

Welcome and Overview of the Conference

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Welcome

On behalf of the International Food Policy Research Institute, the African Union Commission, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa, it is an honor and privilege for me to welcome all of you to this important conference on “Increasing agricultural productivity and enhancing food security in Africa: New challenges and opportunities” or in short, AgProductivity-Africa conference. Many of you have prepared papers and speeches to deliver at the conference and travelled long distances to get to Addis Ababa. Others are here to contribute to the discussions that will evolve. I hope you all find it worthwhile to spend today and the next two days to deliberate on two issues that are important for Africa’s development, productivity and food security. Due to its importance, the conference is being held in the historic Africa Hall which hosted the birth of the Organization of African Unity by stalwarts of African emancipation and unity in the early 1960s. Apart from the conference I encourage participants to spend some time to visit historic places in beautiful Ethiopia.

World Population and Food Needs

At the close of yesterday, October 31, 2011, the world’s population reached seven billion people, and it is expected to continue to grow to nine billion by 2050 at which time Africa’s population will be 2.3 billion. In order to satisfy the world’s food needs, it is estimated that production will need to grow 70-100 percent. Questions of sustainability, malnutrition, food security and environmental impact are at the forefront of international debates on how we feed a growing planet.

The African Farmer

Let us reflect on the situation of Kofi Salifu, a farmer who lives in a country in the Sahel of West Africa.

Kofi has a wife and four children. The children are enrolled in school which is 4 kilometers from their village but they do not attend school regularly especially during the peak period when they are asked to help with farm work.

Kofi’s wife, Asetu had plans to have a farm of her own but because of gender discrimination she could not get land on her own. As a result, she decided to work with her husband on the same farm.

Kofi cultivates 2 hectares of land which he inherited from his father. Neither Kofi nor his father has title to the land except that the family has cultivated it for a long time. There are little prospects for Kofi to obtain additional land from the village due to population pressure. Kofi should count himself lucky to

have this amount of land since many of his colleague farmers in the village cultivate about one hectare or less of land.

Kofi grows sorghum which is a major staple crop in the region, and a few other crops. Over the years Kofi has seen his sorghum yield dwindling due to continuous cropping of the land without application of fertilizer or organic manure. In 2010 the yield for Kofi's sorghum was 850 kg per hectare although a research station which is 50 kilometers away can have 4,000 kg per hectare. Once a while the rains fail and there is drought and the yield of Kofi and many of the farmers in the village also fail since none of them irrigates the farm. Due to the absence of effective storage structures, weevils infest Kofi's sorghum produce and he loses about 25% of the harvest.

At harvest time Kofi sells about a third of his farm produce and leaves the rest for seed and home consumption. He is not able to save enough produce for his household and so he buys sorghum from the local market from time to time, especially during the lean season. He also catches fish for household consumption from a sizeable river which runs beside the village. Due to the imbalanced nature and insufficient quantity of their meals the children often fall sick and Madam Asetu has to stop farm work and attend to the sick. They can hardly afford orthodox medicine and so they rely on traditional medicine for health care.

The produce from Kofi's farm is purchased by itinerant traders who come to the village to buy and sell in urban markets. Since Kofi does not know the price in the city he accepts any price that is offered. Kofi has attempted to sell his produce at the urban market before but due to the deplorable state of the road, it took him long time and cost him a lot of money to transport the goods. In the end he lost out on the sale and so he decided to wait for the traders in the village although he suspected he was not getting a good deal from them. Although Kofi had not seen an extension staff for the past three years he heard about seeds that can improve his yields and the potential for fertilizer to do the same from a farmer association meeting he attended when he went to a funeral in her wife's village which is 80 kilometers away. There is no farmer association in his village.

If for some reason he wants to buy improved seed and fertilizer he has to travel to the district capital which is 60 kilometers away.

He cannot obtain credit from the rural bank to buy improved seeds and fertilizer for his farm because he does not have collateral. He sometimes borrows from money lenders in the village at 150% interest rate which is about 10 times what the banks charge to finance his additional food purchases and other household expenditures. Kofi knows that farmers in the farmers' association in his wife's village are able to obtain group loans from the local rural bank. He has vowed to start a farmers' association in his village but he does not know how to mobilize the farmers and set the ground rules.

Motivation for the Conference

Our motivation to organize the conference emerged from the plight of Kofi Salifu and Asetu and many others like him in Africa. Although Africa has good natural resources – land and water, and there has been economic and social growth over the last 10 years, hunger and malnutrition have been increasing

to the extent that about 240 million of the population is malnourished. We would like to find solutions that will improve the situations of people like Kofi and his household , especially their food security situation. It is our belief that such improvements will come from increasing the productivity of Kofi Salifu's labor and that of his land.

