

reaching the poor *a call to action*

The most severe and intractable poverty in the world is in Africa south of the Sahara. Nearly half of all the people there live in absolute poverty – their income is less than a dollar a day.

On present trends, two of the most fundamental Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations – halving the number of people living in absolute poverty and halving the proportion of people suffering from hunger – will not be met by the target year of 2015.

Indeed, the World Bank forecasts that in Africa and the Middle East, the number of “absolute poor” will actually increase between now and 2015.

To avert this disaster, the focus of development in sub-Saharan Africa must be on rural areas, where three-quarters of poor people live. Tackling poverty means boosting smallholder production, which is the best – and perhaps only – way of kick-starting and supporting self-sustaining growth and employment across a range of agricultural and non-agricultural activities in rural areas.

The alternatives are unviable. Mineral extraction and tourism could be important, but only in particular areas. “Safety-net” welfare programmes for the poor would cost millions and fail to foster investment and enterprise. In recent years, much attention has been paid to liberalising markets and creating macro-economic stability in order to stimulate demand for agricultural products. Such policies are necessary but not sufficient. To enable smallholders to respond to new demand means removing the constraints that have caused smallholder agricultural growth in Africa to lag behind other continents and behind population growth.

Reversing the trend will not be easy, because small-scale farmers face a host of problems, including inefficient ministries of agriculture, inadequate access to services and markets, the impacts of HIV/AIDS, patchy roads and telecommunications, poor soil, adverse terms of trade in global markets, low produce prices and limited irrigation (4% of cropland in Africa is irrigated, compared with 40% in South Asia).

Investment in smallholder agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa

HOW CAN SMALLHOLDER AGRICULTURE GROW IN AFRICA?

An effective strategy needs to address constraints at national, local and household levels. Change is needed in a number of core areas.

- 1. Empowering the rural poor:** farmers' groups and other community-based organisations should be strengthened so they can voice their needs and take part in policy decision-making; public agencies need to be more decentralised and accountable.
- 2. Access to land and water resources:** both are required if farmers are to respond to new market opportunities and Africa's irrigation potential is grossly under-exploited. Even modest techniques, such as rainwater harvesting, can help. In some countries, inequalities in land distribution may have to be addressed and, where land is scarce, agricultural development efforts should target middling and better-off smallholder households – nearly all of whom are still poor by most criteria – and look for ways to assist the semi-landless through the rural non-farm economy or welfare safety nets.
- 3. Support services:** years of decline in agricultural extension services must be reversed; better delivery of support services – information, inputs, credit, market access – will require the coordination of government ministries, the private sector and non-governmental organisations.
- 4. Improved rural infrastructure:** this is critical for expanding market opportunities for producers, improving their linkages with traders and reducing the cost of inputs and service delivery. Roads, communications, water management and markets all need improvement.

Further change is also needed in:

- **Reform of Northern agricultural and trade policies:** industrialised countries must be pressed to reform protectionist policies and accept that special treatment – in trade negotiations, for example – must be given to agricultural development in developing countries. Smallholder producers need investment so they can respond to opportunities created by higher prices.
- **Assured and reasonable returns on agricultural innovation and investment:** there is a strong case for measures that stabilise and, in some cases, support domestic prices.

The agenda outlined needs to be coordinated by ministries of agriculture – but these are generally under-resourced, ineffective and unaccountable to farmers. Reform of ministries of agriculture and implementation of coherent rural development strategies are preconditions for large additional investments in the agricultural sector in most African countries. Strategies must involve all stakeholders, including the private sector: this would encourage investment and give donors the opportunity to invest in African agriculture without having to work through national ministries of agriculture or other government agencies.

“Agriculture is the backbone of the economy” is a mantra for many African governments, but agriculture usually gets only a small share of government expenditure and farmers often have little say in deciding how money is spent or services delivered.

Unless the problems analysed in the full version of this paper are addressed and its recommendations adopted, the prospects for Africa's poor will remain bleak.

CALL TO ACTION

We call on DFID, other donor governments and organisations, African governments, the United Nations and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) to take the following measures to foster the development of smallholder agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa.

UK DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL DONORS

- Increase the aid budget spent on agriculture.
- Ensure a balance of support between national governments on the one hand and civil society organisations such as community-based and farmers' organisations and NGOs on the other.
- Ensure that concern for international trade issues does not distract attention from local and regional markets.
- Explore new approaches to supporting rural livelihoods by funding experimental programmes for evidence-based policy and practice.
- Make the case for investment in the smallholder agricultural sector.
- Encourage innovative, farmer-led initiatives, empowering smallholder farmers and herders.
- Encourage other donors to re-engage in natural resource development with appropriate, coordinated and long-term commitment.

NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS IN AFRICA

- Increase public expenditure allocated to support for agriculture to reflect agriculture's economic importance and its profile in national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.
- Develop an effective agriculture strategy, which translates Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers' intentions into implementation procedures involving all stakeholders.
- Reform ministries of agriculture to improve performance incentives, accountability, resourcing and partnerships with other organisations.
- Expand frontline workers' capacities in community facilitation and empowerment.
- Support agricultural research capacity to work on the priority needs of smallholder farmers.
- Focus infrastructure development to improve rural markets and private sector development.
- Consider how to reduce smallholders' vulnerability to price fluctuations.

UN ORGANISATIONS

- The World Food Programme should operate with a development-orientated use of food aid.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization should focus more on the development of global best practice lesson-learning and information support.

NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT (NEPAD – a declaration by African leaders)

- Capture examples of good agricultural policy and practice and facilitate lesson-learning among member states.



Imperial College
London

This pamphlet is a summary of the findings of a research paper written by Dr Christie Peacock, FARM-Africa; Andrew Jowett, Harvest Help; Dr Andrew Dorward, Colin Poulton and Ian Urey, Imperial College London (Centre for Development and Poverty Reduction, Department of Agricultural Sciences).

It is available on the FARM-Africa website – www.farmafrica.org.uk – or in hard copy from FARM-Africa, 9-10, Southampton Place, London WC1A 2EA, UK.

T +44 (0) 20 7430 0440; F +44 (0) 20 7430 0460; E farmafrica@farmafrica.org.uk

© FARM-Africa, Harvest Help, Imperial College London

Published by FARM-Africa 2004

Editor: Daniel Nelson

Design: Eileen Higgins E eileenh@mac.com

Print: Waterside Press T +44 (0) 1707 275555