

Unlocking Trade Through Food Safety Certification: A Strategic Analysis for Africa

White Paper



About FHSA

Food Health Systems Advisory (FHSA) is a leading management consulting and business advisory firm providing top-tier advisory and technical services to private sector, governments, and development partners on strategy, policy, and program implementation. We specialise in topics related to food systems, nutrition, agriculture, health, and climate.

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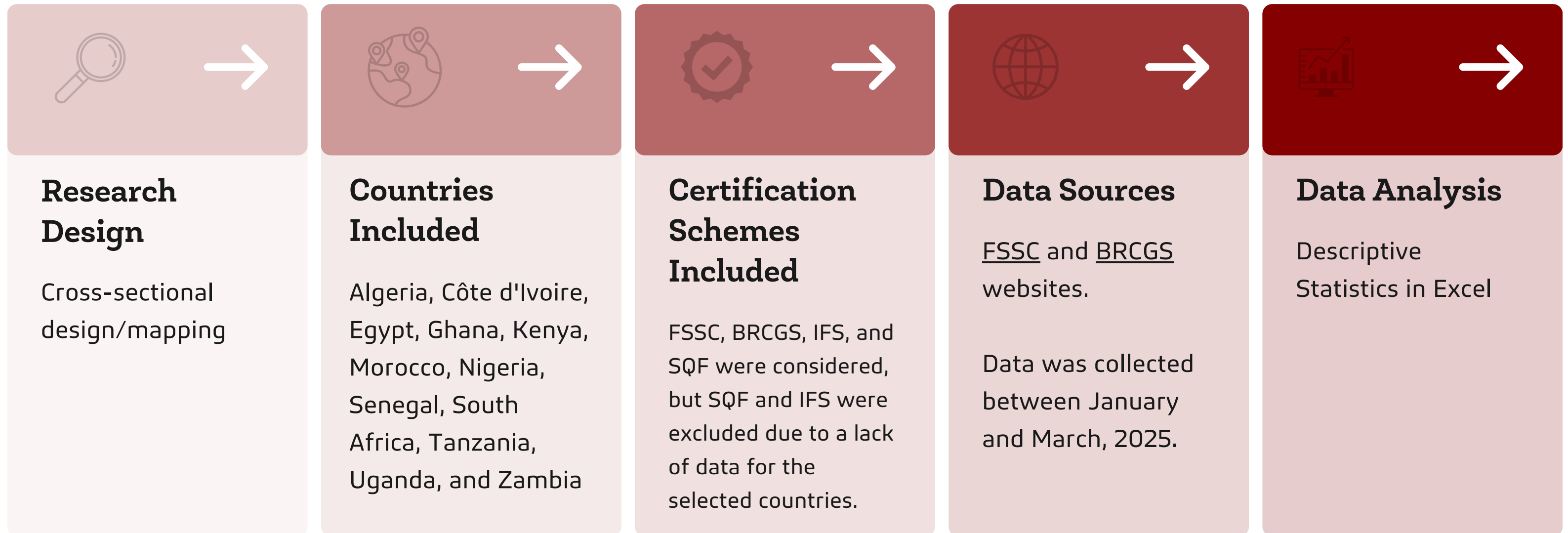
Introduction

Food safety certification is essential for aligning with international standards, expanding market access and trade, and building consumer trust. Globally recognized schemes, such as the Food Safety System Certification (FSSC) and the Brand Reputation Compliance Global Standards (BRCGS), provide robust frameworks for assessing food safety and quality management. This report, commissioned by Food Health Systems Advisory, provides an overview of voluntary food safety certification in Africa, examining trends, the business case, key barriers, and emerging opportunities. It analyzes Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI)-recognized certifications across 12 African countries, using publicly available data to map certified companies by country, region, sector, and scope.

