

## PolicyPennings by Daryll E. Ray &amp; Harwood D. Schaffer

## IFAD president spells out what is needed to get African agriculture back on track

“Africa can feed Africa. Africa should feed Africa. And I believe that Africa will feed Africa.” With these words, IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) President Dr. Kanayo Nwanze opened his keynote address to the triennial Forum for Research in Africa (FARA) General Assembly on July 18, 2013.

These words will undoubtedly surprise many farmers—and policymakers—in major agricultural exporting nations who have repeatedly been told that they and their use of GMOs are essential to feeding a world population of 9 billion people in 2050, many of whom will be born in Africa. Interestingly, he didn’t mention GMOs..

What he did do was remind his audience that “in the sixties and seventies, many African countries were net exporters of major food and cash crops, not importers as they are today.” During that period, African nations directed some 20 percent of their national budgets to agriculture and some of their universities were home to top-notch research stations.

“These were the years when India was described as a hopeless case; when people in China died of famine; Brazil was dependent on food aid and massive food imports and South Korea received assistance from some African countries,” he said.

He laid the blame for the decline of African agriculture on under-investment in agriculture as a result of structural adjustment programs forced on many of the continent’s nations by the World Bank. The result was a loss of good people as the quality of agricultural research and education declined. He also noted that public investment in agriculture also declined elsewhere in the world—a fact that is not lost on researchers at Land Grant Universities in the US.

Nwanze told his audience that he saw signs that the investment in agricultural research in Africa was turning around. “But,” he declared, “it will only translate into stronger nations and better lives for the people of Africa if it is supported by coherent investment in agriculture for development.”

At the same time, he identified the challenges facing African agriculture today: “climate change, higher temperatures, prolonged droughts, extensive flooding.... [and] conflict.”

Taking a wider view of the challenges and opportunities, Nwanze said, “if we set our sights only on improving productivity, there is a very real danger that we will grow more food in Africa without feeding more people.” To counter that possibility he declared the

necessity of linking research not only to agricultural development but to social and economic development as well.

In this vein, he argued, “we must reposition research and development so that it is research for development. This means measuring our results NOT by higher yields alone but by reduced poverty, improved nutrition, cohesive societies and healthy ecosystems. In short, it must be inclusive.”

“For agriculture to yield the greatest returns for Africa, development efforts must focus on the small-holder farming sector. Small farms account for 80 percent of all farms in sub-Saharan Africa. In some countries, they contribute up to 90 percent of production. They have the potential to be key suppliers to Africa’s burgeoning urban markets, as well as supplying rural markets,” he told his audience. “And growth in agriculture equates to a reduction in poverty. It has been estimated that for sub-Saharan Africa, growth generated by agriculture is eleven times more effective in reducing poverty than GDP growth in other sectors.”

Among the opportunities are the potential for increased irrigation, small increases in fertilizer use, and 2 billion acres of “of uncultivated land with rain-fed crop potential in sub-Saharan Africa.” He urged nations not to blindly sell off this land.

“Simply providing smallholders with fertilizers, improved seed and access to irrigation is half of the equation. The other half of the equation for food and nutrition security includes the right policies, investment in rural infrastructure and access to land and local, national regional markets.”

He pointed out that agricultural development must involve women who are “too often...the most disadvantaged members of rural societies.

“To farm successfully, women need agricultural resources and inputs, as well as access to rural finance, education, and knowledge. They also need rights to the land they farm and a voice in the decisions that affect their lives.”

After discussing the importance of paying attention to nutrition as an element of agricultural development, Nwanze said, “and in the years ahead, more research will need to be directed towards agricultural growth that is ecologically sustainable and that provides a diverse range of options, genetic variation and ecosystems so that the land can provide for future generations of farmers.”

He concluded his remarks saying, “Agriculture

**Cont. on p. 2**

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**Cont. from p. 1**

holds the key to Africa's development, and development holds the key to a future where Africa is not only feeding itself, but feeding the world."

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