

Agriculture and education - the combination that could have the greatest impact ever

 By [Wynand Espach](#)

9 Jan 2023

Let us take a step back to 2019 and look at two sectors, agriculture and education. Two particularly important role-players in any economy, but two sectors which only occasionally reached the same agenda, and that were both fighting their separate battles to come out top and keep up with a changing world.



Wynand Espach, Chief Operating Officer, Agricolleges

Agriculture showed slow but steady growth, driven by certain commodities, but it was not the most glamorous career choice, especially for the youth. The knowledge base was ageing, and we needed a revival of agriculture to make it “cool” again.

Education on the other hand was facing little renewal and educational systems had become a major concern, from primary to tertiary education. The systems were taking hits from all angles. Something had to give.

Then came the pandemic.

A terrible time for everyone that had to witness its path of destruction and a very confusing time for all involved. But, it was as if every aspect of our daily lives got a hard reset, and every individual had to review and adjust their situation to the new way of doing things.

Agriculture – shoved into the spotlight

Overnight the agricultural sector stepped up and carried the economy, employed the people, fed the people, and kept everyone safe and healthy. Not bad for a former outcast. The growth of the sector was unparalleled by any other industry or sector.

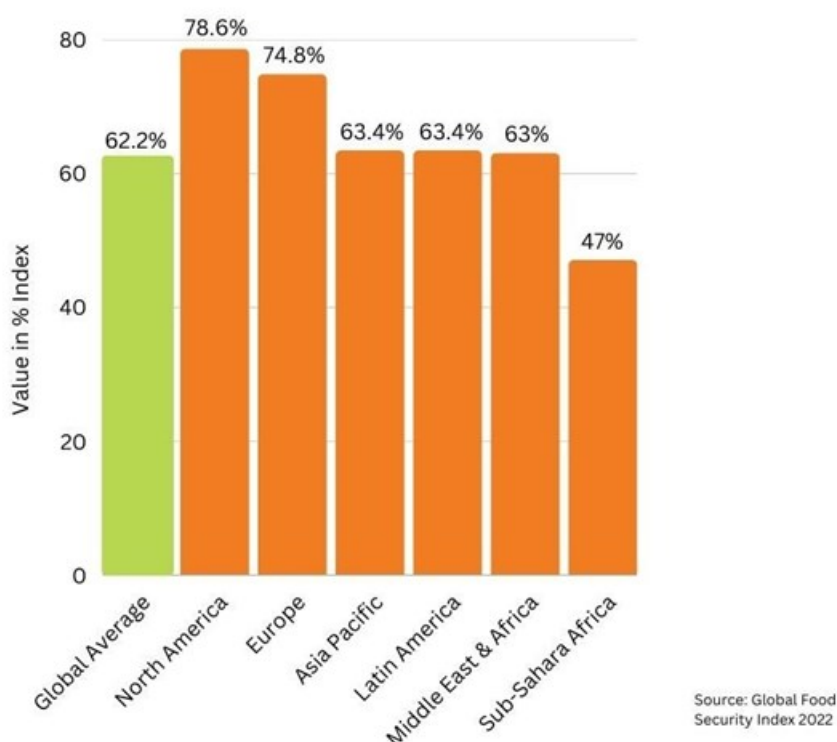
Education – caught completely off guard

Education took a ridiculously hard knock on the chin with the forced closure of schools, colleges, and universities. Every person in the educational space was scrambling to find alternative ways to teach and educate.

Now with all that has happened and all that we have learnt from the last three years, what are the trends for 2023 and beyond looking like? Let us start by looking at statistics that can colour the current picture for us.

The global average on the Global Food Security Index Score is at 62.2%. The sub-Saharan score is at 47%. It is in fact the only score below the average with all other regions over 63%. This indicates the unbelievable need for food production in Africa.

Overall Global Food Security Index Score by Region - 2022



Source: Supplied | Global Food Security Index 2022

The GDP per capita in Africa is sitting at \$1954. The lowest in the world. To overcome this the economy must grow faster

than the population. And to achieve this, we have seen the value of agriculture in contributing to an economy and coupled with quality education, we could have a winning formula.

The trends that would really have influence and achieve the win mentioned above, are:

- Inclusive growth
- Sustainable development
- Good governance
- Collaboration
- Public-private partnerships

But only time and dedication from all parties involved will assist in setting up the path that will lead to these major trends.

Micro trends

Online learning which came to the fore during 2020/21, will continue to solve problems such as accessibility and will remain a viable option for organisations, schools, and institutions. What will however start filtering through, is the demand for quality online education. Too many organisations took the approach of putting paper behind glass and selling it as online learning. This combined with zero facilitation on online platforms is not what education should be.

Agriculture will continue its growth into 2023 and after a tough 2022 for various commodities, the key will be to create access to new markets in countries where there is a demand, but no distribution into those countries yet. This access is a lengthy process that is set up through government-to-government agreements, which should be a strong focus for industry bodies and government departments.

Local market development should also take a strong focus. This will assist small-scale farmers in accessing markets and achieving better prices while reaching a wider customer base.

Macro trends

Working from home has become a norm rather than a trend. This will continue as more organisations realise what the benefits are. Working from home and not spending two hours a day commuting has made employees more productive and given them more time. More time has sparked a need for further learning.

The trend of lifelong learning is setting in. Recent experience on our agricultural education platform has proven this to be a growth point. Out of an intake of 46 students in a 2022 general farming certificate, 15% of the students had previously completed a degree and were doing an agricultural national certificate as an add-on to their career path.

Communal farming has found success in recent years. Although this is a small step, it has shown the areas of potential collaboration and potential failure. This will be a long-term trend that will strengthen communities and create powerhouse small-scale farmers in rural areas. This is a trend that will continue and grow, but it will need collaboration with industry, educational institutions, corporates, distribution partners, and other community role-players.

Mega trends

Healthy living has stepped out of the shadows, and one way to do this is by growing your own food. The growing of fresh vegetables, herbs and even fish in aquaponics units, on a small scale in communities and even in urban gardens, has proven successful. This trend will start getting more popular as success stories filter through.

Pooling resources is another factor that will become popular. Through the concept of food gardens in communities or even agricultural hubs in central areas, this could become an impactful business creation model. Growing food for the community, creating market access, buying equipment together, employing service providers, and seeking bulk discounts

for purchases, are all just examples of how this could be beneficial to everyone involved.

Education will start shifting to short courses rather than one-year to three-year courses. The affordability, as well as time flexibility of short courses, make it a more natural way of learning. Government and educational institutions will need to find a way to make this possible by speeding up the delayed accreditation processes of courses.



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To keep courses relevant, modern, and up-to-date, courses must undergo a review process regularly. If these courses must go through the current accreditation process, they will never keep up with the changing technology or industry trends. This might lead to industry endorsement rather than accreditation, as it is the industry that will end up employing the people that complete these courses.

Education and agriculture thus taking hands, could create an enormous impact in Africa and secure our beautiful continent.

With all these exciting trends in agriculture and education in our future, one thing remains critical. If we allow education (more specifically agricultural education) to revert to what it was before Covid-19, we have missed an opportunity and failed future generations.

ABOUT WYNAND ESPACH

Wynand Espach is Chief Operating Officer at Agricolleges International.

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