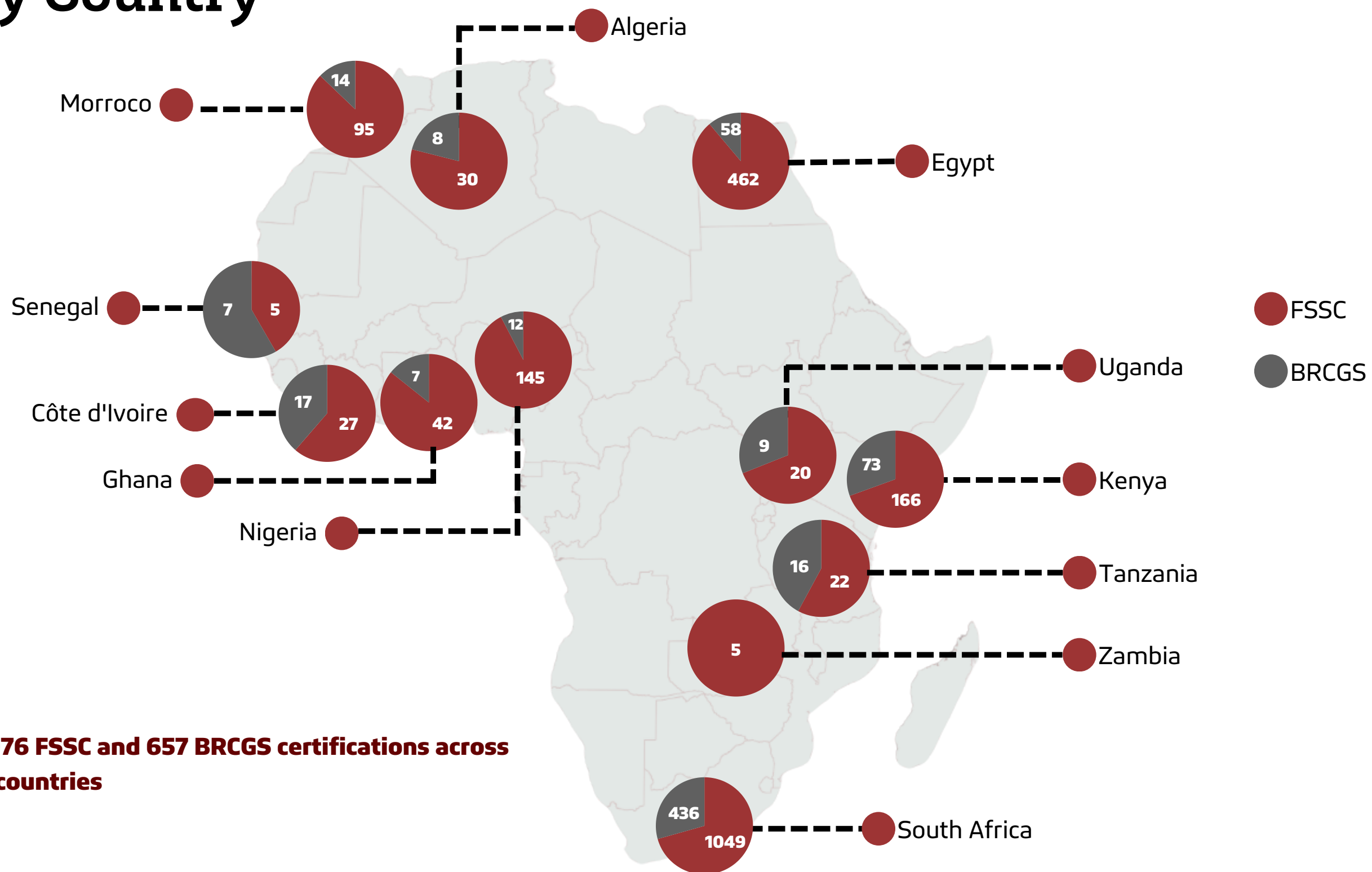
The insights from this report are intended to inform food companies, policymakers, development partners, and certification bodies about the current landscape of food safety certification in Africa and to guide efforts to improve uptake, address compliance challenges, and align regulatory frameworks to support safe, competitive, and resilient food systems.



Methodology



Food Safety Certifications in Africa: FSSC and BRCGS by Country



2,076 FSSC and 657 BRCGS certifications across 12 countries

Commentary

The distribution of FSSC and BRCGS certifications across 12 African countries reveals important trends and underlying dynamics shaping the continent's food systems. **South Africa stands out, accounting for 1,049 of 2,076 FSSC certifications (50 %) and 436 of 657 BRCGS certifications (66 %).** This concentration suggests a more mature certification ecosystem, likely driven by structural advantages such as more vigorous regulatory enforcement, better access to infrastructure and certifying bodies, and a higher concentration of multinational and export-oriented food companies.

