Reflections on the G-7 New Alliance Partnership: Value Added Lessons, the Malawi Case.

As the G-7 New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition Partnership withers away from the policy dialogue, policymakers and stakeholders need not ‘throw away the baby, alongside with bath water’. The future of development cooperation and partnerships may just belong to such maverick initiatives. Through the account of Malawi’s experience as a New Alliance country, a reflection is worthwhile.


The Genesis of the G-8 New Alliance Partnership

The New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition was launched at the G-8 Summit in May 2012 as one in a series of responses to the global food price crisis of 2008-2010. The 'global crisis' is reported to have been triggered when agro – commodity prices on the international markets began to surge in late 2007, reaching its peak in mid-2008: at that point, major commodity prices (rice, maize, wheat and soybean) had doubled from their pre-crisis levels. A study by the EU on the New Alliance partnership in Africa in 2015 revealed that the trigger was weather-related in 2005 and 2006, leading to poor harvests in certain major cereal-exporting countries. The resulting price increases were exacerbated by export restrictions introduced as a result, by a number of countries, leading to sudden panicking over prices of staples for importers who resorted to panic buying, further worsening the situation¹. It was against this background, that policymakers were called into action to deal with the global food crisis in 2008. As an example, the EU responded, with the establishment in December 2008 of the EUR1 billion Food Facility, to raise the productivity and incomes of small farmers in the 50 worst affected countries by strengthening agriculture².

In July 2009, a year within the crisis, the G-8 leaders, alongside other partners, convened to discuss food security at a session in L'Aquila under the Italian leadership of the G-8. The gathering took place in a setting in which the food prices, were still high and volatile. In view of this background, the G-8 leaders and their partners pledged to support vulnerable countries and regions to develop and implement food security strategies, and together increase sustained commitments of financial and technical assistance³.

² The EU, Study on the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa, 2015
³ L'Aquila Joint Statement on Global Food Security, para. 3.
Through the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative (AFSI), a commitment was made to increase aid to agriculture and food security amounting to USD 20 billion for the period between 2009 and 2012. Against a background of these initiatives, the private sector was deemed to have been largely left out in the equation yet has potential to play a big role. This brief narrative can be traced as the genesis of the New Alliance for food Security and Nutrition (NAFSN) partnership. It is important to understand the background to the partnership in order to appreciate the present status.

**From L’ Aquila to Camp David**

At the heart of the G-8 NAFSN, lies the recognition that African public investment combined with official development assistance was inadequate to compensate for under investment in agriculture since the early 1980s, a period also marred by disruptive Bretton Woods Structural Adjustment Programmes. Therefore, the NA was an attempt to mobilize private sector investment in food security and nutrition, in order to compensate for the inability of public budgets to make up for the financing gap. The NA was unveiled at the G-8 Summit held at Camp David in May 2012, under the US leadership.

The Camp David Declaration included recognition to African governments for committing to increase investments in agriculture and for adopting policy reforms to accelerate sustainable agricultural productivity through the African Union's (AU) Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). Therefore, the NA represents a global response to efforts by African countries to restore growth through improved economic governance and a renewed development cooperation under the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). To this end, the participating NA countries negotiated Country Cooperation Frameworks (CCFs), setting out commitments to facilitate private investment in the agro-based sector. These frameworks typically aimed at:

i. Bringing together various strategies in support of agricultural development, food security and nutrition, forming the national implementation framework of the AU’s CAADP;

ii. Listing policy reform commitments;

iii. Listing pledges from donors in order to ensure predictable support to these programmes, as well as intentions from companies, to invest in return of the policy reforms.

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4 The Summit brought together the leaders of the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US

5 Camp David Accountability Report, May 2012, p. 4.
The NA initiative saw 10 African countries joining and agreeing to their respective CCFs. These are Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Benin, Malawi, Nigeria and Senegal. Collectively, the NA partnership seeks to achieve sustained and inclusive agricultural growth with the overall goal of raising 50 million people out of poverty by 2022.

