CHAPTER 8

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF AFRICAN AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS

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> *"Africa is beyond bemoaning the past for its problems. The task of undoing that past is ours, with the support of those willing to join us in a continental renewal. We have a new generation of leaders who know that we must take responsibility for our own destiny, that we will uplift ourselves only by our own efforts in partnership with those who wish us well." —Nelson Mandela*

This quotation succinctly captures current thinking in Africa for charting the course of economic transformation through African-led and African-owned partnerships. When Africa's leaders founded the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in 2001, they were sending a powerful statement to the African and global community that they were committed to defining new relationships that emphasize African ownership of policy and program processes with support from international partners.

NEPAD reflects the belief of all African leaders that they have the responsibility, working in partnership with the African peoples, to address the region's challenges of poverty, social exclusion, and transformation. While these goals are laudable, they remain elusive and it is our premise that more effective partnerships between African and international research and policy analysis units will be needed to make swift progress toward achieving these goals.

In recent years, there has been a shift of focus from "agricultural productivity growth" to the "transformation of agri-food systems" (AGRA, 2016). This shift reflects the recognition that in countries that are primarily agrarian, the agricultural sector's fundamental contribution to rising living standards is through the "multiplier effects" that agricultural growth provides to the rest of the economy (Jayne and Ameyaw, 2016). When millions of small farms experience productivity growth, then millions of rural people spend more in the local rural economy, opening up new jobs in the non-farm sector, diversifying employment, and contributing to demographic and economic transformation. The shift in focus from "agriculture" to "agri-food systems" reflects the recognition that it is the entire system—including agri-input suppliers, farmers, transporters, wholesalers, agro-processors, retailers, and finance—not just farmers, who must be involved to achieve transformational objectives (Allen et al., 2016).

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR CHALLENGES THAT EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS COULD ADDRESS?

African leaders face formidable challenges in sustaining progress toward agricultural transformation. Consider the following:

Overcoming low spending on agricultural research and development (R&D) by African governments.

While applied studies consistently show that investment in agricultural research (e.g., improved seed varieties, best practices for soil management, breeding stock improvements) are among the most effective means of achieving agricultural productivity growth and poverty reduction, most African agricultural research systems are woefully underfunded. Their weaknesses constrain the pace of agricultural productivity growth in the region (Fuglie and Rada, 2013). Asian farmers benefit from the fact that their governments spend over eight times more annually on agricultural R&D on average than African governments. Not surprisingly, the pace of agricultural productivity growth in Asia has eclipsed that of Africa over the last several decades. Table 1 compares the total number of agricultural researchers and total spending on agricultural research for a number of Asian, Latin American and Africa countries.

Table 1. Measures of public sector commitment to agricultural research and development, 2016

	TOTAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCHERS (FTE)	TOTAL SPENDING ON AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH (MILLIONS OF CONSTANT 2011 PPP DOLLARS)
Bangladesh	2,121	251
Brazil	5,869	2,074
Chile	716	186
China	na	9,366
India	12,746	3,298
Vietnam	3,744	136
Burkina Faso	311	49
Cote d'Ivoire	253	82
Ethiopia	2,768	127
Ghana	575	197
Kenya	1,178	274
Malawi	158	28
Nigeria	2,975	433
Tanzania	858	102
Zambia	246	27

Source: Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators (ASTI) database, www.asti.cgiar.org, accessed May 28, 2017.

The constraints holding back the competitiveness of African farmers are increasingly shifting from problems of remoteness to a lack of science-based best practices.

Advances in ICTs are making it increasingly feasible to provide information and finance to farmers even in the most remote areas. And the rise of secondary and tertiary towns in areas formerly considered rural is rapidly improving market access conditions for millions of smallholder farmers. Increasingly, the binding constraint on smallholder productivity is inability to provide farmers with proven "best practices" regarding farm management and input use appropriate for their specific areas due to decades of weak and underfunded agricultural research and extension programs.

International research and development can be more effective with solid local R&D systems.

International R&D provide invaluable services, but they cannot fully substitute for local R&D because agricultural technologies, especially seed varieties, must be locally adapted, tested, and refined to suit Africa's highly varied agro-ecological conditions. Building African R&D capacity requires sustained investments in people, lab facilities and equipment, budgets for field trials, providing bi-directional co-learning between farmers, extension agents and scientists, and other recurrent costs. And because the benefits of most agricultural R&D investments accrue broadly and cannot be captured by firms investing in them, there is a strong role for sustained support for public R&D.

Aging African scientists.

As of 2014, half the region's PhD-level agricultural researchers were in their 50s and 60s, close to retirement age. The region increasingly requires highly skilled agricultural scientists and technical analysts to provide home-grown responses to the region's challenges, and hence governments will need to redouble their efforts to ensure that the growing demands—by both the private and public sectors—can be filled by highly competent Africans.

A vicious cycle?

Unfortunately, little progress has been made over the past several decades in building African universities, scientific crop and livestock institutes, and transformation-oriented policy research think tanks to support agricultural productivity growth and improved rural living standards, as the USDA and land-grant systems did for U.S. farmers and rural communities for the past 150 years. International development assistance has typically addressed these weaknesses by providing grants to organizations in the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) system, private development-oriented companies, and international universities. Donors make such grants with the view that African organizations are too weak to generate positive outcomes from direct grants within the short timeframes that grantees are typically given. As a result, R&D projects are often structured to bypass and only marginally involve African public agricultural organizations. The setting up of parallel channels to meet 3- to 5-year grant objectives is understandable in some respects, but it leads to a vicious cycle in which African public sector agencies are perceived as too weak to contribute productively to grant activities and outcomes, justifying future donor-funded grants that bypass them again.