Other notable countries for FSSC certifications include Egypt (462), Kenya (166), Nigeria (145), and Morocco (95). For BRCGS, the top countries following South Africa are Kenya (73), Egypt (58), Côte d'Ivoire (17), and Tanzania (16). The presence of Côte d'Ivoire and Tanzania in the BRCGS rankings highlights the role of specific export-driven value chains such as cocoa, coffee, and horticulture.

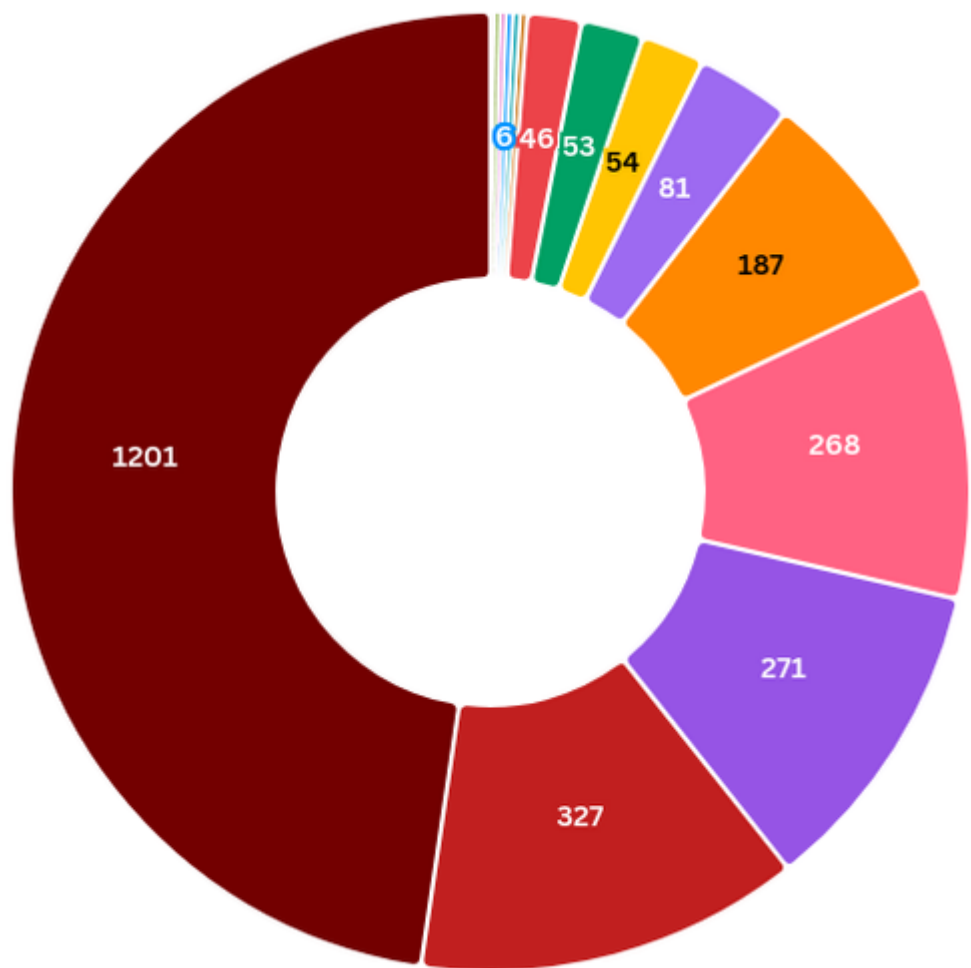
The data also reflects broader structural imbalances. Countries with lower certification counts are not necessarily less active in food production but may face systemic barriers such as high certification costs, limited technical expertise, inadequate infrastructure, language constraints, and insufficient institutional support. Furthermore, while certification is often driven by the need to access international markets, it does not always translate into improved domestic food safety outcomes.

