

Follow Up Paper for *The Africa Roundtable*

Growing Africa's Future: Advancing Food Sovereignty through Agricultural Progress and Innovation

May 2024



TAKEAWAYS & RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Transforming Africa's agricultural sector requires a **systematic, cross-sectoral approach that includes coherent policies, targeted investments, and good governance**, while addressing conflicting goals and the unique challenges faced by each African country.
2. **Unlocking Africa's agricultural potential necessitates increased funding in critical areas** such as infrastructure, fertilizer production and soil health, storage facilities, and digital technologies, with a focus on making these investments accessible and beneficial to smallholder farmers.
3. **Strengthening local food production and intra-African trade** is essential for achieving food sovereignty and resilience. This requires addressing issues such as land tenure, climate change adaptation, infrastructure, and the development of value-added processing and marketing channels.
4. **Leveraging digital technologies and innovations**, such as index-based agriculture insurance, smart irrigation, inclusive digital financing, and other solutions like utilizing space data, can help transform the productivity and profitability of Africa's agri-food system, but requires investments in digital infrastructure, education, and regulatory support.
5. **Empowering women and youth in agriculture is crucial** for driving progress and innovation. This involves improving access to land, finance, education, and training, and creating an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and agribusiness development.
6. **Fostering strong partnerships and collaboration** among stakeholders from politics, the private sector, civil society, and research is vital for implementing successful strategies and initiatives that advance food sovereignty and agricultural progress in Africa. Collaboration and partnership with Europe can play a crucial role in supporting this transformation through knowledge sharing, capacity building, and joint initiatives.
7. **Establishing conducive policy frameworks and governance structures** is crucial for creating an enabling environment that encourages investment, innovation, and growth in the agricultural sector, while ensuring that the benefits are equitably distributed among all stakeholders.

OPENING REMARKS

The 6th edition of *The Africa Roundtable*, hosted by Global Perspectives Initiative, brought together decision-makers, thought leaders, and experts from politics, the private sector, civil society, media, science and research from Africa and Europe to discuss the pressing issue of "**Growing Africa's Future: Advancing Food Sovereignty through Agricultural Progress and Innovation.**" The event, held on May 7th, 2024, in Berlin, Germany, as a side event of *The Global Solutions Summit*, aimed to explore actionable solutions and innovative partnerships to support Africa in becoming an agricultural powerhouse.

In his opening remarks, H.E. Albert M. Muchanga, Commissioner for Trade and Industry of the African Union, highlighted the immense potential of Africa's agricultural sector, with its abundant arable land, water resources, and favorable weather conditions. However, he also noted challenges such as low productivity, limited access to technology, and the need for international partnerships to address issues like subsidies and fair competition.

H.E. Cem Özdemir, Minister for Food and Agriculture of the Federal Republic of Germany, stressed the importance of food sovereignty in the face of global challenges such as COVID-19, climate change, and the war in Ukraine. In his video statement, he emphasized Germany's commitment to partnering with African countries to expand intra-African and international trade, focusing on knowledge transfer, capacity building, research, and standards, with the guiding principle of agroecology at the forefront.

SETTING THE SCENE

Amandla Ooko-Ombaka (McKinsey & Company) presented key findings from the [white paper](#) "Growing Africa's Future," highlighting the dynamic nature of Africa's food industry and its projected growth to \$1 trillion by 2030. Despite the sector's incredible potential, challenges such as low productivity, infrastructure gaps, and climate change must be addressed. Ooko-Ombaka emphasized the need for targeted investments in areas such as fertilizer production, storage infrastructure, and digital technologies, while also focusing on doing more with less, given the limitations on land expansion. She also discussed the potential for activating underutilized land and reducing food waste as strategies for increasing agricultural productivity and efficiency, and highlighted the competition for land among food, fuel, and nature commitments.

The opening remarks and the presentation of the white paper set the stage for a fruitful discussion on the potential of Africa's agricultural sector and the challenges that need to be addressed to achieve food sovereignty and sustainable growth - through strong collaboration and partnership between African and European stakeholders.

SOLUTIONS FOR SOVEREIGNTY

Systematic Transformation through Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

To transform Africa's agricultural sector, stakeholders must take a **systematic, cross-sectoral approach** that prioritizes the development of **coherent policies, strategic investments, and good governance practices**, while addressing conflicting goals and the **unique challenges** faced by each African country.

Policymakers should focus on creating **strong policy frameworks** and building **robust systems**, including seed systems, extension services, market systems, and sustainable farming practices. These efforts should aim to establish an enabling environment that encourages private sector investment, facilitates technology adoption, and empowers smallholder farmers to become active participants in the sector, rather than just recipients of relief.

Attention was also brought to the **challenge of subsidies** in Europe and the United States, which make it difficult for Africa to export its agricultural goods competitively, underscoring the need for fair competition and a level playing field in international markets, as emphasized by Commissioner Muchanga during the discussion.

