

ARENA AFRICANA 3



This land is your land....An African Rainbow Evolution and the future of small-holder farming

Date: Wednesday 7 December

Time: 8:00 PM – 10:30 PM

Location: De Balie, Kleine Gartmanplantsoen 10, Amsterdam

Introductory Note

Dr Han van Dijk

Africa is the only continent where per capita food production declined over the past decades despite the fact that a vast majority of the African population is involved in some way in agriculture.

More than 300 millions people live with less than one US \$ a day, the majority of which in rural areas; 30% of children are underweight. Nobody denies that Africa needs a revolution, but the questions around this topic are diverse: what kind of revolution are we talking about? Who has to take part? Where to invest? In technology, infrastructure or research? In high potential areas or in less favorable zones? Any transformation will certainly have deep impacts on the lives of smallholder farmers. Therefore, it is imperative that farmers themselves are involved in the decision-making process that will shape these reforms.

Speaker 1

Ms. Mercy Karanja (key-note)

Looking at the economic performance of the African agriculture sector in the last decades, we see that up to the '80, African economies were driven by the commodity market: they were doing well, producing successfully goods as coco, café and exporting them to Europe. The sudden collapse of the international market led to the fall down of the African economy.

In the '80 we saw two main changes in the political scenario: first of all, the greater than ever role of international globalization led to a diminishing weight of national policies and to an increasing power of international policies; secondly, the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) imposed by the International Monetary Found reduced the role played by the national government. Supporting liberalization and privatization, the SAPs removed subsidies and public help for the farmers.

If Kenya was able to feed its population in 1980, now it is no longer in the situation to avoid famine. The main challenges are the following:

1. Farmers need technology to carry out their activities: it is necessary to work with farmers in their local contest and introduce sustainable technology based on local knowledge;
2. A holistic approach has to be used: the issue here is not only agricultural development, but rural development. Tackling only agricultural problems is not enough: it's necessary to develop a strategy for the whole system, which allows people to make choices. Nowadays the only choice is between farming and

migration: diversification is needed for creating new jobs and activities. Not everybody can do farming, but people have to be given the possibility to choose something different. For these reasons, policies have to create the environment in which the economy can grow: infrastructure building, market creation, industrialization promotion.

3. The role played by the farmers themselves: Africa is not a recipient; people can take the development agenda on their hand and develop themselves. People empowerment is required in order to stop the perpetuation of depend relations with the developed countries. Furthermore, farmers have to be conscious that they are entrepreneurs and that they are able to work in a market economy. Africans cannot claim that they are innocent, but now it's necessary for African people to be the owners of their own development and technology.

Africa knows how to feed its population: it did it in the past and it can do it again.

Speaker 2

Mr. Mamadou Cissoko (key note)

There are two ways of productions which characterize the African economy: the industrial agriculture, which is the export oriented production for the European market (goods such as café, cacao, bananas...) and the production for the local market. This second type of activity is usually referred to as "*Exploitation familiale*", a concept which includes the whole family and different kind of activities in the production system. The "*Exploitation familiale*" is not only farming, but also fishery, forestry and breeding. It refers to a broader concept, in which activities are not only economic, but embedded in social and cultural structures.

The majority of people in Senegal and in the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) are farmers: the 15 states members of the Community have a population of more than 250 millions people, of which 145 million are farmers. Despite the fact that the 65% of the population are farmers and that the national wealth bases on the agricultural sector, these countries do not have an agricultural politic and do not allocate enough resources of their budget to this sector.

This lack of public commitment has led to:

- a massive flight of the peasants from the countryside to the urban areas or abroad
- a spread of hunger (40% of the peasants do not reach the food security)
- decreasing investments
- decreasing productivity
- impoverishment of the soils.

We find ourselves in a paradoxical situation: we have the land, we have the knowledge about how to cultivate but we don't have enough food for our people. Before the arrival of the European in our economies, we were able to produce enough for our population, but the European set up the conditions for our dependency and crisis.

We can produce rice, but we cannot sell it on our market, because it is more expensive than the one produced by the Asian farmers who are subsidized by their governments, while we are not. On the other side, our habits have changed: our markets are liberalized and have to be free, our imports have increased and so did our poverty.

What do the peasants demand?

1. After the world war in Europe a reconstruction plan has been implemented, aimed at the development of the countries: agricultural politics, industrialization, and

protection of the market and of the infant industries. Why can these policies not be implemented also in Africa?

2. European producers have to change their way of production: subsidies and quotas have to be taken off;
3. The only sustainable future for Africa and for Europe is a rich African continent which bases its development on agriculture and which goes beyond it, promoting an industrial expansion.
4. It is essential to give Africa the chance to develop itself.