This analysis suggests the need to look beyond certification numbers to better understand the enabling systems and market incentives that shape adoption. Strengthening regulatory frameworks, building local certification capacity, and supporting SMEs can help ensure that certification contributes to broader goals of food safety, nutrition, and trade across the continent.

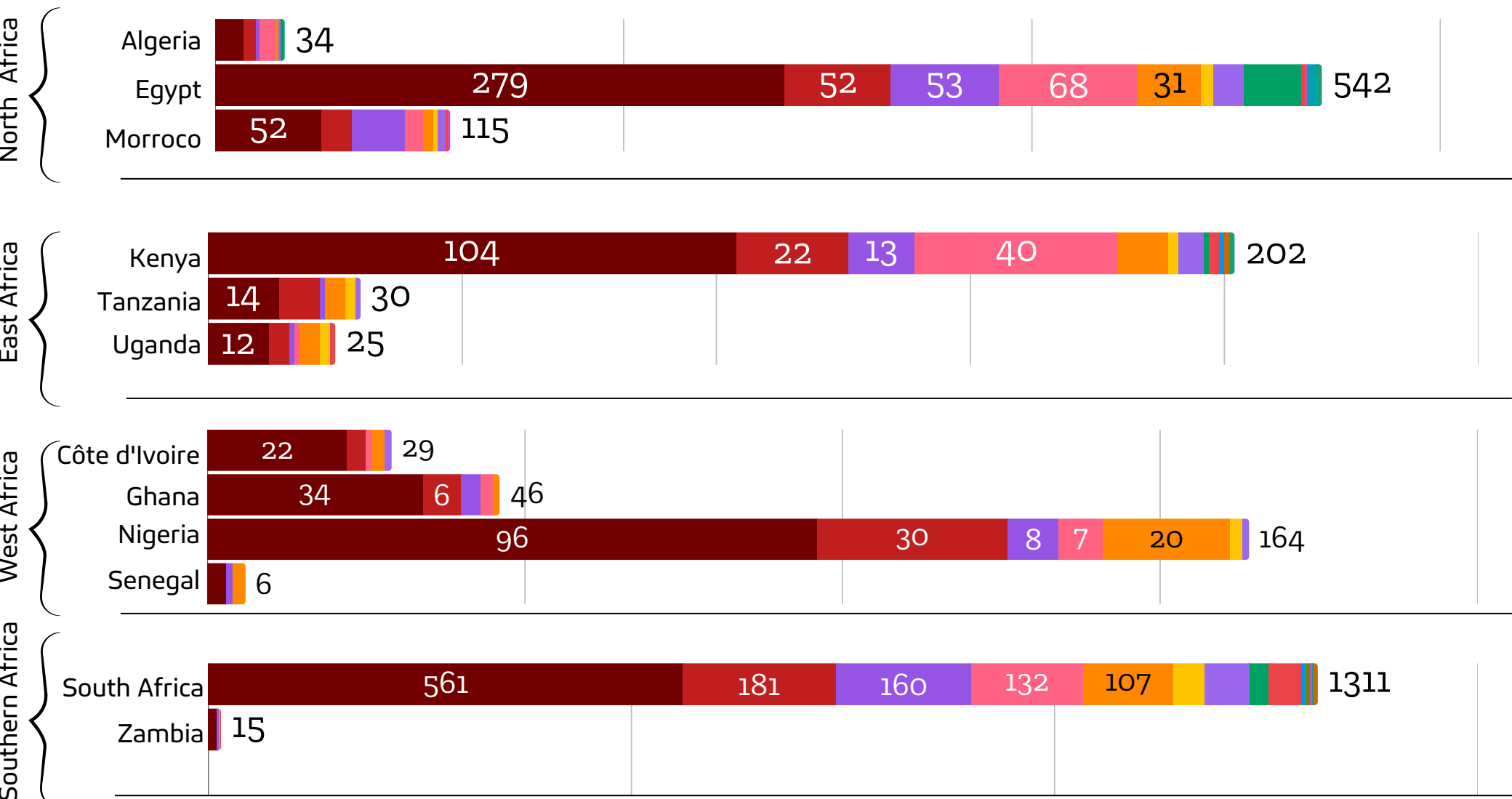
Distribution of FSSC Scopes

FSSC scopes classify the type of activity being certified, such as food manufacturing, packaging, storage, and transport. (e.g., CII - perishable plant products, I - packaging materials).

