely consumed



Mr. Ermias Asmelash



vegetable. Eritrea produces 34,063 metric ton annually against a 75,000 metric ton demand, from 1,290 hectares in key regions. Common varieties include Electra, Arizona, Keih Embaba, and Tsaeda Embaba. Over 4,000 farmers are involved, but productivity is limited by a lack of adequate quality seed. The National Agricultural Research Institute(NARI) is addressing this through tissue culture. Expansion to 5,000 hectares is feasible, especially involving the the western lowlands during cool seasons.

*Ms. Saron Yemane, Horticulture Development Unit, MoA*

My presentation was on Pepper and Cactus. The study aimed to highlight potential investment opportunities in both commodities and included a cost investment analysis. Pepper production remains low in Eritrea. It is primarily cultivated in the Gash-Barka and Northern Red Sea regions, with smaller-scale production in the Maekel and Debub regions. Given Eritrea's potential water resources and arable land, the goal is to expand cultivation to over 4,000 hectares and achieve a production target of more than 17,000 metric tons by 2030. As for Cactus, it is a fruit that has received little attention so far. Commonly consumed during the summer in Eritrea. It is drought-



Ms. Saron Yemane

tolerant, well adapted to harsh and dry conditions, and remains evergreen. The plant is easy to establish, maintain, and utilize. It is also multipurpose, serving as a valuable fodder crop due to its high palatability and richness in soluble carbohydrates. Currently, cactus covers more than 18,000 hectares, with an annual production of over 470,000 metric tons. Therefore, it presents a strong investment opportunity.

*Mr. Zaid Tekle, Senior Beekeeping Expert, MoA*



Mr. Zaid Tekle

I presented on the potential investment opportunities in the beekeeping sector, as well as the resources currently available. At present, there are over 50,000 bee colonies in the country, producing approximately 1,000 tons of honey annually. However, this level of production has not yet met the per capita demand.

Eritrea has an estimated 3 million hectares of land suitable for beekeeping, yet only about 5% of this potential is currently being utilized. The aim of my presentation was to highlight the untapped opportunities in this sector and to encourage investment that can significantly boost honey production. With the right investment plan, we can unlock

this potential and create a thriving beekeeping industry.

*Mr. Kibrom Tekesete, Fish Corporation, Ministry of Marine Resources*

I represented the Ministry of Marine Resources and presented a value chain analysis on anchovies, which are a highly abundant pelagic fish. This commodity is produced at an average volume of 50,000 tons per year, although further study is needed. With proper planning and effective mitigation of associated challenges, this resource has the potential to grow significantly, ensuring an adequate and sustainable supply for the public.

Anchovies were selected for analysis because they remain largely underexploited, are highly nutritious, and rich in omega-3 fatty acids. If managed and harvested efficiently, especially at the right time, they can be collected in bulk and enhanced through value addition. Anchovies can serve as a food source for human consumption, and when dried and processed, they can be preserved for extended periods. Additionally, they have the potential to be used as livestock feed. With the right infrastructure in place, the anchovy value chain presents a highly productive investment opportunity.



Mr. Kibrom Tekesete

**Editor-in-Chief:** Ermias Solomon, Director of Public Relations Division

Email:- [ersohab@gmail.com](mailto:ersohab@gmail.com), Tel: 292-1- 182225/ +291-7143877

**Assistant Editor-in-Chief:** Filmawit Measho; Information and Media Relations Unit Head

**Reflections transcription:** Raffaele Giuseppe

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