

Revolution in African agriculture gathering momentum

By [Busani Bafana](#)

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ACCRA: As one major meeting on agriculture ends, another begins: farming is truly back on Africa's agenda.

"Africa's agricultural sector has the potential not only to feed its own people but to become the breadbasket of the world," Dr Lindiwe Majele Sibanda said in Windhoek.

"Africa also has 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land, and the potential exists for African yields to grow in value by more than three-fold by the year 2030, from US\$280 billion today to US\$880 billion."

Sibanda is the CEO of the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network, which held its Annual High-Level Policy Dialogue in the Namibian capital from 30 August to 3 September 2010.

More than 200 policy-makers, researchers, development partners and farmers met to discuss improving infrastructure and market access, ensuring food security, and protecting farmers from the effects of climate change.

In Accra, 3,500 kilometres north-by-northwest, the fourth African Green Revolution Forum kicked off with similar optimism. Here, more than 800 people are participating in a three-day meeting in the Ghanaian capital to agree on a strategy for investment in African agriculture to enhance food security and drive economic growth.

Encouraging signs

Several positive developments suggest Africa is on the road to greater food security and economic growth.

Malawi transformed itself from a recipient of food aid in 2005 to a net exporter of maize in each of the past four years. Rwanda increased its food production by 15% in 2007 and 16% in 2008.

In Tanzania, a government programme supporting farmers with vouchers to purchase seeds and fertilisers enabled 700,000 smallholder farmers to produce five million tonnes of maize.

A September 2010 report by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation says Ghana is on track to becoming the first country in Africa to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty and hunger. The country reduced hunger levels by 75% between 1990 and 2004 and its agricultural output has grown at an average of five percent a year for over 10 years.

Since its founding in 2006, researchers supported by AGRA have developed more than 130 new crop varieties that have

been released to farmers.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) estimates that Africa will need US\$32-US\$39 billion of investment annually to realise the full economic potential of its farm sector.

AGRA chair, Kofi Annan, who was awarded the Borlaug Medallion from the World Food Prize for his global leadership and commitment to food security, said Africa needed this massive investment in agriculture because of a lower density of critical infrastructure than Asia had at the inception of its Green Revolution in the 1960s.

Sustaining success

In Africa, 19 countries have put in place plans to accelerate their annual agricultural growth by six percent a year, a goal agreed to under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

"African agriculture must take a quantum leap forward", said Annan, calling for partnerships across all sectors.

Challenges to African agricultural growth include poor soils and seeds, lack of finance and markets, and weak policy support. These have been compounded by climate change and threats to biodiversity and natural resources, which has compromised soil health and water availability.

Jørgen Ole Haslestad, chief executive of YARA - a Norway-based chemical company and one of the Forum partners - was optimistic that the forum will cement the alliance of public-private partnerships and strengthen the drive to sustainable farming in Africa.

New Partnership for Africa's Development Planning and Coordinating Agency (NPCA) chief executive officer, Ibrahim Mayaki, urged the forum come up with concrete actions on how to fast-track agriculture transformation on continent.

IPS correspondents in Windhoek contributed to this report.

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