Proportion of FSSC Scopes Across 12 Countries



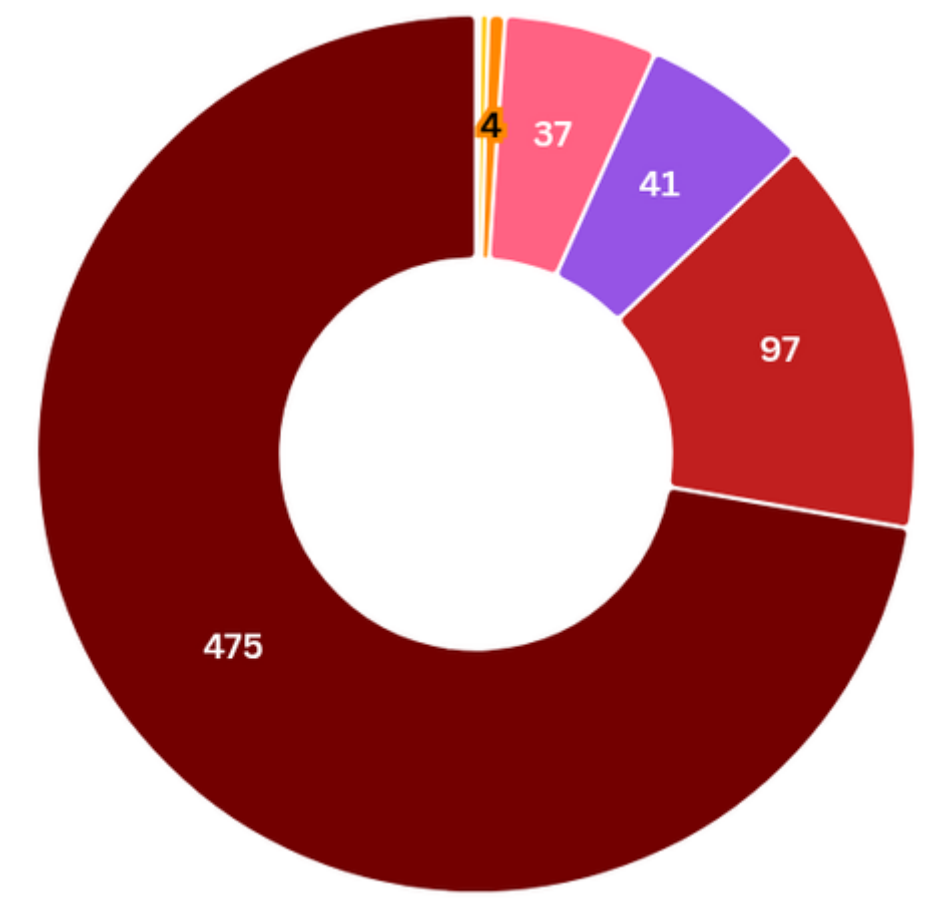
Number of FSSC Scopes Across 12 Countries



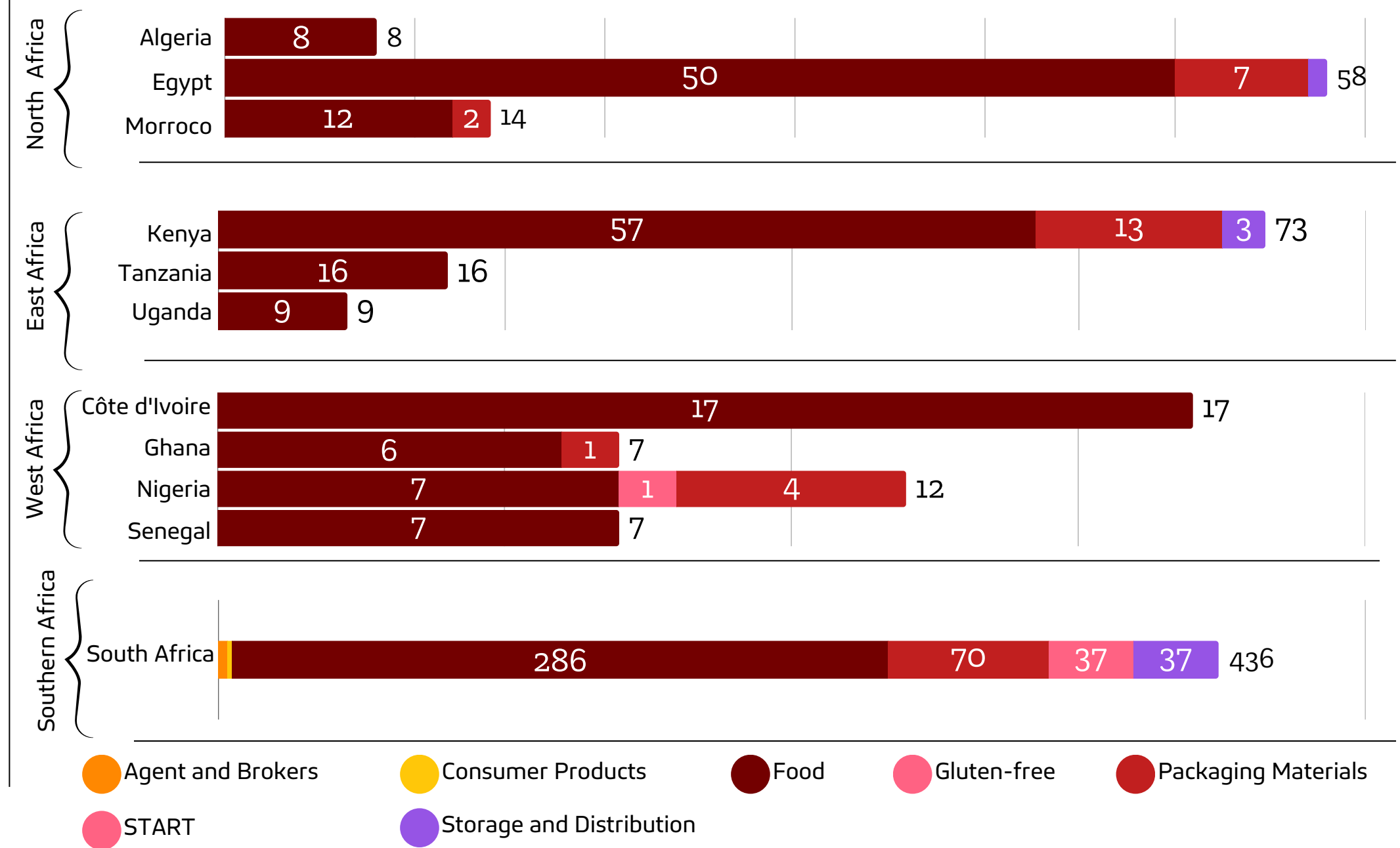
● CIV: Processing of ambient stable products ● I: Production of food packaging and packaging materials ● CI: Processing of perishable animal products ● CII: Processing of perishable plant products
● K: Production of (Bio) Chemicals ● CO: Animal - Primary Conversion ● CIII: Processing of perishable animal and plant products (mixed products) ● BIII: Pre-process handling of plant products
● G: Transportation and Storage ● GI: Transport and storage services for perishable food and feed ● D: Animal feed production ● F: Retail and Wholesale
● FII: Broking/Trading/E-commerce ● GII: Transportation and storage services for ambient stable food and feed ● E: Catering