A Novel Approach to Development Cooperation in Africa
The NA represents a new approach to development cooperation. An unprecedented innovation for engagement, not just in Africa but also beyond. It marked a departure from the hitherto, isolated and uncoordinated efforts that may or may not be aligned with national priorities. A departure from exclusion of private sector and civil society. That traditional approach is neither in conformity with general principles of aid effectiveness nor with NEPAD/CAADP ideals. That traditional approach needs reforms, against a background of food insecurity in the Sub-Saharan region particularly with respect to the pangs of climate change, which continue to rage consistently.

The key feature of the NA was to encourage investors in the agri-food sector, and to identify constraints that governments had to deal with in order to facilitate this foreseen private sector involvement. Many of the commitments made under the CCFs reiterate obligations made under the CAADP as launched in Maputo, Mozambique in 2003 and renewed in 2014, in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea⁶.

Reflections from Malawi’s NA Model
This piece attempts to provide key experiences of Malawi as a participating NA country. This piece recognizes that a smart evaluation, assessment, critique or review, may not necessarily focus on success or failure but rather what has worked, what could be replicated and scaled up, and what lessons from the weaknesses would be useful for future initiatives. Therefore, this piece focusses on key lessons from the Malawi’s NA model. The Malawi CCF had 15 public policy commitments; over US$ 377 million initial donor-funding commitments to support policy reforms, development and implementation; and estimated US$230 million investment intentions by 29 private sector companies. Therefore, the CCF entailed a tripartite arrangement to implement commitments with the aim of promoting stronger coordination and

⁶ CAADP is the framework through which countries committed to meet pledges made, among which: to dedicate 10% of the public budget to the agricultural sector and to achieve an annual growth rate of 6% in agriculture, including improvements to food and nutrition security.
mutual accountability of different stakeholders in the agriculture sector. On the overall, the CCF intended to help 1.7 million people emerge out of poverty\textsuperscript{7} by 2022.

Institutionally, the Ministry of Agriculture has been the lead government institution, while the EU Delegation led development partners with support to the overall NA coordination. In terms of governance, there was a High Level Task Force made up of Ambassadors from the development partners, relevant Ministers and representatives of the participating private sector and civil society. At technical level, there was a Core Team comprising officials from participating development partners, relevant ministries and departments, civil society and the private sector representatives. This direct governance structure ensured active dialogue periodically on issues in the CCF.

**CCF Policy Commitments**

At inception in 2013, Malawi’s CCF had 35 policy commitments proclaimed but this was later deemed too ambitious and not SMART\textsuperscript{8}. Therefore, through a consultative process, the 35 were revised to 15 in 2015. The commitments focused on four broad areas aimed at ensuring a strong enabling environment for agriculture and food security investments. Refer to Table 1 below:

Given the nature of the policy process, which is typically rigorous, protracted and punctuated by conflicting interests in the political economy, progress on the commitments has not proven smooth. Deadlines for achieving commitments were repeatedly missed.

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\textsuperscript{7} This estimation was calculated by analyzing the linear relationship between poverty rate as per the UN MDGs and GDP growth in PPP terms. The UN MDGs provided the population proportion below $1PPP in 1998 and 2004. This was used along with the GDP growth during that period, used to work forward to 2013, then to 2022 (Revised CCF, 2015).

\textsuperscript{8} SMART for Sustainable, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely bound.
Table 1: Summary of NA policy commitments by CCF objective as of 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Objective</th>
<th>Limited Progress</th>
<th>Good Progress</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create a conducive environment with reduced risk in doing business and fair</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>market returns for smallholder farmers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve access to water and basic infrastructure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve productivity, storage of produce and packaging</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase uptake of nutritive foods and diets to reduce malnutrition and</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prevalence of stunting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: The traffic lights denote status and level of progress: green for good progress and on schedule; yellow for partial progress and red is for limited progress hence more work to be done. Source: 2017 NA Annual Progress Report-Malawi.

