Agriculture
Food insecurity in Africa

Jakkie Cilliers
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Local initiatives to improve agricultural production [19] [20] have not gained widespread traction and Africa remains the most food-insecure region globally. [21]

According to data from FAO, about 256 million Africans faced undernutrition in 2018 and the IFs forecast is that the number will modestly decline to around 200 million by 2043. [22] The impact of a lack of focus on agriculture, climate change, natural resource degradation, rapid population growth, increasing fragility and insecurity, and slow economic growth combine to condemn many Africans to a life of hunger and malnourishment.

Furthermore, those countries in Africa with large agricultural sectors mostly export raw products without adding value. For example:

- Africa produces about 45% of the world’s cashew nuts, with 90% of the crop exported for processing overseas but with little benefit to the 2.5 million farmers involved in the industry. The African Cashew Alliance estimates that a 25% increase in raw cashew nut processing in Africa would generate more than US$100 million household income in the sector. As it is, a recent report noted that Tanzania’s farmers ‘get rock-bottom prices and the country imports its own nuts back after processing to meet buoyant domestic demand.’ [23]

Africa also produces 70% of the global total of cocoa, much of that from Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire. Yet Ghana earns only about US$2 billion a year from its colonial-style arrangement with the world’s chocolate manufacturers. In fact, Africa accounts for less than 1% of chocolate exports. Europe, which grows no cocoa of its own, exported US$19.2 billion worth of chocolate in 2016. [24]

However, things have started to change to address such unequal relationships. For example:

- Through the Africa Cocoa Initiative, Côte d’Ivoire overtook The Netherlands as the world’s largest processor of cocoa during the 2014–15 season.

- Ghana is now processing more than a third of its own cocoa.

- In an effort to increase the farm-gate prices to levels high enough to allow small cocoa producers to escape extreme poverty, Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire unilaterally announced that from October 2020, they will be charging a fixed premium of US$400 a ton over the benchmark futures price. [25]

However, government measures to control prices could lead to increased production, in turn driving down the export price and leaving the government to foot the difference. These measures will therefore only succeed with the simultaneous better management and control of domestic production.
Endnotes


5. T Lewis, Transatlantic slave trade, 2018


7. The data is taken from the World Bank, Cereal yield (kg per hectare), The African countries, in ascending order of productivity, are Cape Verde, Botswana, Namibia, Niger, Zimbabwe, Eritrea, Libya, South Sudan, Sudan, Angola, Lesotho, DR Congo, Somalia, Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, The Gambia and Chad. The geographical spread of African countries highlights the scope of the problem.


14. World Bank, Aggregated LPI

15. World Bank, Aggregated LPI

16. Embassy of the DR Congo, Invest in DRC, Agriculture


19. In 2003, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (now called the African Union Development Agency) published its Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, with ambitious goals, namely to: allocate at least 10% of national budgets to agriculture; reach rural growth rates of 6% annually by 2015; integrate and invigorate regional and national agricultural markets; significantly increase agricultural exports; transform Africa into a ‘strategic player’ in global agricultural science and technology; practise sound environmental and land management techniques; and reduce rural poverty (see: M Fleshman, Boosting African farm yields, 2014).

20. The commitment to devote at least 10% of national budgets to agriculture and rural development was also included in the 2003 Maputo Declaration by African heads of state and reiterated in the 2014 Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation in Africa.

21. On aggregate, Africa spends only 5–7% of national budgets on agriculture, although a 2018 study found that 11 African countries did manage to allocate 10% or more of their budgets to agriculture in some years since 2005, with Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique and Sierra Leone achieving 6% agricultural

22. AllAfrica, *Communique: Africa food security leadership dialogue*, August 5, 2019

23. IPPMedia, *Value add in Africa: First steps in a long journey*, 2019; also see: African Cashew Alliance, *About us*

24. The world cocoa industry is worth more than US$100 billion annually; also see: Y Adegoke, *Why Europe dominates the global chocolate market while Africa produces all the cocoa*, 2018; D Philling, *The African farmers taking on big chocolate*, *Financial Mail*, 16 December 2019; H Fofack, *Overcoming the colonial development model of resource extraction for sustainable development in Africa*, 2019


31. World Bank, *Agriculture in Africa: Telling facts from myths*


33. World Bank, *Agriculture in Africa: Telling facts from myths*

34. In contrast to the tripling in growth cited earlier, this was an improvement across the entire country, so the growth is understandably much smaller; see: JY Lin, *The Household Responsibility System in China’s Agricultural Reform: A Theoretical and Empirical Study*, *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 36:53, 1988, S199–S224

35. China-Africa Project, *Chinese and African agriculture have a lot more in common that most people think: Interview with Xinqing Lu, Associate Programme Officer for Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa*, 3 December 2019

36. OEC, Brazil


38. L Abboud, *The robot revolution down on the farm*, 2018


40. R Kimani and P Bosire, *FarmDrive*, 2019

41. In most of rural Africa, precise location of a farm is objectively unknown so the location is determined via a series of SMS questions (e.g. time to walk to different primary schools). The more schools a farmer is familiar with in their area, the easier it is to hone in on their specific location.

42. J Bird, *‘Smart’ insurance helps poor farmers to cut risk*, *Financial Times*, 5 December 2018; also see, for example, https://agrocenta.com/ and https://www.zenvus.com/.

44. S Gebre, AGRA plans to invest $500 million in African seed companies, Bloomberg, 7 September 2016

45. The Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa and its allied organisations argue that ‘AGRA has unequivocally failed in its mission to increase productivity and incomes and reduce food insecurity, and has in fact harmed broader efforts to support African farmers.’ See: Various co-signatories, Open letter: The Green Revolution in Africa has unequivocally failed, 15 September 2021


47. Ammonia manufacturing contributes 1% of worldwide carbon dioxide emissions. See LK Boerner, Industrial ammonia production emits more CO2 than any other chemical-making reaction. Chemists want to change that, *Chemical & Engineering News*, 15 June 2019


49. Indorama Petrochemicals, About IEPL, Port Harcourt


54. Food and Agriculture Organization, Food wastage: Key facts and figures

55. InspiraFarms, Our team

56. The improvements in yields are similar in magnitude to the improvements seen in South Asia between 1980 and 2020, and in a similar timeframe. Indeed, South America achieved a much more rapid increase between 2000 and 2010, moving from roughly 7.8 tons per hectare to about 11.8 tons.

57. Chart 14 presents the reduction in extreme poverty in African countries across the low- and middle-income categories. The reduction in extreme poverty in Seychelles, Africa’s only high-income country, is negligible.

58. The contribution of agriculture as a proportion of the Seychelles’ economy, the continent’s only high-income island state, was about 4% in 2019.

59. Some of these constraints can be overcome through technology, such as the use of precision irrigation and application of precise amounts of fertiliser exactly where they are required. Then there is also the potential of vertical farming, which could produce 180 m tons of food globally, according to some analysts.


61. Food and Agriculture Organization, Government expenditure on agriculture, 2019


63. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Working Group II: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability, 2018


65. The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture does particularly impressive work in this regard. See: https://www.iita.org/
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Jakkie Cilliers is the founder and former executive director of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS). He currently serves as chair of the ISS Board of Trustees and head of the African Futures and Innovation (AFI) programme at the Pretoria office of the ISS. His 2017 best-seller Fate of the Nation addresses South Africa’s futures from political, economic and social perspectives. His two most recent books, *Africa First! Igniting a Growth Revolution* (March 2020) and *The Future of Africa: Challenges and Opportunities* (April 2021), take a rigorous look at the continent as a whole.

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