Distribution of BRCGS Scopes

Proportion of BRCGS Standards Across 12 Countries



Number of BRCGS Standards Across 12 Countries



Commentary

Across all 12 countries and both certification schemes analyzed, shelf-stable food products and packaging emerged as the most commonly certified categories. Under the FSSC scheme, **Scope CIV, which covers the production of ambient stable (shelf-stable) products, accounted for nearly 50% (1,021) of all certified scopes.** This was followed by Scope I, which covers food packaging and packaging materials at 13% (327), and Scope CI, which focused on the processing of perishable plant products at 10% (271). The rest is distributed across twelve other FSSC scopes.

Under the BRCGS scheme, food production certifications also dominate, comprising 72% (475) of all certifications. Packaging certifications account for 15% (97), followed by storage and distribution at 6% (41), with the remaining 7% falling under three other scopes. While BRCGS uses a different scope classification system from FSSC, the emphasis on food production and packaging remains consistent across both schemes.

These patterns highlight the strategic importance of shelf-stable food production, likely driven by export demands and the need for products with extended shelf lives in regions where cold chain infrastructure is limited or unreliable. The strong presence of packaging certifications in both schemes underscores the critical role of packaging in ensuring food safety, quality, and marketability.

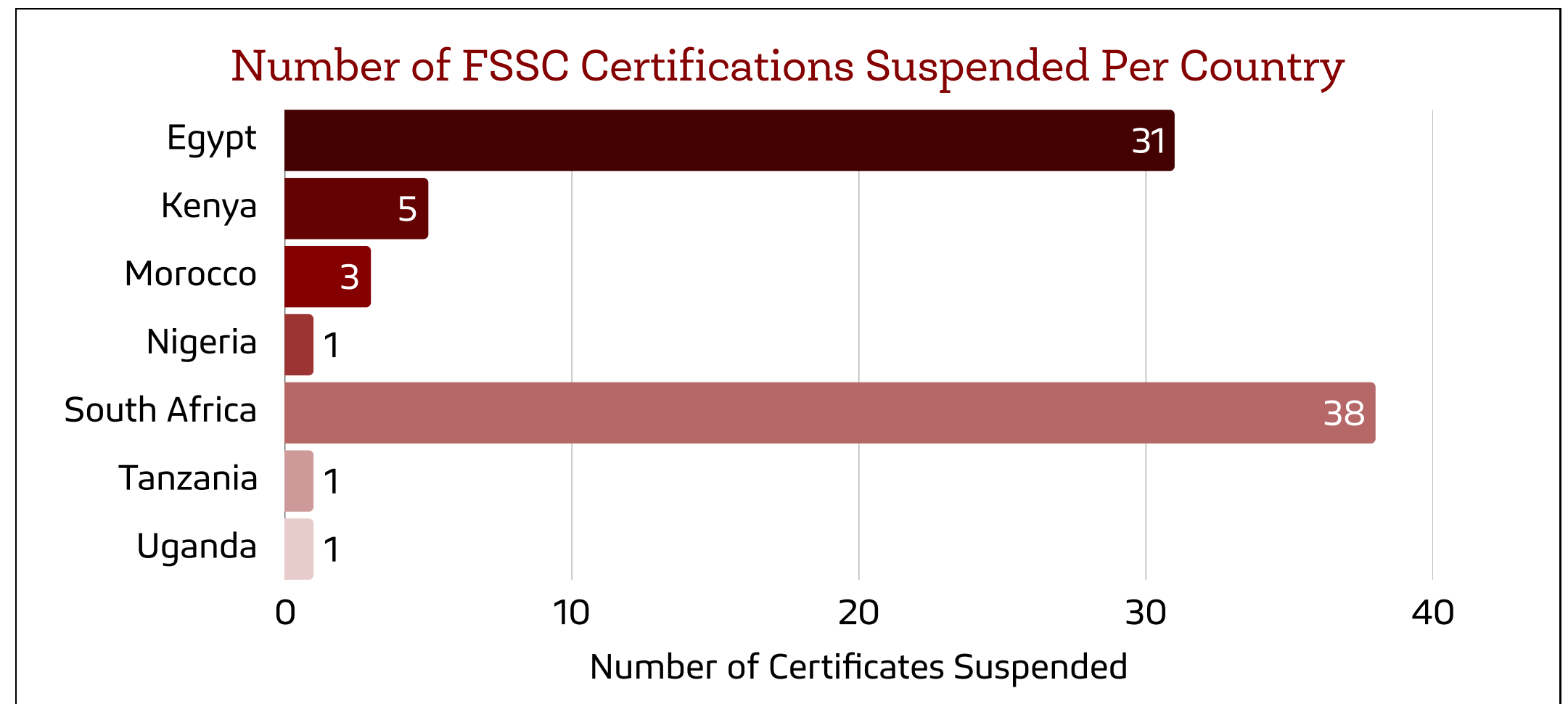
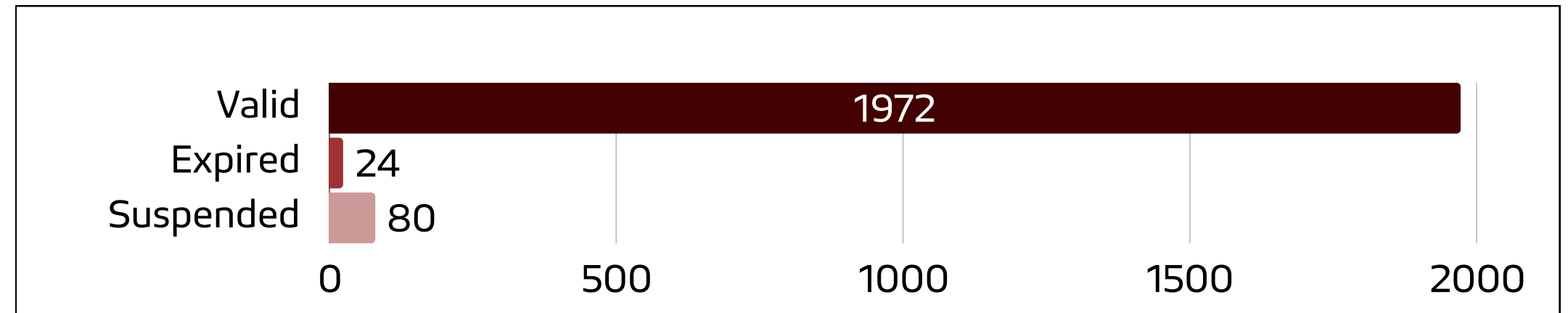


FSSC Certification Status: Validity Overview

The Validity Status of FSSC
Certifications Across 12
Countries



On average, **one in 25**
companies with FSSC
certification could get
suspended!



Commentary

The majority (95%) of companies holding FSSC certification maintain valid certifications, while the remaining 5% have either expired or been suspended. **Typically, expirations arise because of non-renewal, and suspensions arise due to non-compliance identified through unannounced audits.** Notably, 80 company certificates were suspended before their expiration date, suggesting that compliance violations were the primary cause rather than mere administrative lapses.

For BRCGS certification, all listed companies maintain valid certifications. This may suggest that companies with expired certifications are systematically removed from the public registry, ensuring that only actively certified entities remain visible.