In order to illustrate the nature of the policies, the paper presents the status on a sample of policy commitments pursued in the CCF under the first objective category **Creation of a conducive environment with reduced risk in doing business and fair market returns for farmers:**

1) **Review of key enabling policies by April 2016: National Agriculture Policy (NAP); National Industrial Policy and the National Trade Policy:** the three were approved and launched towards the end of 2016. These have so far been instrumental in guiding interventions in the agricultural sector and beyond. For instance, the NAP has informed development of the National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP), which came into force in 2018. In addition, development partners are expected to align their interventions in this sector to these instruments. For instance, several projects such as the recently launched World Bank - supported Agriculture Commercialization Project have been informed by the NAP while the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development (MoAIWD)’s budgeting process is aligned to the NAP and the NAIP. Therefore, the NAP is already making a difference since its adoption.

Since this composite commitment is achieved by introduction of the cited policy instruments, the next key issue is optimal implementation of these approved policies. The understanding being that policy approvals are not enough, as policy instruments are only a means to an end and not an end in itself. Therefore, the operationalization of each of these policies is critical. That calls for strengthening of
custodian implementing institutions. This is the missing link, which the CCF commitments did not adequately address but worth addressing going forward.

2) **Review of the Control of Goods Act (CoGA) to eliminate export bans and improve licensing by September 2016.** This missed several deadlines but finally was reviewed in May 2018. This was a key piece of legislation to the private sector as it was the main instrument for export restrictions. It brought unpredictability and lacked transparency in its application. Stakeholders often cited this legislation as critical in ensuring functional markets for important value chains such as maize and rice. It was accused of eroding incentive to produce for the export market, which has enormous potential in the region. This, to a certain extent, affected the state of food security and functionality of markets both domestically and on the export front. A study by IFPRI in 2015\(^9\) revealed that Malawi had the most volatile and unpredictable maize prices in the Southern African region. This was largely due to Government’s discretionary interventions on the maize market under the CoGA. Therefore, once regulations for the new law are in place and functional, the expectation is that there would be more predictability to the benefit of agro-investments and food security dynamics.

3) **Development of a strategy and legislation for contract farming by March 2016.** The Contract Farming Strategy was approved in August 2016. Going forward, the Competition and Fair Trading Act or an alternative relevant legislation, will have to ascertain role and introduce disciplines in regulating contract farming in the country. A functional contract farming regime will enable fair contractual arrangements and act as an incentive for parties particularly the smallholder farmers who are struggling to graduate from subsistence. There has been a lag between the approval of the Strategy and the introduction of corresponding legislation. The strategy’s duration is 4 years (2016-2020) but not much has happened because implementation mechanisms are not in place. Again, this is a missing link in the CCF and the relevant custodian institutions.

4) **Review of Seed Policy, strategy and certification system (Seed Act 1996) by September 2015:** The Policy was approved in 2018 after missing several deadlines. The corresponding Seed Act has been reviewed based on the new Policy and is due for enactment in parliament. The seed sector needed a progressive system as a basis for agricultural production and hence food and nutrition security. The seed regime

has not been progressive. The World Bank’s Enabling Business for Agriculture Report (2017) indicated that the seed sector in Malawi ranked 50th out of the 62 countries. Among other things, the report indicated that it takes 579 days to register a new seed variety. That is certainly prohibitive. The expectation is that the new Policy and the Act will address some of these constraints for the benefit of productivity. As they say in agronomy, it all starts from the seed.

As may be appreciated from the above-cited policy commitments in the Malawi’s CCF model, the NA was not necessarily a traditional project nor an initiative responsible for the actual delivery of policy commitments. Actual implementation is the realm of custodian institutions and related forums such as Sector Working Groups (SWGs). The CCF primarily served as a shared obligation, a framework and tool for focusing, programming, review, monitoring and coordination of progress and fast-tracking reforms. This was the maverick feature of the partnership. A feature, which brought both confusion and criticism in the policy dialogue.