Speaker 3

Rudy Rabbinge (Referent)

Africa is a land deviating from anywhere in the world: in the last 20 years the per capita food availability has increased by 20% all over the world, while in Africa it has decreased. Why is this continent so different from the others? What has to be done in order to improve the living conditions of African population? To answer these questions, United Nation General Kofi Annan requested that the InterAcademy Council engage leading scientific, economic, and technological experts from around the world. The result is a new IAC report "Realizing the promise and potential of African agriculture". This report was presented last year, discussed with African leaders and adopted within the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

There are many reasons which could explain parts of the particular African situation:

- lack of a dominant farming system on which food security largely depends;
- predominance of rainfed agriculture as opposed to irrigate agriculture;
- heterogeneity and diversity of farming systems;
- under-investment in agricultural research and development and infrastructure;
- lack of functioning local and regional markets;
- lack of technologies: minimal mechanization, fertilizers.

Since there is no single reason, there is no single solution. A multidimensional action is required: creation of the market, introduction of appropriate technology, increase in investments, diversification of production, empowerment of peasants, access to assets.

As far as financing these interventions is concerned, the UN could contribute, but African countries have to prioritize agriculture in their national policies. They are the first who have to increase investment in this sector. The African leaders agreed on this point.

Speaker 4

Michael Mortimore (Referent)

Looking at the report just presented, it seems that the conclusions we have to draw are negative: should we conclude that the family system has failed? Or that it is a structure of the past? I do not agree.

There are several points that I would like to stress:

1. Diversity: the real challenge is agriculture diversity. A rainbow revolution is necessary in such a complex system;
2. Flexibility: family farming has shown over time much more capability to adapt and to change according to external factors. This is not possible for commercial agriculture;

3. small scale farming can be and is efficient;
4. smallholder farmers do invest: deforestation can be seen either as spoilage of the environment or, as I think, as an investment which leads to a different use of the land.

A crucial point is the need of adaptive strategies which manage to keep pace with climatic changes and the family farming system has shown that it can do it.

Speaker 5

André de Jager (Referent)

Despite the limited commitment of African and European governments in agricultural sector, I have positive expectations for the future because of the nature of the African market. If there is profitability, private investments can flow to the agricultural sector where profits can be made. The dynamic is already present and peasants have already shown that they know how to work and how to change their production, shifting to horticulture.

Chairman Dr. Han van Dijk

Summing up what discussed until now, I would like to highlight some points introduced by the speakers:

1. The importance of a holistic approach which gives much more attention to the people;
2. The lack of national policies, which leads to a discrimination of African farmers on the international market;
3. The lack of one single solution available. On the contrary, the need of interventions at different levels;
4. the diversity, flexibility and efficiency demonstrated by the African farmers: there are many potentialities in this sector which can be used;
5. if there is a functioning market, potentialities are high and private sector is dynamic.

Interventions:

Audience: Bringing money to Africa is a bad way to understand development: as Mamadou Cissoko said, the peasants need to be empowered and not just be given financial resources to start a development process.

Political institutions have to respond to the need of the population, more than looking for resources from outside. African politicians and population should push from inside and promote rural area.

Audience: African leader should respond to their citizens for their policies, but they are listening more to urban population than to rural population, because the former has much more political weight. It is thus necessary to improve and support the peasant organizations in order to enable them to influence political decisions.

At international level, institution as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) should require the involvement of peasants from the governments it is dealing with.

Audience: Referring to what was just mentioned, are the African governments really listening to their people? Going back in the past decades, we see that in the '60s-'70s the government support was strong in many countries, then in the '80s IMF and WB imposed their policies of budget cut, privatization and liberalization. African governments were paying attention in the past but they have been punished.

Rudy Rabbige: we cannot say that everything done in the past was well done. Now it's necessary to stimulate people organizations at local level and also increase the contribution of the State.

Mamadou Cissoko: I would like to stress two points:

- a) We have been told that the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) represents our point of view, but I do not see any differences between this New and the Old partnership. That's again a negotiation between heads of state, without involving the peasants.
- b) There is no alternative for Africa: the agricultural sector is the drive for the African economy. We have the land, we have the people, who are ready and willing to work, but they need to earn profits from their work. We know the problem, we know the solution: the only thing to do is increase investment to develop the agriculture.

Chairman: two observations: which sectors should we invest in? Which are the more profitable? And how can agriculture be developed unless women empowerment?

Audience: What farmers do depends upon what they know, what they want to do socially, what they can do (i.e. the tools they have). I think research can help because there is a lot that farmers can learn which could improve their way of producing. Farmers normally carry on many different activities: why are we then looking for the single solution?