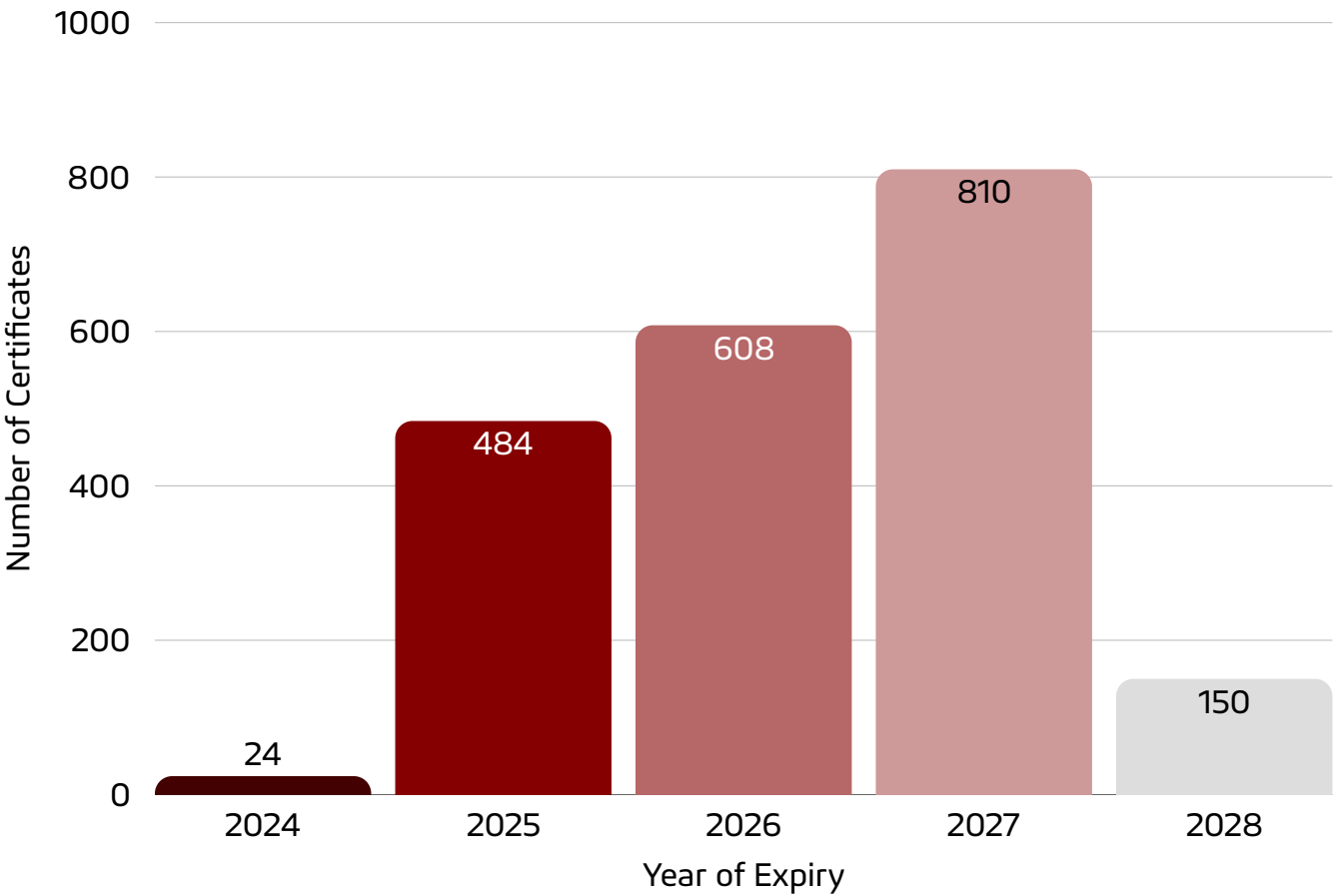
These findings highlight the critical role of **ongoing compliance monitoring** and the necessity for companies to uphold stringent food safety protocols to avoid suspension.



FSSC Certification Expiry Trends: 2025–2028 Outlook

Over half (52%) of FSSC certifications across these 12 countries will expire in two years (2025–2026)

Number of FSSC Certificates Expiring between 2024–2028



FSSC 22000 certificates are typically valid for three years, with annual surveillance audits. As a result, expiration patterns often follow a predictable cycle. The data shows that over 50% (1,092) of currently certified FSSC companies across the twelve countries analyzed are due for renewal within the next two years (2025–2026).

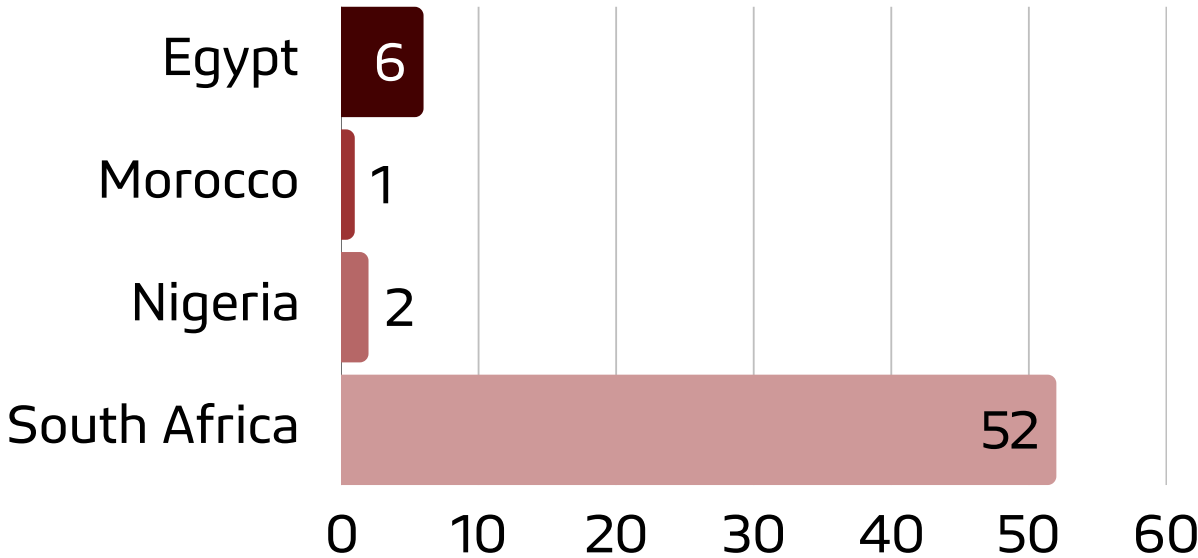
This indicates that a significant number of companies will need to begin the recertification process soon to avoid potential disruptions in compliance, market access, or supply chain continuity.

Given these timelines, there may be an opportunity for technical assistance providers, including organizations like FHSA, to support companies in maintaining certification through targeted advisory services, training, and audit preparedness.

Factors Behind Non-GFSI-Recognized FSSC Certificates

Out of all the FSSC Certifications identified, 61 are not GFSI recognized.

