



Promoting Commercial Smallholders Agriculture In sub-Saharan Africa And Its Challenges For Sub-Regional Development

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is about how to promote the commercialization of smallholder agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and the constraints inherent in the context of regional development and poverty eradication. The paper therefore posits that commercial agriculture is a veritable tool for tackling development; mitigates food insecurity and poverty challenges as it affects the people of the sub-region. The methods of this study involved analysis of documents and secondary data. To address the problem this study raised, the following questions were posed: to what extent is the SSA agriculture becoming a business? What are the driving forces to make smallholder agriculture a more market oriented and stimulating activities for specialised enterprises in agro-food business? How can the international and domestic private sector become the driver of the transformation? What are the governments of the SSA doing to promote such transformation towards commercialisation? The paper revealed that there are indications that agriculture in the sub-region has undergone extensive reforms and external liberalisation policies in the past four decades. However the reforms have failed to generate sufficient supply response that could provide the fundamentals and foundation for an astronomical expansion in agricultural productivity and its critical role as a main driver of growth and poverty eradication, and the ability to adapt to structural transformation as desired by international agro food markets. Critical to this process, the paper also examined the institutional and regulatory framework for achieving a transformed and competitive agricultural sector in the SSA. In addition the sub region is facing new challenges as a result of market transformations on global scale, technological advances, changes in food consumption patterns, the demand of private retail organisations and stricter quality and health/safety standards imposed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), European Union (EU) and the developed North importing countries. The paper concluded that these challenges can only be addressed through a change perspective that promote smallholders commercial agriculture productivity and expanded market opportunities at the international, regional and domestic levels. In addition adequate policies or regulations should be designed and activated with a view to supporting the agricultural sector with private investments, appropriate technology and scientific expertise.

Key words: commercial agriculture, smallholder farming, subsistence farming, agribusiness, poverty, development, challenges, drivers, sub-Sahara, Africa.

1.1 Introduction

Globally, it is recognised that commercial agriculture is *asine-qua-non* for food security/sufficiency, raises income generation capability, promotes industrialisation and enhances poverty eradication. This is particularly true as experiences from North America, South America, Europe and the Asian Tigers have shown. Evidence of massive rice production in Thailand, Pakistan and Indonesia point to this claim; other examples include China, India, US and Brazil who now occupy the first, second, third and fourth positions as the countries with high food production and commercialised agriculture in the world (Sean, 2018; Simpson, 2018).

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) from pre-independence till date has tried various options and strategies to attain domestic food security/sufficiency, and have made concerted efforts to commercialise export of their agricultural products. This effort necessitated adaptive research at farmer's level; vigorous extension service delivery system backed with input supply which put the farmers at the centre-piece of all agricultural development efforts in the sub-region.

There have also been vigorous attempts or emphasis on the use of science and technology for improvement in agricultural industry. However, the problems of promoting commercial agriculture in sub-Saharan African remain complex and multi-faceted: including inadequate financing, poor planning and management of agribusinesses, inadequate processing/storage facilities, diversification and mechanisation of agro-processing technology, the quality of the farm products and restrictive policies of importing countries.

For example, to further drive her efforts towards food security and poverty reduction, the continent had evolved a number of programmes to serve as drivers: these included NEPAD and the Greening Industrialisation Programme (Todaro & Smith, 2009). The impacts of these are yet to be fully felt, but progress has been made.

Doing a deep analysis of commercial agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa would indicate that the effort at understanding and addressing the economic and environmental challenges of commercial agriculture in the sub-region has yielded far less than the expected result. There is no doubt that since the start of this millennium, the SSA governments, donors and the private sector through cooperative and collaborative efforts have stepped-up efforts through



coordinated strategies and intervention programmes to re-engineer the agricultural sector, particularly commercial agriculture.

For example, at the adoption of NEPAD's Comprehensive Africa Agricultural and Development Programme (AADP) in 2003, African leaders agreed to governmental responsibilities for providing technical and financial support to the agricultural sector and development of the agro-based private sector (commercial agriculture inclusive). This sector today is facing new challenges brought about by the transformations of the global states; involving stiff competition for available markets. In addition, SSA Agro-food companies are finding it difficult to meet the increasing demand for food in the SSA as a result of rising industrial activities and rapid urbanisation.

Besides, there is the inability of SSA to meet stricter quality and health/safety standard policy imposed by the importing countries. Agriculture remains the dominant sector of most SSA countries, contributing 32% of the continent's GDP (AFDB, 2015), and also playing a dominant role in rural and overall economic activities in the continent. The sector provides earnings for over 70% SSA labour force (Chauvin, Mulangu, & Porto 2012; AGRA, 2017). However, the potentials of the sector are largely untapped. It is dominated by poor smallholdings, subsistence farming and agro business centres that are at best in infancy and essentially unorganised. The sector is characterised by the challenges of low input and output, low income, and productivity.