Ms. Mercy Karanja: farmers live in a complex system, but development people want to specialize in one area. We can find different production systems within the same field because farmers are aware of the contrasts. It is a very complicated system to deal with which requires different strategies to be implemented in different zones and at different levels.

André de Jager: Researchers are much more aware of complexity than we think, but a decentralization of research and holistic approach seem to be required.

Michael Mortimore: family farming is very different from the commercial farming, because decisions are imbedded in social, cultural and everyday life. Scientific research cannot prescribe solutions.

Audience: Maybe research cannot give solution, but knowledge?

Chairman: is knowledge different from the past?

Rudy Rabbige: Africa's situation is different; we cannot search one single solution.

Mamadou Cissoko: in Africa the real problem is political: priority is not investments in agricultural sector, but the management of urban areas. For example, in Senegal, we have one big urban center (Dakar) for which the government has allocated 63 million Francs CFA for infrastructures. The rural communities are twenty, but no investments are set up for the rural areas.

Audience: Since the problem is political, you have to go to politicians and ask them the reasons for so limited investments in agriculture if the majority of people are peasants.

Audience: I come from Kenya and I would like to share my view: I think politicians have different interests. It is difficult for them to make policies in favor to small farmers if they are businessmen themselves.

Ms. Mercy Karanja: the solution is not in politicians' hand, but in the system. Farmers have to be brought in the system and put on its top. A development process is needed which makes them aware of their rights.

Mamadou Cissoko: the main question is why do we have this problem? Bad governance is caused by the fact that we have a democracy which is not African, but brought by the Europeans.

We cannot solve all problems with technology, because each progress without increasing profits doesn't work.

Audience: Since the problem is political, producers' organizations have to become stronger. I believe, it is thus necessary to give hope to the people. If people see possible real improvements they will stand for their rights. If they are not eager for their future, they will not act.

Chairman: what about youth? Do they have any perspectives for the future?

Mamadou Cissoko: although there are many things which I do not like of American people, I recognize that the American government respects and is aware of American farmers. They are the minority and they are recognized, we are the majority and we do not play any significant role.

Ms. Mercy Karanja: in the last three years we have experienced in Kenya a considerable empowerment of the entire civil society which has demonstrated to be dynamic. The only long term solution is that people are aware of their right.

André de Jager: empowerment is not enough: farmers face huge transaction cost, they will never be competitive if the whole sector will not be organized.

Audience: before '80, government did support farmers and agricultural sector.

Chairman: can we see any change in thinking at international level?

Rudy Rabbige: according to Michael Mortimore, the IAC reports leads to negative conclusions. I do not agree because I see some sign of hope:

- people and women in particular are more and more involved in the development process;
- some governments showed their commitment in supporting agriculture and in working with peasants' organizations;
- international organizations are aware that what they did in the past was not correct;
- in the developed countries, people are more conscious of the role they have to play.

Audience: innovative middle sized farmers are willing to improve their way of production. The big problem relates to the small farmers who still do not have access to the market.

Audience: scientific research has a role to play; it does not have to bring solutions but can contribute to the process. For instance, how important are wet lands?

Ms. Mercy Karanja wet land is very important

Mamadou Cissoko: of course wet land is important also in Senegal, but there are no resources available for the research. It is too expensive.

Michael Mortimore I would like to introduce a new point. What about international geopolitical relations? And about countries which do not have financial resources because of the debt they have to pay back? Are we talking about a Demand or Supply constraint? Which is the U.N. point of view?

Rudy Rabbige: the U.N.O. is aware of the geopolitical interactions.

Mamadou Cissoko: I think there are three main levels:

1. Local level: farmers need to have capacities to organize themselves and to press the governments;
2. international cooperation: both bilateral and multilateral
3. world solidarity.

All three levels are important, but the basis of all activities is the first one because peasants have to propose their conditions and governments have to respect and recognize their people.

Chairman: many different subjects have passed the table, it is impossible to summarize, but I would highlights some point:

- The common agreement on the necessity to tackle agricultural sector problems in Africa;
- The geopolitical element in the analysis of the situation and of the possible interventions;
- Which role for the scientific community;
- Empowerment of people, in particular of women (too little discussed tonight);
- Physical security.

Participants

Ms. Mercy Karanja, (Key note)

Development policy coordinator for the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) and former director of the Kenya National Farmers Union.

Mr. Mamadou Cissoko, (Key note)

Honorary President of the *Conseil National de Concertation et Coopération des Ruraux* (CNCR), based in Senegal.

Michael Mortimore, (Referent)

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