The importance of recognizing **agriculture as a multi-dimensional sector** that encompasses primary, secondary, and tertiary activities was emphasized. To unlock the sector's full potential, governments and their partners should actively promote the **development of integrated value chains** and **agribusiness ecosystems**. This requires a **shift in mindset**, moving away from the presumption that agriculture is solely a primary sector associated with farmers and poverty, and instead embracing agriculture as a business that spans across the entire value chain.

Unlocking Potential through Strategic Investments

To unlock Africa's agricultural potential, **strategic investments** in critical areas such as **infrastructure, storage facilities, fertilizer production, and digital technologies** should be prioritized. Critically, these investments should also be accessible and beneficial to smallholder farmers. Governments, development partners, and private sector actors are encouraged to collaborate to create targeted investment programs that address the specific needs of each country and region.

Stakeholders should actively explore strategies and solutions for activating underutilized land and reducing food waste, while recognizing the challenges associated with land expansion. Governments and their partners should develop and implement integrated land-use planning and management frameworks that balance competing demands while prioritizing food security and environmental sustainability. It is essential to focus on doing more with less by investing in technologies and practices that increase productivity and efficiency.

Harnessing the potential of **digital technologies can revolutionize African agriculture**. Investments are needed to build local capacity and create enabling environments for the adoption and scaling of these innovations, such as establishing digital innovation hubs, providing training and support, and developing policies and regulations that promote responsible use of digital technologies in agriculture.

The potential of digital technologies, such as remote sensing and AI, as well as the need to create platforms that bring together European companies and African startups to develop these technologies was further highlighted by Wolfgang Niedermark (Federation of German Industries), while noting that over 300 companies in Africa are already cooperating on this issue.

To inform decision-making and monitor progress, stakeholders should collaborate to establish and strengthen reliable, accessible, and actionable data collection, analysis, and sharing systems. This can involve investing in agricultural census and survey programs, promoting digital tools for data management, and establishing multi-stakeholder platforms for data sharing and collaboration.

Strengthening Local Food Systems and Intra-African Trade

Strengthening **local food production** and **intra-African trade** is essential for achieving food sovereignty and resilience. This requires addressing issues such as land tenure, climate change adaptation, infrastructure expansion, and the development of value-added processing and marketing channels.

The discussion called for a focus on **indigenous foods** and **traditional food systems** in promoting food sovereignty, emphasizing the need to amplify production towards the market and create value-added opportunities. The potential of these foods in terms of nutrition, resilience, and cultural significance was highlighted, and participants called for increased investments in research, development, and marketing to unlock their full potential.

H.E. Amina Abou-Zeid, Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy of the African Union, called for a **prioritization of local food processing** and value addition to harness Africa's agricultural potential as compared to importing food: "Processing, whether it's cocoa, whether it's coffee and tea, whether it's yogurt, milk, (or jam), we should be major producers".

The **critical role of land reforms** in enabling investments, reducing conflicts, and promoting equitable access to land resources, particularly for women and smallholder farmers, was stressed. Participants emphasized the need for secure land tenure rights and effective land governance systems to incentivize long-term investments in agriculture and promote sustainable land management practices.

The **correlation of food insecurity and climate vulnerability** in Africa was also discussed, with participants emphasizing the importance of building resilience and adaptation capacity in

agricultural systems and rural communities. This includes investing in climate-smart technologies and practices, such as drought-resistant crops, irrigation systems, and agroforestry, as well as strengthening early warning systems and social protection mechanisms.

Participants cautioned against narrowing the focus of agricultural development to export-oriented agribusiness, emphasizing the **need to balance export market opportunities with the strengthening of local food systems** and the promotion of food sovereignty. The importance of developing value-added processing and marketing channels was also highlighted, to capture a greater share of the value chain and create employment opportunities in the non-farm economy.

Leveraging Digital Technologies for Productivity and Profitability

Gerald Chirinda (Future Africa Group) presented the highlights of a [report](#), which was created for *The Africa Roundtable* event. **Agricultural innovation** in Africa currently focuses on input supply, production, aggregation, processing, and commercialization, with Kenya and Nigeria being the major hubs for ag tech, accounting for 45% of tech solutions.

Innovative technologies, such as index-based agriculture insurance, smart irrigation, inclusive digital financing, and blockchain solutions, show a lot of promise and can help transform the productivity and profitability of Africa's agri-food system, but require investments in digital infrastructure, education, and regulatory support. These technologies can help to reduce risks and uncertainties associated with agricultural production, improve access to finance and markets, and enhance transparency and traceability along the value chain.

Participants stressed the importance of building **digital literacy and skills** among farmers and agribusiness entrepreneurs, as well as creating an enabling policy and regulatory environment that supports innovation and investment in the digital agriculture space.

Sheena Raikundalia (Kuza ONE) shared her experience of building a digital platform that combines best-in-class technology with on-the-ground support from youth agripreneurs to ensure effective adoption and impact, highlighting the importance of this approach in connecting smallholder farmers with extension services, inputs, finance, and markets.