Questions for Reflection

1. Is Kofi's land large enough to provide his household a decent livelihood – enough to eat, a good proportion to sell to enable him buy his needs?
2. Why can't there be a system to register Kofi's land so that he can use it as collateral for loans and encourage him to invest in the land and adopt new technologies and innovations?
3. Although it is difficult for Kofi to find additional land, and obtain title to the land he works on, it is common knowledge that some foreigners have been given land through all kinds of arrangements. Should we encourage access to land by foreigners? How do we institute responsible governance of land and other natural resources?
4. How can we end gender imbalance, and give rural women the same access as men to land, technology, financial services, education, and markets?
5. How can Kofi obtain production and marketing information to boost his production, productivity, and profitability? How can extension and advisory services be revamped to help smallholders like Kofi?
6. How can Kofi move away from traditional farming and begin to innovate with modern inputs and improved farming practices so as increase his yields? How can the yield gap between Kofi's farm and the research station be narrowed?
7. How can African farmers increase maize yields from 1-2 tons per hectare to the potential 4-6 tons per hectare; rice yields from 1-2 tons per hectare to the potential 6-8 tons per hectare; cassava yields from 6-8 tons per hectare to the potential 20-30 tons per hectare?
8. How can Kofi reduce considerably post-harvest losses? The Economist reported that about 40% of Africa's farm produce is lost on the way to market.
9. What does it take to add value to Kofi's production so that post-harvest losses can be reduced, shelf life increased and demand increased so that Kofi can earn more from this farm enterprise?
10. There is a river in Kofi's village yet Kofi does not irrigate his farm and depends on rainfall which sometimes fails him and he loses his crop without any remedy. Why can't the river in the village provide a source of water for irrigation?
11. Why is it that just 7% of African arable land is irrigated compared to 41% in south Asia? What does it take to increase irrigation in Africa when there are many large rivers in the continent?
12. Why is there no social protection system like insurance in place to provide a remedy for Kofi and others who lose their production due to extreme weather events?
13. Why can't public investment be increased to improve the road that connects Kofi to the urban center so that he can sell his produce for higher price and be able to buy inputs directly?
14. What does it take to improve rural service delivery so that Kofi can buy inputs and other supplies from his village?

15. How can Kofi get access to credit whose cost is manageable so that he can pay back from his farm enterprise?
16. How can Kofi improve the nutrition of members of his household, especially the children to reduce the incidence of disease?
17. How can Kofi make his children attend school regularly and devote most of their time to their development instead of indulging in child labor?
18. How can Kofi's village be assisted to establish and empower grassroot organizations which will bring benefits to their members for their economic and social development?
19. What public policies are needed to assist Kofi to increase productivity and manage risk?
20. How can we get Kofi to move towards more commercial farming and look at farming as a business?
21. How can we bring about fundamental changes in the way agriculture is done in Africa?
22. Is smallholder farming the way to go to increase agricultural production and productivity and enhance food security in Africa? What do smallholder farmers in Africa need to make them efficient?
23. How can we reverse the long-term neglect of the agricultural sector? In 1979, aid to agriculture was 18% of total development assistance. By 2008, it was just 4.3%. There has been resurgence of interest in agriculture after the high food prices but the global economic down turn has not helped in translating interest into substantial financial assistance. How do we make policymakers around the world step up their critical efforts to combat hunger, malnutrition, and poverty by providing greater support for agriculture? The African countries have to put their money where their mouth is. For instance, less than 10 countries in Africa allocate about 10% of their budget to agriculture as mandated by the Maputo declaration which is aimed at reducing hunger, poverty, and malnutrition on the continent through the CAADP. From 2010 to 2011, budget allocations to the agriculture sector in the East Africa Community decreased in all countries, except Burundi. How do we get African countries to live up to what their heads of state signed in Maputo in 2003?

All is not Gloomy

Despite the plight of Kofi Salifu and many others like him, all is not gloomy. Agricultural growth in Sub-Saharan Africa rose from annual rate of 2.3% in the 1980s to 3.8% between 2000 and 2005. Over the same period, agricultural productivity rose by 50%. In many African countries there is a rich and diverse treasure trove of innovations from farmers and farmers' groups. These results demonstrate that the challenges that face African agriculture are not insurmountable. Yes, with focus and dedication Africa shall overcome. About 26 African countries and counting have signed CAADP compacts and they are expected to increase spending on agriculture to at least 10% of their budgets. Yesterday, the Africa Food and Nutrition Security Day which fell on October 30 was commemorated under the theme, "Investing in intra-African trade for food and nutrition security". The purpose of the Day is to serve as a rallying point in intensifying commitments at all levels and all times to address the challenges of food and nutrition insecurity and malnutrition in Africa. Let us use the conference to address these challenges

Objectives of the conference

1. Showcase research results on the trends, determinants, constraints, and opportunities for improving agricultural productivity in Africa within the framework of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), national and rural development strategies, and investment plans;
2. Identify areas for policy actions, further research, and innovations towards enhancing food security and reducing rural poverty in Africa;
3. Encourage appropriate communication strategies for conveying and implementing research results that improve agricultural productivity, enhance food security, and reduce rural poverty.

Format of the conference

The conference will consist of plenary and parallel sessions. The plenary session will take the form of keynote speeches and panel discussions. The panel discussions will have moderators who will pose questions to panelists. The parallel sessions will consist of paper and poster presentations on sub-themes of the conference. Each parallel session will have a chairperson to manage the session.

Expectation

It is my expectation and that of all the organizers that this conference will not be just a talk shop. We have seen many of them in the past and they have not been useful. We seek the full engagement of all participants and look forward to lively and productive debates that will bring out solutions that will resolve the several challenges that African agriculture faces. We would like the solutions to contribute to the CAADP country processes that have been designed or are being designed to drive national agricultural strategies and agenda.

I wish all of us a fruitful seminar.

Thank you.