The Role of the Development Partners

In the CCF, donor partners committed to support Government in the policy reforms to create conditions to enable private investment. These were captured as financial commitments – funds budgeted and disbursed. The overall cumulative disbursement rate for development partners presented in the 2017 NA Progress
Report was 99.2 percent. The disbursements show nearly all the donors met pledges with some exceeding the initial commitments. Refer to Table 2 below for a disbursement snapshot as self-reported by the donors.

Table 2: New Alliance Donor Commitments and Disbursements as of 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>2011-2017</td>
<td>151.4</td>
<td>126.17</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>2012-2016</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>2012-2019</td>
<td>160.8</td>
<td>160.6</td>
<td>99.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>2011-2020</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>24.84</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2012-2015</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>377.17</strong></td>
<td><strong>374.18</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: New Alliance Progress Report, 2017

However, the observation is that most of the funds were dispersed in various projects and not directly linked to the commitments. However, the US is exceptional for having developed a specific intervention - the New Alliance Policy Acceleration Support (NAPAS) Project, which specifically championed the reform processes including the work on the National Agricultural Policy (NAP). The other donor being, the EU, who supported the overall coordination by among other things, sustaining the NA Secretariat in the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Role of Grow Africa and Private Sector

The private sector intentions to invest were embraced in the LoIs. Grow Africa was founded by the AU Commission, the NEPAD Agency (now referred as AU Development Agency) and the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2011. It is an African-owned, multi-stakeholder platform to accelerate investment in support of the CAADP. Thus, the AU Commission mandated Grow Africa to administer, manage, oversee and monitor the private sector’s Letters of Intent (LoI) process in the NA partnership. This process had a share of constraints as the companies in the partnership had challenges in reporting on the intended investments in the course of time.

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10 The NA in Malawi also had Flanders, Ireland and Norway supporting the resident G-7. While Ireland opted out of the partnership, Norway and Flanders had not yet made submissions for the 2017 NA Report.
Update on Letters of Intent (LoIs) Companies

Based on the mandate from the AU Commission, Grow Africa engaged LoIs and host governments on the implementation progress of the LoIs. There was an annual stocktaking exercise across all NA countries, which resulted into an annual reporting process. This reporting fulfilled the reporting obligations under the NA and fed into the CAADP’s Joint Sector Review (JSR) process.

This was the problematic part of the initiative because LoI companies had challenges in reporting on the intended investments so much that it was difficult to monitor the ‘projects’. Grow Africa faced hitches to solicit data from the participating firms. Interestingly, this trend was not only evident in Malawi but also for the rest of the NA countries. Based on the last available official data in 2016, the NA initially had 29 LoI companies with estimated investment intentions at US$ 230 million. In the course of time, the LoIs became increasingly inactive. The LoI companies covered in the last progress report of 2017, show investment worth US$ 41.9 million, specifically in milk, honey, Jatropha nuts, maize and maize seed, mangoes, and soya beans value chains. This brings total cumulative investment to around US$ 82 million since 2013 and translates into 35 percent of the initial commitments. As hinted, these figures were difficult to verify, as it was self-reported. In addition, ordinarily private sector does not share critical information easily. Some of the notable LoIs were Universal Industries, Malawi Mangoes, Exagris, Export Trading Group, Dairiboard, Seed Co, Limbe Leaf Tobacco, Press Agriculture, Illovo Sugar and Mpatsa Farms. Apart from the investments, the LoI projects were expected to create employment and stimulate local value chains and enhancing local incomes with direct positive effects on food security.

