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Agricultural Outputs, Food Security and Economic Development: Some Policy Options and Strategies for Africa

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Abstract

It is a common knowledge that industrialization has long been considered the engine of growth and the propeller of economic development. On the other hand, agriculture was believed to be unresponsive to economic incentives and therefore did not apply itself to technical change. As a result, policy makers believed that promoting industry at the expense of agriculture would sacrifice little in output.At least, this was the conventional wisdom in the 1970s and early 1980s. But this conventional wisdom had gone through empirical verification, with no conclusive result yet. Again, by the late 1990s and early 2000s it became clear that agriculture was deeply influenced by some factors external to the sector. These were industrial policies and exchange rates, which in turn affected investment, growth and income in agriculture. Against this background, this conceptual paper contributes to the literature by focusingon what African countries should do to enhance agricultural outputs, food security and economic developmentwithinthecontinent. The study therefore lays strong emphasis on the making the right use of the population, addressing land use issues, formulating appropriate macroeconomic policies, adopting advanced technology, improving natural resources management, investing in infrastructure, investing in education and health, better functioning markets, improving food utilization and enhancing rural investment climate. These are some of the policy options and strategies that Africa can adopt to enhance her development through agricultural innovations.

Keywords: Agriculture, Output, Food Security, Economic, Development, Africa
JEL Classification: N57; O13; Q18;

1.1 Introduction

It is common knowledge that industrialization has long been considered the engine of growth and the propeller of economic development. On the other hand, agriculture was believed to be unresponsive to economic incentives and therefore did not apply itself to technical change. As a result, policy makers believed, rightly or wrongly, that promoting industry at the expense of agriculture would sacrifice little in output. But this conventional wisdom had gone through empirical verification, with no conclusive result yet. Again, by the late 1990s and early 2000s it became clear that agriculture was deeply influenced by some factors external to the sector. These were industrial policies and exchange rates, which in turn affected investment, growth and income in agriculture. One is not therefore surprised that in spite of the massive technical assistance and a growing share of international development aid enjoyed in the 1990s, sub-Saharan Africa receive about 26 percent of all financial aid to developing countries and yet produces too little food. Although total food production in real terms has gone up, moving from an index of 100 in 1965 to 221 in 1998, it went down on a per capita basis, from 100 to 86 over the same period. The reason for the reduced yields can be attributed to drought, although climatic conditions cannot explain the long-term trends in agricultural production. Curiously, at the turn of this new century, Africa has come to depend more on food aid than it did about 35 years ago.

This scenario has deep economic implications against the background of the general perception that Africa's land potential is still to a large extent untouched. Regrettably, over the past 25 years, many African countries that were noted for exporting food have now become net importers. Not only have these countries become dependent on foreign aid, their burgeoning food bill has become a serious budgetary and political obstacle to progress and growth.Hardly a year goes now without a global or continental conference on ways and means of fostering the growth of food supplies aimed at eliminating hunger and reducing poverty. In spite of all the effort, a World Bank (2012) reveals that about 800 million people are hungry because they cannot afford to buy food they need for a healthy life. The report adds that more than 2 billion people are at risk from micronutrient deficiencies (of for example, vitamin A, iodine, and iron) and more than One billion are actually disabled by them harmed by mental retardation, learning problems, and blindness.Ironically, nearly 75 percent of poor and undernourished people live inrural areas where food is grown.Reducing poverty and hunger will require encouragement of rural development in general and a prosperous smallholder private agricultural economy in particular.

Experience has shown that offering encouragement to rural development is the best way to help poor farmers and rural dwellers to become more productive as well as improve their living standards. It is also critical to increasing national and global food supplies. In addition, rural development can contribute to improved management of natural resources and the environment.

Inspite of the myriad of postulations aimed at finding solutions to the problem of inadequate food production, one cannot help but question the rationale of the existing food aid initially introduced as a temporary measure but which has now reached about 80 million tons of cereals a year as revealed by a recent WHO investigation. The finding further showed that the origin of the problem cannot be attributed to either climatological or technical reasons. This is because abundant rain has fallen in West Africa over the past several years and solution have now been found to a good number of the technical problems confronting the sub-continent. The problem is rather associated with socio-economic issues and the inability of traditional structures to adapt to the needs of a changing society. The table 1 below further highlights the extent of food related problems confronting Africa and the world at large.

Table 1: Data underlying the calculation of the 1990 and 2009 Global Hunger Indexes (GHI)

Region	**Proportion of undernourished**		**Prevalence of underweight in children**		**Under-five mortality rate**		**GHI**	
	1990-1992	**2003-2005**	**1988-1992**	**2002-2007**	**1990**	**2007**	**1990**	**2009**
Sub-Saharan Africa	**31**	**28.5**	**27.4**	**23.4**	**17.7**	**14.3**	**25.4**	**22.1**
South Asia	25	21.7	55.2	40.4	12	7	30.7	23.0
Southeast Asia	17.5	11.4	20.5	12	5.5	2.7	14.5	8.7
Near East and North Africa	**3.8**	**4.6**	**12.2**	**7.9**	**7**	**3**	**7.7**	**5.2**
Latin America and Caribbean	11.8	8.3	9	4.3	5.4	2.6	8.7	5.1
World	**19.7**	**16.1**	**30.4**	**22.7**	**9.8**	**6.8**	**20.0**	**15.2**

Source: von Grebmer et al. 2009.