

Legacy of trailblazing

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29 Jun 2017

“Over the years we realise that there is a huge shift in thinking regarding agriculture in Africa. Increasingly, African agriculture is viewed no longer as just as a development project needing aid, but much more hopefully as a business worthy of investment,” says Mamadou Biteye, Managing Director (Africa) at Rockefeller Foundation. “As a sector, its growth is central to increasing prosperity, food security, industrialisation, intra-African trade and to bolstering Africa's contribution to global trade.”



Image Source: [African Agri Council](#)

Governments, donors, and private organisations all recognise the importance and potential of agriculture in building sustainable, inclusive economies. With continued investment, smallholder farmers can improve their livelihoods and experience the direct effects of this growth. Such investments stand to have the most profound impact if directed towards technology.

The power of technology in farmers' hands

Technology is not just about information communications technology (ICT) or mobile access, but frankly, any tool that makes work or life easier, and makes us better informed - after all, even the wheel was a game changer in its day. Mobile technology on the continent is already having a positive impact on smallholder's livelihoods: cell phones allow them to carry out business without mediators, open bank accounts only they can access, receive market and trade information, and access agriculture extension services and training that governments may no longer provide.

“Smallholder farmers are the backbone of the sector. When they have what they need to make their hard work pay off, we are all better off, because we will be able to feed the continent sustainably for posterity. The power of technology in farmers' hands will yield countless dividends. It is up to us to ensure farmers know about them and can afford to use them,” says Biteye.

The Rockefeller Foundation has one mission

The Rockefeller Foundation has one mission – promoting the well-being of humanity throughout the world. Today, this mission is pursued via its dual goals of building greater resilience and advancing more inclusive economies.

“We work to create global interventions (initiatives/programmes) under four issue areas: Advance Health, Secure Livelihoods, Re-value Ecosystems, and Transform Cities. Through our portfolio of initiatives, we strive to catalyse and scale transformative innovations, convene sector-spanning partnerships, and create systemic change to improve the lives of poor and vulnerable people around the world.”

The Rockefeller Foundation was established by the sixth-generation of The Rockefeller family and has a legacy of trailblazing new fields, convening unlikely partners and sparking new innovations that lead to transformative change. Biteye says the Foundation assisted in founding the modern field of public health, supporting the discovery and development of vaccines that helped eradicate diseases such as yellow fever and malaria, funding urban visionary Jane Jacobs and catalysing the Green Revolution and churned an entire generation of African PhDs via its ‘Backing Brains’ initiative.

“These are just a few of our greatest achievements of the 20th century. We have also invested more than a half-billion dollars in helping communities of all kinds generate dividends from investing in economic, climate, and social resilience. The Foundation has given more than \$17bn to support thousands of organisations and individuals worldwide.”

Over the last century, the Foundation’s approach has evolved, first focusing on efforts to increase the wealth of farmers then on improving the nutritional content of food and increasing the yield of staple crops, followed by catalysing a uniquely African Green Revolution.

“We have rolled out various initiatives in diverse focus areas in order to bring positive transformation to humanity and are meant to be catalytic demonstrations of solutions that can be scaled across the continent and beyond. **In Africa our initiatives include:**

YieldWise

This is a \$130m initiative aimed at reducing food loss and waste by half by 2030 across three value chains: cassava and tomato (in Nigeria) mango (in Kenya) and maize (in Tanzania).

AGRA

The Rockefeller Foundation’s success in helping to spark the Green Revolution in Latin America and Asia, as well as our longstanding history with African agriculture, provides crucial experience to equip African farmers with new tools and solutions.

The Rockefeller Foundation has a long history of supporting agricultural innovation and enhancing food security and farmer income. In 2006, The Rockefeller Foundation – in partnership with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – founded the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) to catalyse and sustain an inclusive agricultural transformation across the continent.

Digital Jobs Africa:

Africa has the youngest population in the world today, with the number of people between ages 15-24 expected to double to 400 million by 2045. Sadly the current pace of job creation is insufficient to meet the demands of this growing and better-educated youth population. With the ICT boom in Africa, the Rockefeller Foundation launched Digital Jobs Africa (DJA) in 2013 whose aim is to improve one million lives through connecting high potential but disadvantaged youth to jobs in Africa's ICT sector, by working with partners in both skills development and job placement.

100 Resilient Cities:

100 Resilient Cities (100RC) is dedicated to helping cities around the world become more resilient to the multisectoral disruptions that are a growing part of the 21st century. By addressing both the shocks and the stresses, a city becomes more able to respond to adverse events, and is overall better able to deliver basic functions in both good times and bad, to all populations. The Rockefeller Foundation launched 100 Resilient Cities Centennial Challenge (100RC) in 2013, a \$164m commitment aimed at enabling 100 cities globally to better address major 21st century challenges.

The challenge recently announced the final list of 100 cities, 10 of which are in Africa.

African Risk Capacity (ARC)

The African Risk Capacity (ARC) is a pan-African extreme weather insurance scheme designed to help AU member states withstand and recover from the ravages of natural disasters e.g. drought, intense heat or heavy rainfall – that are hindering their economic growth and adversely affecting their populations, especially the poor and vulnerable. ARC uses an advanced satellite weather surveillance software called African Risk View, which was developed by the World Food Program with the Foundation's support. It translates satellite-based rainfall data into near real-time estimates of the number of people affected and the cost of responding to any likely outcome. How it works is that member countries pay a premium based on its needs and plans, which enables them to get a payout in the event of a disaster.

R4

ARC is part of a broader effort to integrate climate change resilience within African agriculture resilience-building efforts. Another example of this is the R4 Rural Resilience Initiative, in collaboration with the World Food Programme and Oxfam, now entering its fifth year of operation in Ethiopia and Senegal. R4 aims at helping the rural poor to protect their crops and livelihoods from the impacts of climate change, consequently strengthening their food and income security.

While the international community remains, by and large, crisis-driven and responsive, with a resilience framework we can prepare for, and respond more quickly to shocks and stresses. We can be visionary and proactive, and in this case, mitigate the impact of great losses. Indeed a resilience framework can be a bridge that integrates humanitarian and development responses, and thereby close the gap between these two modes of assistance.

“We usually have scan and search processes where we look at emerging issues and trends in development globally, and what humanity's most pressing needs are. We then make a decision on where to invest our capital, where we can have the biggest impact for change and with what kind of innovative partnerships, and where we can also be most influential. YieldWise was the result of such a process, and it is now in its second year, we will continue to reap the lessons and gains from the rest of the initiative lifetime which goes until 2022, and then we will decide what is next,” Biteye concludes.