TOWARD A NEW MODE OF PARTNERSHIP FOR AFRICAN AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

It is time to consider new modes of collaboration between strategic donor groups, African agricultural institutions and international partners. First, we must all acknowledge the long-term nature of institution strengthening. Focusing on demonstrating achievements over short time horizons encourages partners' programs to obtaining quick, unsustainable wins rather than tackle the fundamental problems impeding development. Within their own borders, most high-income countries around the world have come to appreciate the importance of public education, agricultural research, farm extension, and data generation and analysis units in contributing to their own economic transformations (Bonnen 1998; Eicher and Haggblade, 2013; Fan et al., 2009; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2008).

The task of transforming African agriculture should shift to provide and expect leadership from African experts and organizations, even as both international and local players remain important supporting partners. It is not an either/or issue but one of achieving the appropriate balance, with effective partnerships at the foundation (Omamo, 2003).

PARTNERSHIPS AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

The Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), one of the pillars of NEPAD specifically dealing with agriculture, exemplifies how global partners are beginning to respond to African-led initiatives. Several donor and multilateral agencies explicitly support the CAADP process in their policy documents, including the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID, 2005); the European Commission's Advancing African Agriculture Policy (2008); and the World Bank World Development Report (2008). The U.S. Administration and Congress have also acknowledged the need for, and acceptance of, country-led development initiatives. The U.S. government has also made clear commitments to demand-driven, country-led approaches, including CAADP, as a means to engaging development partners.

Another important area for further consideration in forging global partnerships revolves around the position of emerging donors in the global architecture of aid. Private foundations and philanthropists have increasingly become important sources of finance and investment in African development in areas of health and agriculture. China, Brazil and India have also fast become reliable investment partners in Africa. The influence of these new partners on the African scene in respect of the collective efficacy of donor support to transform African agri-food systems needs further analysis and reflection.

And the stakes are high. If the countries of Africa can upgrade their agricultural institutions, they will not only raise living standards and expand employment opportunities but also address social problems borne of youth underemployment and poverty. Leaders need look no further than many Middle Eastern countries to see how a large population of unemployed and disaffected youth can coalesce into militant groups, potentially leading to widespread unrest, mass migration, the creation of fragile states, massive humanitarian costs, and military interventions. Such situations might have been moderated or avoided with earlier well-conceived development support. Many African countries currently enjoy rapid economic growth, but its sustainability is not assured, and many others lag far behind.

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RETHINKING THE ROLE OF NEPAD/CAADP IN STIMULATING CONTINENTAL AND GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

NEPAD/CAADP is a valuable platform in stimulating orchestrating and championing partnerships across African countries. To date, it has facilitated countries' understanding of each others' agricultural transformation strategies and enabled them to learn from each others' best practices. Before NEPAD/CAADP, it was rare for East and Southern Africa countries to sit at the same table with West Africa except in more general AU meetings. Facilitating a process by which countries can speak with a unified voice has also enabled development partners to more easily define their entry points in providing technical or financial assistance. The challenge for NEPAD/CAADP is to raise the bar for partnerships between African and international governments, private sectors, universities, and other technical bodies.

CONCLUSIONS

Productivity growth of agri-food systems is at the heart of Africa's economic transformation, and investing in Africa's economic growth has been shown to be in the national interests of other countries around the world. Over the past 15 years, African governments that have effectively promoted farm productivity growth have enjoyed faster rates of poverty reduction, higher rates of labor productivity in the non-farm segments of the economy, and a more rapid exit of the labor force out of farming. Because the economies of most African countries still depend largely on the performance of agriculture, public investments in agricultural productivity growth will be an important component of an effective youth employment strategy. Young people between 15 and 34 years of age account for roughly 60 percent of Africa's labor force (Filmer and Fox, 2014). Often considered more of a burden than a benefit, Africa's youthful workforce could open up a wide range of economic opportunities in farming, in the downstream stages of agri-food systems and in the broader non-farm economy, with the right mix of policies and public investments toward agriculture.

The time has also arrived for greater commitment to the principles of empowering African organizations to be the drivers of their own transformation through partnerships that are ready to accept their priorities, subject to mutual commitment, mutual respect, and accountability.

African agri-food systems of the future will require upgraded and profoundly expanded skill sets relative to what local education and training systems are currently producing. Developing the skills and jobs to move the continent towards a productive twenty-first century agriculture will require transforming the content and approach of African agricultural education, research, extension, and policy analysis institutions. And, now that ICTs are increasingly able to overcome problems of remoteness, the transformative power of ICTs is increasingly dependent on African research institutions' ability to generate appropriate information on best farm management practices for dissemination through ICTs. This requires a serious commitment to overcome decades of neglect in supporting localized, context-specific adaptive public agricultural research and extension programs.

The time has arrived for greater commitment—both local and international—to invest directly in long-term capacity building of African universities, agricultural training colleges, vocational schools, national crop science research organizations, extension systems, and policy analysis institutes. International private companies, universities, and NGOs have important but increasingly redefined roles that put African institutions in the lead. African governments will need to show greater financial commitment to building the capacity of public agricultural organizations in order to demonstrate that they have "skin in the game."

The time has also arrived for greater commitment to the principles of empowering African organizations to be the drivers of their own transformation through partnerships that are ready to accept their priorities, subject to mutual commitment, mutual respect, and accountability. To argue that African organizations and voices be put center stage implies that African governments also must live up to their commitments. Pan-African organizations such as the AFDB and AU can collect and publish annual metrics to transparently report on progress at country level. Regional network of national policy analysis units can play a critical role by serving as think tank to these regional and pan-African policy organizations, supported by international research and financial partners. By encouraging the "evidence-based voices" of African policy analysis institutions, the center of gravity of agricultural policy discussions can finally be shifted, as it should, to Africa.