

## **Agriculture in Africa**

The untapped potential in Africa is huge. In spite of declining growth rates and recent credit downgrades in many African countries, a growing labor force and vast expanses of arable land, point to significant opportunities. However, many challenges also need to be addressed in order to tap into the possibilities - from low levels of health and education to climate change, limited funding and lack of access to key resources.

According to Foresight Africa's 2016 report, at 200 million hectares, sub-Saharan Africa is home to nearly half of the world's uncultivated land that can be brought into production. And yet Africa struggles with undernourished populations and the region is increasingly dependent on food imports.

We know that farming is massively important in Africa: it is the primary source of food and income for Africans; it provides up to 60 percent of all jobs on the continent; and about a third of the gross domestic product comes from agriculture. Yet, the Foresight Africa report is clear: without a 60 percent increase in food production in sub-Saharan Africa over the next 15 years, there will not be enough food to feed the growing population.

If Africa could produce more food, it would help to reduce poverty, enhance food security and provide economic growth opportunities. But agricultural productivity in Africa still has a long way to go. Most farming depends on rainfall, rather than irrigation; the use of technology and machinery is limited; and funding for fertilizers, pesticides and high-quality seeds is hard to come by.

There can be no doubt that revitalizing the agriculture sector and raising productivity is vital for Africa's economic future. On the face of it, the growth that's needed shouldn't be hard to achieve - Africa has the land, water and people needed to be an efficient agricultural producer.

So how do we help to increase food production? We know that increasing the levels and quality of education generally is essential to raising productivity – and agriculture is no different. For starters, improving the understanding and use of soil and techniques such as irrigation; growing the use of technology; and improving seed selection will lead to improved crop yields. In time, feeding more people and animals will improve productivity levels, reduce food insecurity and assist with economic growth.

Of concern, however, is the fact that young people are moving away from rural and into urban areas, in the search for jobs and opportunities. At the same time, the quality and availability of agricultural education has declined, leading to fewer students enrolling in agricultural courses. Add to this the mass student protests against the high costs of education across the world and the result is a chronic shortage of trained human resources in the field of agriculture.

Growing skills in agriculture through improved education and training will increase agricultural productivity; improve production and marketing processes, and help to unlock the sector's enormous potential.

One of the areas that offers particularly exciting opportunities is Africa's mobile phone revolution and the growing access to the internet. E-learning, cloud-based, learning is a relatively new concept in Africa and a new business in this field, AGRICOLLEGES international, plans to take it to the next level. The business is building a cloud-based e-learning platform that will provide students with access to the Agri-Sciences through its blended and shared learning approach that involves combining e-learning and digital media with practical training.

A modern Learning Management System will be used as the basis for the online learning tool and access to the course-work will be through mobile and other devices with connectivity to the internet. This will give learners the benefit of having access to all the course information they need, while studying at a time and place that suits them and having the opportunity to earn an income while they learn, if they choose.

Centres of Excellence and other destinations for face-to-face practical learning with a lecturer will allow students to learn how to apply the theory they have studied.

The learning model requires significantly lower infrastructure and maintenance costs in comparison to traditional universities. Students will also not have to account for the costs of accommodation close to a physical campus, or travel to lectures each day. Ultimately these things will create a more affordable solution for students while offering them greater access to modern agricultural skills and learning opportunities.

Courses will not only focus on comprehensive diplomas, but also on building skills through production short-courses, aimed at all professions along the agricultural value chain. Learners will be trained to become, amongst others, section managers, assistant farm managers, farm managers, field officers, sales and marketing assistants and managers, for the many agri-related businesses within the economy. Certain agri-related trades will also be made available to learners.

By transferring modern technologies and skills to the younger generations, it is possible to help develop the agricultural sector, enabling best practices to be adopted by future generations and improving productivity, food security and poverty along the way.

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