A mango nursery at Malawi Mangoes - an LoI which created employment, and provided market for the local mango producers.
Weaknesses of the New Alliance Partnership

- **Policy reforms versus implementation capacity**: The policy reform agenda is important but what is more important is the implementation part of the reforms. The need to remove the many policy and regulatory bottlenecks, has led to challenges in the implementation capacities. It therefore runs the risk of *ticking the box* only on policy reforms but with little or no actions on the ground. A Disconnect between policy pronouncements and action, which calls for attention to executing institutions.

- **Design Faults**: The initiative’s design and theory of change had the assumption that private sector would invest in return for policy reforms. This assumption was faulty because decisions to invest are a function of a configuration of determinants including positive macro-economic fundamentals, cost of doing-business or access to capital not only structural sectoral policy reforms. This expectation and assumption proved sticky as can be verified by the outcomes on the private sector intentions. Given this observation, it is clear that there is a challenge on the viability of the LoI approach in the partnership. The challenges on LoI reporting could possibly be a proxy for the weaknesses in the design including the modality for private sector engagement. LoIs were therefore criticized as being a wish list of desiderata and merely statements of best endeavour. Further criticism was on the LoI modality for not been concrete on food security and nutrition\textsuperscript{11}.

Furthermore, NA data was self-reported and not independently verifiable, thereby raising questions on credibility. This also relates to a faulty design considering the fact that the LoI arrangement was not legally binding. This might explain the reporting apathy by LoIs. It may also explain the decreasing interest resulting in withdrawal of the private sector from the partnership. This was a key finding in the EU commissioned review on Malawi’s NA in 2017. These observations call for a revised approach to engaging the private sector in future initiatives. The fact that the challenge was prevalent in other NA countries, fortifies this view on design weakness.

In addition, there is an observation that some policy commitments were too broad and some were not too smart to measure progress. For example, the commitment on nutrition, which was crafted

as follows: *Improve advocacy for the growing and consumption of more nutritious food crops and agro-processed foods.* This proved difficult to measure as the Progress Reports reveal. For the future, commitments need to be tightly crafted and *SMART* for easy execution and monitoring. This is one reason why new generation commitments, need to be carried forward.

- **Loose Obligations**: Donor partners’ commitments were not directly attached to the specific commitments in the CCF except for a few and a small proportion of the commitments. Thus, support made or reported was generally dispersed in the existing projects, which accounted for a large portion of the financial commitments. This is maybe reasonable for a new initiative and first generation commitments. However, for the future, real transformation would require specific, new and additional resources support beyond existing portfolios.

- **Ownership**: In keeping with the principles of aid effectiveness, the NA was supposed to be fully-owned by the government machinery. As it turned out, the coordinating Ministry did not demonstrate durable disposition to manage the initiative beyond support from the development partners. This explains the reason why USAID, through the NAPAS Project and the EU supported the Ministry through contracted personnel but once the contracts expired the initiative quickly faded into haze. However, this may have been necessitated by the abrupt nature in which the partnership withered at the AU Commission level. This needs to be addressed for sustainability of future initiatives.

**NA Withering and the emergence of the CAP-F**

The NA was programmed for a 10-year period (2012-2022), however, it has since faded and withered in the policy dialogue. This could be explained by variegated reasons including: changes of government and subsequent refocus from the key development partners such as the US, which saw the cutting of development support after change of administration in early 2017. On the other hand, there has been loss of steam from the private sector leading to consistent withdrawal in the course of time. The withering saw the closure of the NA Secretariat, at the AU Commission at the end of 2017, which hitherto was largely USAID supported, and consequently the NA participating countries no longer had continental oversight. They were no longer expected to report on the initiative, which sent fading signals. In Malawi, the lead development partner, the EU Delegation, also relinquished the role at the end of 2018 and likewise the NAPAS Project effectively closed with the expectation of a successor programme, which has not been set up yet.
The participating private sector, reportedly had expectations, which were not met, given the slow reform process on the government front. Further, there is suspicion that they expected more from the initiative, including capital financing for the intended investments, which the NA did not have. Thus, LoI companies in the NA subsequently saw no incentive to remain in the initiative. Hence, became a frustrated party in the tripartite initiative. Against this background, the CAADP has a new instrument called the Country Agri-business Partnership Framework (CAP-F), which provides a framework in the NAIPs for engaging private sector. The CAP-F concept was developed to build on the successes and lessons under the NA. It is aimed at supporting agribusiness partnerships and investments. It intends to foster effective coordination between the private sector, government and other non-state actors in establishing concrete agribusiness partnerships and investments deals12.

