

# Measuring Africa's agricultural takeoff is set to make billionaires from 'poor men's fields'

By [Boaz Blackie Keizire](#)

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Asked where the next crop of African billionaires will come from, the president of the African Development Bank, Dr Akinwumi Adesina, without batting an eyelid, declared that they will be farmers. And he is not the only person in his class endorsing agriculture as the next frontier. Technology success Strive Masiyiwa, a Zimbabwean businessman and entrepreneur, has indicated more than once that if he was to start over, he would go into farming.



Eric Isselee via [123RF](#)

Africa's richest man, Aliko Dangote, too, is now venturing into farming, just recently investing \$4.6bn in Nigerian agriculture. Dangote plans to invest \$3.8bn in sugar and rice and \$800m in milk production in the next three years. Already greatly involved in agriculture, Dangote, through his Dangote Group conglomerate, is out to increase sugar output by 50 percent (from 100,000 tonnes), rice yield by one million tons, and start producing 500 million litres of milk a year by 2020.

Masiyiwa and Dangote are successful businessmen in their own right, and being billionaires, they must know something that the average African doesn't.



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## Delivering agricultural transformation

Yet, for years, and even with front-seat access to data and consultant-advice from real billionaires, the majority of African governments have done little to reposition their economies as agricultural powerhouses. But things may now be set to change.

In 2014, African heads of state met in Equatorial Guinea and vowed to work together to open up the potential of the region's agricultural industry. This agreement was put into a document, now popularly known as the Malabo Declaration, which stipulated the specific commitments with clear indicators for tracking and measuring agricultural practice that needed attention.

Further, the Malabo Declaration agreed that a new monitoring system would be set up to ensure that the heads of state, and their respective authorities, maintained accountability to peers, and to their citizenry in delivering this agricultural transformation.

## **The agriculture scorecard**

For this purpose, the heads of state agreed to review their achievements every two years, known as the biennial review. The first such review is now underway, with a final report set for presentation at the next African Heads of State Summit. In the same way, the heads of state agreed that there was an urgent need to create a scorecard that would show countries how they are faring on the different goals of the Malabo Declaration.

The scorecard, the first ever pan-African cooperation of its kind, is now under development and will be ready for the January 2018 African Union Summit of heads of state. Once presented, it will provide a new and powerful tool for all stakeholders in identifying the specific areas of agricultural transformation that need attention.

A complementary tool for the biennial review process, the scorecard is powered by data submitted by respective countries on their performance in the 43 agriculture growth indicators agreed on in Malabo. The beauty of the new agriculture scorecard is that it is least concerned with how countries perform against each other and provide an opportunity for sharing lessons. The hope is that countries that are struggling to reposition their agricultural sectors for takeoff will use it to reach out to those who are proving successful for guidance, allowing the region to grow together, as a block.

This function of the agriculture scorecard, therefore, represents the intent and purpose of the discussions in Malabo, as a pan-African drive, where it has become clear that success is not owed to any country in Africa, and that the only way up is by nations becoming pillars of support for each other.

The scorecard will also be available online to encourage public participation in the interrogation of the information gathered, in the knowledge that by engaging with citizens, heads of state can benefit from expert advice that may not be immediately available to them. The key principle for presenting the information publicly, however, is rooted in Jürgen Habermas' articulation that public engagement can influence decisions in ways that see key national objectives met more swiftly.

## **Identifying and overcoming weaknesses to further development**

The ultimate goal remains to dispel the myth that scorecards are complicated documents whose aim is to vilify non-performers while rewarding success. The leaders' meeting in Malabo rightly confirmed that Africa is moving into a space where competition in development no longer matters and that the failure of some countries adversely affects the reputation of the region as a whole.

By the end of the second biennial review process, and with countries actively engaging with the agriculture scorecard, it is

foreseen that further improvement in regional integration will have been secured, with key successes in intra-African trade, increased investment, and hunger reduction efforts.



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However, the speed at which the scorecard fuels that success depends on support, from governments and other stakeholders, in pursuing its underlying objective. The active interaction of heads of state with the tool will introduce them to a new line of questioning that will allow them to identify the specific weaknesses they need to overcome for further development. The hope is that by easily identifying critical areas of failure, the heads of state can encourage both a policy and attitude shift that will eventually drive the desired changes.

## Driving the agriculture revolution

Opinion leaders, such as Dangote, Adesina, and Masiyiwa, are helping fellow Africans to appreciate the importance of achieving the Malabo goals. Masiyiwa has already emerged as a major influencer through his interaction with the youth on social media, and his voice is now gradually inspiring a radical shift in favour of agriculture. So are Adesina and Dangote, who is driving a new admiration for farming through their views voiced on television and radio. More of their peers are following suit too, but a lot more mouthpieces are needed around the continent to drive this revolution with the speed it deserves.

As experts note, it is only when the average African realizes that digging dirt is an honorable job, and develops the desire to be actively involved in it because of the financial liberation it comes with, that the continent will begin to achieve its economic development goals.

The Malabo declaration and its biennial review process, as well as the new agriculture scorecard, are now providing a new base to drive that change.

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