Participants also emphasized the need for inclusive and user-centered design approaches that consider the needs and preferences of smallholder farmers and other actors in the value chain.

Empowering Women and Youth for Progress and Innovation

Empowering women and youth in agriculture is crucial for driving progress and innovation. This involves improving access to land, finance, education, and training, and creating an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and agribusiness development.

Birgit Pickel (BMZ) stressed the need to address the challenges faced by women in accessing land, finance, and other resources, calling for women to be given access to finance if they want to invest in land and agriculture.

The discussion stressed the importance of creating **attractive and meaningful employment opportunities in the agricultural sector**, particularly for youth, to fully harness the potential of Africa's demographic advantage. Participants called for a **rebranding of agriculture as agribusiness**, promoting the use of modern technologies and innovative approaches to make the sector more appealing to young people.

The **need for education and training programs** that equip youth with the skills needed for success in the agricultural sector was also emphasized, along with the creation of an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and agribusiness development. This includes improving access to finance, markets, and business support services, and fostering a culture of innovation and risk-taking.

Building Partnerships for Food Sovereignty and Progress

To foster **strong partnerships** and drive effective collaboration among diverse stakeholders in African agriculture, action-oriented approaches are needed.

Governments, development partners, and the private sector must work together to increase investments in public-private partnerships and blended finance mechanisms, mobilizing resources and sharing risks to support agricultural development. Establishing effective platforms and mechanisms that facilitate dialogue, build trust, and align incentives among stakeholders is crucial for co-creating solutions and driving innovation in the sector.

Participants called for **concrete steps to enhance regional and international cooperation**, such as increasing support for intra-African trade and developing regional value chains. Leveraging the opportunities created by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) requires harmonizing standards and regulations to facilitate cross-border trade. Stakeholders from politics, the private sector, civil society, and research, both from Africa and Europe, must actively engage in implementing successful strategies and initiatives that advance food sovereignty and agricultural progress in Africa. Collaborative efforts should focus on targeted investments, capacity building, and creating an enabling environment for agricultural growth and transformation.

Creating an Enabling Environment through Policy and Governance

Establishing **conductive policy frameworks** and governance structures is crucial for creating an enabling environment that encourages investment, innovation, and growth in the agricultural sector, while ensuring that the benefits are equitably distributed among all stakeholders.

There is a need for coherent, evidence-based, and inclusive policy frameworks that address the unique challenges and opportunities in the sector, while also promoting food sovereignty, sustainability, and resilience.

One of the key policy issues discussed was the **need to reform land tenure systems and ensure secure access to land for smallholder farmers**, particularly women and youth. Participants called for the development of effective land governance frameworks that balance the interests of different stakeholders, promote sustainable land management practices, and facilitate long-term investments in agriculture.

Another important policy area highlighted was the need to **create an enabling environment for private sector investment and innovation** in the agriculture sector. This includes establishing stable and predictable regulatory frameworks, reducing bureaucratic barriers, and providing incentives for investment in areas such as infrastructure, research and development, and value addition.

As stressed by Nathalie Delapalme (Mo Ibrahim Foundation) policies that **promote inclusive and equitable growth in the agriculture sector** are crucial, ensuring that the benefits of agricultural progress are shared among all stakeholders, particularly smallholder farmers and rural communities. This includes policies that support the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), promote fair trade practices, and strengthen social protection mechanisms.

The role of regional and international trade policies in promoting food sovereignty and agricultural progress was also discussed. Participants called for the **harmonization of trade policies and standards** across African countries, as well as the development of strategic partnerships with international markets that support the growth of African agriculture while protecting the interests of local producers.

Finally, participants stressed the need for policies that **promote sustainable and climate-resilient agricultural practices**, in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This includes policies that support the adoption of agroecological approaches, promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and encourage the development of climate-smart technologies and practices.

OUTLOOK

The Africa Roundtable on "Growing Africa's Future: Advancing Food Sovereignty through Agricultural Progress and Innovation" provided a platform for an exchange of ideas, experiences, and recommendations for transforming Africa's agricultural sector. The discussions highlighted the immense potential of African agriculture to feed its growing population, drive economic growth, and contribute to global food security, while also emphasizing the critical challenges and barriers that must be overcome.

We would like to thank all partners and participants for joining us at the ***The Africa Roundtable*** and contributing to the dialogue, especially McKinsey & Company and Future Africa Group for providing a white paper and report as a basis for our discussion in Berlin.

The discussions and ideas generated at ***The Africa Roundtable*** will shape the direction of our future activities and will also have a wider impact on our initiatives and formats. The recommendations and takeaways of this edition of *The Africa Roundtable* will be further discussed in bilateral conversations and follow-up sessions.

Global Perspectives will continue the dialogue on the topic of Food Sovereignty and Agricultural Progress at the Spring Meeting of the Paris Peace Forum in Ben Guerir, Morocco, on May 10th, 2024.

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