

A revolution in African agriculture is underway

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Agricultural development is the most effective strategy for boosting economic growth in Africa, concluded panellists at a plenary session of the World Economic Forum on Africa in Dar es Salaam.

Jakaya M. Kikwete, President of Tanzania, laid out a new vision for Africa ' s agriculture to provide food security, promote sustainable development and generate economic growth and opportunities.

" Africa ' s agriculture is plagued by low productivity and food insecurity," he said, adding, "Three-quarters of the population reside in rural areas, living from hand to mouth. We need to do things differently."

Mr Kikwete stressed the role of science and technology, a point shared by other panellists.

"Agricultural transformation is critical", agreed Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of Ethiopia. " The challenge is to overcome policy and institutional barriers that impede agricultural productivity. "

Mr Zenawi pointed to the urgent need for agricultural policies to reach the grassroots and for successful solutions to be scaled up.

To break the cycle of poverty and chronic under-investment, market solutions are required, according to Eleni Gabre-Madhin, Chief Executive Officer, Ethiopia Commodity Exchange, Ethiopia.

" For small-scale farmers, low returns lead to low levels of future investment. As such, crop yields remain at one-fifth of their potential. "

Kanayo Nwanze, President, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Rome, welcomed the focus on empowering small-scale farmers. " Policy measures must take a twin track – focusing on rural development as well as agriculture, recognizing that women produce most of the farming output, " he said. " Action is required on the ground – we must go beyond rhetoric, " Nwanze stressed. Inspiration was attached to the vision by the " Miracle of Malawi " .

Dyborn Charlie Chibonga, Chief Executive Officer, National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi, outlined how Malawi was able to unlock the potential of small farmers and go from a country which depended on food aid to a food exporter in five years. " The challenge is to scale this miracle across Africa, " he said.

Joergen Ole Haslestad, President and Chief Executive Officer, Yara International, Norway, and a Co-Chair of the meeting, outlined an alliance of global companies which have committed to support the government of Tanzania's Kilimo Kwanza ("Agriculture First") initiative. At the invitation of the government of Tanzania, the companies will join a working group comprised of global and local business, government, farmers, NGOs, donor agencies and other key stakeholders. The group will work to develop an investment blueprint for agriculture, with an initial focus on the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania. In addition, the group will investigate opportunities for public-private partnerships. Companies that have committed to join are Unilever, Yara, Syngenta, DuPont, Land 'O Lakes, Monsanto, SAB Miller and General Mills.

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World Economic Forum, 91-93 route de la Capite, CH-1223 Cologny/Geneva
Tel. +41 (0)22 869 1212, Fax +41 (0)22 786 2744, <http://www.weforum.org>