The major feature of the CAP-F is the *Term Sheet*, which is expected to lead into specific and concrete business deals. It marks a departure from the LoI in the NA, as an instrument of engagement. As discussed, the LoIs were weak for not been legally binding. It remains to be seen how the *Term Sheets* in the CAP-F will transform from this weaknesses. As was the case with the NA, Grow Africa is leading the rollout of the CAP-F implementation. According to Malawi’s NAIP, the CAP-F will use the NA as a building block. Grow Africa and the AUDA officially launched CAP-F in Malawi in March 2019 as one pioneer country. However, an institutional mechanism is still not established concretely on the ground. It is clear that the AU Commission through lessons learned from the 10 NA countries, aims to replicate the same to a larger scope through a modified version called the CAP-F.

**Key Policy Take-Aways from the NA**

There is no question nor doubt about the relevance of the NA on Malawi’s agriculture landscape. The initiative presented a novel approach to dealing with key issues, which dodge the African region of food and nutrition security. As in the case of most innovations, even its initiators would not have expected a perfect product. Nevertheless, they must have hoped for useful lessons for future efforts. There are so many lessons to learn from Malawi’s NA experiences but the key take-away include the following:

- The NA has proven to be an instrument for accelerating key policy reforms. The policy reform process is a continuous discourse but it needs a departure from *business as usual* approach and the

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12 For more detail on the conceptual design and implementation arrangements of a CAP-F, refer to the [implementation Guide](#).
NA provided that tool. For Malawi, the NA plugged into the broader public sector reforms programme which was a flagship for government since 2014.

- The NA provided a platform for bringing private sector on the table. It is often a challenge to bring strategic members of the private sector face-to-face with policy makers and development partners at the highest level, on the same table. Malawi’s NA model had a High Level Task Force comprising key Ministers relating to the CCF policy reform areas, the participating G-7 Ambassadors and the Chief Executives of the LoI companies and key private sector representatives including the Confederation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry. That was powerful in terms of policy dialogue.
- The NA model can also be a mechanism for active resource mobilization, programming and development cooperation as proven by the Malawian model. The initiative puts all key stakeholders focussed and actively accountable for actions in line with principles of aid effectiveness.

Epilogue

The Malawian lessons from the NA provide critical guidance for forging ahead not only for Malawi but other African countries and beyond. Stakeholders in international development have a lot to draw reference, on delivery in development partnership. Most importantly, it is worth noting that future initiatives will not be sustainable, unless attention is paid to the quality of implementing institutions. This means defining clearly the commitments of all parties involved in the implementation process. The NA model in Malawi was powerful and relevant in the most important sector – agriculture, where over 70% of the population are involved in and roughly accounting to a third of the GDP. Therefore, as per the African saying goes: Do not throw away the baby with the bath water; the NA may not just wither without drawing the key lessons. We need to learn and utilize the rich lessons learnt as we forge ahead in the agricultural transformation agenda. Fast-forwarding to June 2020, the G-7 leaders return to Camp David, the birthplace of the NA. It is doubtful whether the NA or global food security would make it into the G-7 Summit agenda. However, one thing, which reasonably needs clarity at that level now, is the outcome of the NA, as envisaged in 2012. How far did it go? The global role as exercised by the G-8 leaders on the same Camp David in 2012 on this important issue surely cannot be deobligated.

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