During the past three decades, the sub-region lagged behind in terms of adapting to standard specification of the international agro food market; most SSA countries' allocation of resources to agriculture declined dramatically (with the exception of a few such as South Africa and Botswana). Agriculture has also undergone major market reforms and external liberalisation policies. These have failed to generate sufficient supply responses that provide the solid base for commercial agriculture to play a critical role as a major driver of growth and poverty reduction in the sub-region. Contrary to expectation, agriculture outputs declined by 3% in the SSA since 1990 compared to Asia and Latin America that have increased more than 30% and 20% respectively (OECD, 2008).

SSA agricultural exports are highly concentrated in a small number of countries with South Africa as the largest exporter at an average of US\$ 4.5 billion a year from 2000-2006, an equivalent of 23 percent of Africa's agricultural export; and this has increased to \$ 9.2 billion

in 2016 (Export.Gov, 2017). It is pertinent to note that agricultural export from the SSA has increased rapidly in the 21st century, largely as a result of increased trade with China and India.

Over the 2002-2005 period the largest exporters of agricultural products were South Africa, followed by Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. The three put together accounted for over 56 percent of total exports from the SSA (Export.Gov, 2017). It must be noted that Nigeria, during the period under review, also had an impressive agriculture output but the bulk of her products were consumed locally. This makes sense if we put into consideration her population. Statistics shows that GDP from Agriculture in Nigeria averaged 3763381.63 Million from 2010 until 2018, reaching an all-time high of 5189365.99 NGN Million in the third quarter of 2017 and a record low of 2594759.86 NGN Million in the first quarter of 2010 (NBS, 2018). It is good news to that SSA has recorded increase in agricultural export above the average growth rate; though her share of global agricultural export is still relatively small; declining by about 5.4 percent (OECD, 2008).

China and India in the 21st century account for a large percentage of World agricultural imports from the SSA. India alone account for over 7 percent of global imports of agricultural products from the SSA. 2002-2006 that of China amounted to over US\$1 billion and has been on the increase since then (Export.Gov, 2017).

As would be seen in the literature review several studies have been conducted in the field of commercial agriculture, especially those that focus on sub-Saharan Africa. (See: AGRA, 2017; Export.Gov, 2017; Adeleke, Abdul & Zuzana 2010; Poulton, Tyler & Hazell, 2008). These studies were devoted to analysis of the contribution, impacts, and challenges to commercial agriculture in the SSA countries. However, none of these studies specifically examines the contributions of smallholder farming to the commercialization of Agriculture in the sub-region. This study would therefore attempt to fill this perceived gap in the literature and thereby contribute to knowledge.

2.1 Statement of the Problem

Ideally, large-scale commercial agriculture has the potential to drive an inclusive economic growth, rapid income and employment generation and poverty reduction capabilities (Todaro & Smith, 2009).

Agriculture is a proven path to prosperity. No region of the world has developed a diverse, modern economy without first establishing a successful foundation in agriculture. This is going to be critically true for Africa where, today, close to 70% of the population is involved in agriculture as smallholder farmers working on parcels of land that are, on



average, less than 2 hectares. As such, agriculture remains Africa's surest bet for growing inclusive economies and creating decent jobs mainly for the youth (AGRA, 2017).

This explains why SSA governments and their international partners formulated and designed series of agro based development policies and programmes (for example, the AU's NEPAD initiated Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme) to facilitate rapid commercial agriculture through increased investment in smallholder agriculture in order to scale up rapid industrialisation and economic development in the sub-region. Most importantly, SSA is in dire need of food security/sufficiency for her ever expanding population. The realisation that agribusiness is the dominant employment and income generating activities among the population of the SSA, meant that commercial agriculture is the most viable option left on the table. There is wide agreement that African agriculture has enormous potential for growth; thanks to its abundant natural and human resources, namely land and water; and a vast growing population (High-Level Expert Forum (HLEF), 2009).

With the understanding that commercial agriculture holds the most promising future for the sub-region, it is imperative to say that all stakeholders must do anything humanly possible to promote it to complete success. And one of the better ways to accomplish this is to commercialise smallholder farming.

However, despite concerted efforts and relatively reasonable investments in agribusiness by SSA governments and their international collaborators, much is left to be desired of commercial agriculture in the SSA countries. SSA's effort to commercialise smallholders agriculture is constrained by a number of inherently pervasive obstacles: stringent international market regulations which borders on health and safety standards, un-capitalised smallholder farming, absence of resilient regional agricultural integration policy or programme, slow pace of technology based farming system, inadequate private sector investments in agribusiness, among others. To combat the above constraints there is need for policy and institutional reforms among SSA countries. Most importantly, there is need to promote the growth or expansion of commercial agriculture through smallholder farming.

3.1 Research questions

In order to address the problem of this study, we consider the following research questions as necessary, as they would help us to address the problem of this study much better.