Number of FSSC Certificates not GFSI Recognized



An intriguing observation was the existence of companies (3%) holding FSSC certification that are not GFSI-recognized in Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, and South Africa. According to insights obtained from industry contacts, this discrepancy may be attributed to the use of remote audits in the certification process. Notably, over 50% of the companies in this category continue to hold valid certifications, while others have expired certificates. This 40% may have found it difficult to renew their certificates because FSSC no longer accepts remote audits.

A second possible explanation relates to the timing of the FSSC Version 6 implementation. Although Version 6 was published in April 2023, GFSI recognition for this version was only granted on December 22, 2023. It is, therefore, possible that some companies were certified to Version 6 before the GFSI benchmarking process was completed. In such cases, certifications would be valid under FSSC but may not yet appear as GFSI-recognized during the transition period.

So What? Turning Certification Insights Into Action



Closing the Gap: Uneven Certification, Unequal Opportunity

Africa's readiness to compete in global food markets and intra-regional trade is uneven. Certification is heavily concentrated in a few countries, such as South Africa, Kenya, and Egypt, highlighting broader structural trade imbalances. This report not only reveals **where certification is happening but also highlights who is being excluded, the key factors driving adoption, and the potential risks if the current trajectory persists.** We can make certification work for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to access market opportunities evenly.

Recommendation: Invest in regional certification infrastructure, local auditor training, certifying bodies, and SME-targeted programs in underserved countries.

So What? Turning Certification Insights Into Action



Certification Data is a Powerful but Underused Policy and Program Tool

Patterns in certification, including lapses and suspensions, offer valuable insight into industry behaviour, systemic constraints, and areas needing support. However, data is often fragmented, inconsistently reported, or difficult to access across schemes and countries.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is working toward harmonized food safety and SPS measures. Although voluntary, certification data provides insight into how well African countries align with internationally-recognized practices and highlights areas for improvement.

Recommendation: Establish a regional platform or dashboard to monitor voluntary food safety certification uptake, renewal trends, and geographic gaps. While not regulatory in nature, this information can guide donor investments, SME support programs, and AfCFTA-aligned food safety harmonization efforts.

So What? Turning Certification Insights Into Action



Food System Transformation Requires More than Certification

While certification is a useful proxy for food safety and trade readiness, the analysis shows that it cannot be the sole driver of food systems transformation. Suspensions, expirations, and limited adoption among SMEs suggest that without systemic investments in regulatory frameworks, infrastructure (especially cold chain), and skills development, certification alone will not deliver widespread food safety or economic benefits.

Recommendation: Align certification with national food control systems, integrated as broader food safety and nutrition strategies. Rather than operating in isolation, certification should form part of a comprehensive package of food system reforms, encompassing investments in infrastructure, inspection and testing capacity, traceability systems, and risk-based oversight.

So What? Turning Certification Insights Into Action



Recertification Services & Continuous Compliance Support

The suspension of FSSC certifications before their expiration suggests that many companies struggle to maintain continuous compliance with food safety standards. These gaps in ongoing food safety management put companies at risk of losing certification, damaging market access, and undermining consumer trust. At the same time, over 50% of currently certified companies will face renewal in 2025–2026, creating significant pressure on recertification systems and technical capacity.

Recommendation: Support businesses with continuous compliance programs that include internal audit systems, unannounced audit readiness training, and digital tools for tracking certification requirements. Companies like FHSA can provide comprehensive audit preparation, compliance training, and systems optimization to help businesses navigate the recertification process with confidence.

Conclusion

The growing adoption of FSSC and BRCGS certifications across Africa highlights the increasing emphasis on food safety for market access and regulatory compliance. While food safety certification is expanding in Africa, **it remains unevenly distributed and often inaccessible to SMEs.** High suspension rates and upcoming expirations highlight the need for stronger compliance systems and recertification support.

To move from certification to lasting impact, food safety must be embedded within broader systems reform, trade policy, and SME development efforts.

Food Health Systems Advisory (FHSA) is a management consulting firm with a technical edge.

Through audit preparation, compliance training, and systems optimization, FHSA equips businesses and institutions with the tools to sustain certification, improve regulatory alignment, and enhance food safety across Africa's food sector.

www.fhsafrica.org





FHSA Technical Services

One-Stop Shop for Food Enterprises

FHSA delivers tailored technical solutions for micro, nano, small, and medium food enterprises. We help stabilize operations, boost financial performance, and achieve sustainable growth while reducing emissions and enhancing climate resilience. From processors to food vendors, caterers, bakeries, and logistics, FHSA is your one-stop shop for success in the food sector.

Technical Solutions for the Food Sector

01.

Audit and Training

- GFSI Gap Audits: Food Safety and Quality Management Systems
- Energy Audits
- Food Waste Audits
- Staff Recruitment and Training Services

02.

Process Engineering and R&D

- Food Product Development/Re-formulation and Shelf Life Studies
- Equipment design, sourcing, installation, and maintenance
- Return on investment analysis (ROI)
- Factory Layout

03.

Market, Finance, and Business Strategy

- Access to Finance Readiness and Business Strategy
- Market Analysis, Sales, and Distribution (export, retail, traditional markets)
- Branding and digital marketing support.

04.

Supply Chain and Operational Efficiency Support

- Vendor and Raw Material Supplier Strategy
- Inventory Management Solutions (ERP systems)
- Process Optimization and Automation

05.

Regulatory and Compliance Guidance

- NAFDAC and FDA Registration
- MANCAP, SONCAP, and US FDA/FSMA, Export Compliance Advisory

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