

The Game Changer: Re-Orienting African Agriculture

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ABSTRACT

The population in Africa is projected to increase up to 1.3 billion by 2050. By then, the majority (over 50%) of these population will reside in urban settings thus requiring sustained supply of nutritious foods. This will strain food systems already challenged by climate change, land use, feeding cities and other factors. The current outlook also indicates that Africa still lags behind other regions whereby 1 in 4 people is chronically undernourished. There is general consensus in Africa that Agriculture will continue to be driver for inclusive and sustainable growth, and the foundation of food systems that provides nutritious, safe and affordable food. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (Maputo [2003] and Malabo [2014]) declaration have flagged agriculture to propel the continent to be one of the 10 fastest growing economies in the world. This continent however continues to import food even though over 75% of its population is involved in agriculture in most countries. This indicates the need to optimize agriculture production and food systems. The sector is a major engine for job creation and provides over 50% of the raw material for industry. It is projected that between 2015 to 2025, food systems will add more jobs to economies in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. Africa has increased agricultural production by expanding land under cultivation that has come at an environment costs i.e. ecosystem destruction - deforestation, over-use of fertilizers, pesticides that subsequently and affecting soil health. Measures are being put in place to intensify production on agricultural land sustainably without harming the environment. Technologies (precision technology) and innovations (minimize water use with smart-irrigation devices; covered [high tunnel] production of crops; use crop calendars); innovative extension systems e.g. use of plant clinics to inform crop protection, establishment of agro-parks and practical training centres and awareness of ecosystem services i.e. use of pollinators, biopesticides, integrated pest and disease management, and biofertilizers have become game changers in boosting agricultural production and productivity. Efforts have been put in place to reduce pre-and-postharvest losses, to reduce food loss and waste through value addition processing technologies, transforming agriculture from subsistence to small-business enterprises, promoting nutrition-sensitive agriculture through development of food composition tables, and conserving diverse biodiversity through utilization. An economic driver is to move production higher in the value chain, with agribusinesses producing and selling processed goods, not simply basic

commodities, while providing markets for farmers. The continent needs best production and processing technologies for increased yields and productivity, need agricultural production infrastructure (irrigation and water management,) and agro-processing infrastructure (post-harvest loss reduction grain mills infrastructure and storage and processing structures), and inclusive growth by having a special focus on women and youth agripreneurs.