- i. How can SSA Agriculture move from subsistence Agriculture to commercial Agriculture?

- ii. What should be the driving forces that would make agriculture more market oriented and stimulate the development of specialised enterprises for Agro-food products?
- iii. How can the domestic and international private sector become drivers of change and progress for commercial agriculture in SSA?
- iv. What should SSA governments and their development partners do to promote smallholder farming towards commercialisation of agribusiness?

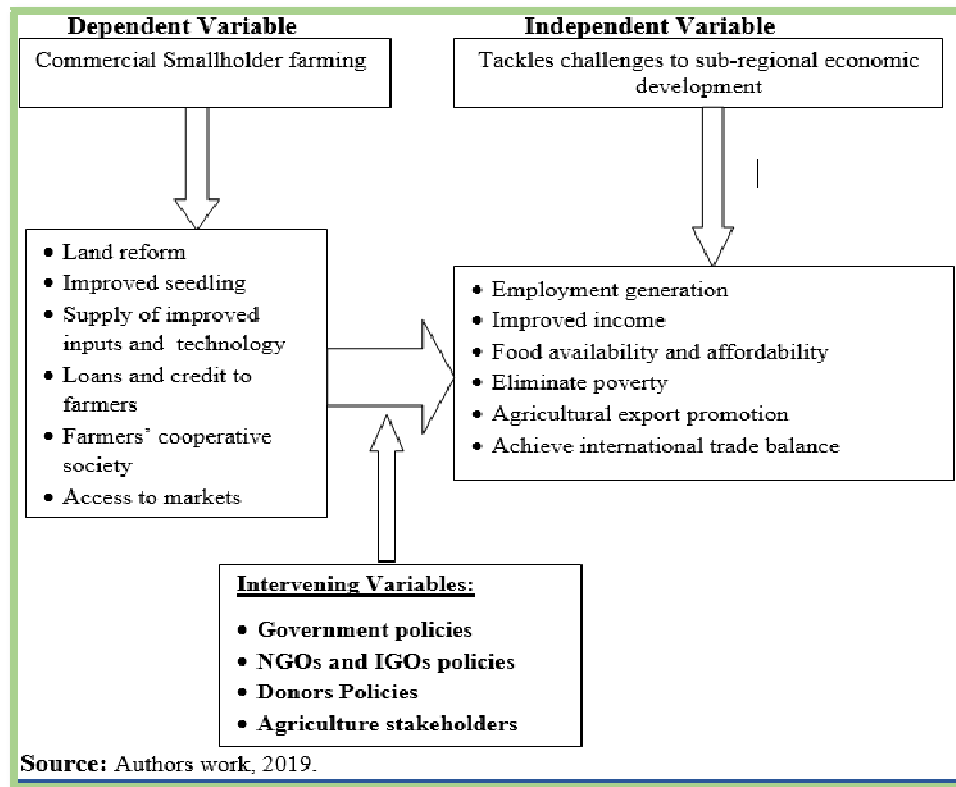


Figure 1. A conceptual framework of commercial smallholder farming

The figure above indicates the conceptual variables of the study. It is reasoned that for smallholder agriculture to succeed as viable commercial enterprise in the region, the stakeholders would need to look at issues of land reform, improved seedlings, availability of modern farming technologies, loans or credit facility, functional agro-based cooperatives and unrestricted access to markets both locally and internationally. However, success for the smallholder farmers could forcibly or possibly come if policies or regulatory mechanisms of government, NGOs and IGOs, donors and other stakeholders are reasonable enough to support the growth of the sub-sector.

4.1 Operational definition of terms



- **Commercial agriculture** involves large-scale, mechanised production of crops and animals for sale, usually intended for widespread distribution to wholesalers or retail outlets.
- **Smallholder farming:** A smallholding is a small farm. In developing countries, smallholdings are usually farms supporting a single family with a mixture of cash crops and subsistence farming.
- **Agribusiness** refers to agricultural and allied businesses; it includes buying and selling of agricultural products and services such as crops, animals, agro-allied materials and transportation.
- **Sub-Sahara Africa** refers to those African countries or sub-region located in the Western, Southern, Eastern and Central Africa. They constitute two-third of Africa's population.
- **Development** in this context refers to improvement in human, economic and productive forces of the society resulting in improvement or transformation of the socio-economic condition of the life of the people.
- **A challenge** in the context of this paper is defined as obstacles or constraints inhibiting commercial agriculture in the sub-region referred to as SSA.

5. Methodology

The methods of this study entails:

5.1 Design of the study: The design of this study is essentially documents or secondary data analysis.

5.2 Tools for data collection: the data for this research paper were obtained from secondary sources; these included documented materials such as journal articles, government publications, publications of international governmental and non-governmental organisations, web pages (internet materials), newspapers and magazines, and books.

5.3 Techniques for data analysis: The data collected were analysed using the qualitative approach to data analysis. The secondary data obtained were analysed according to themes.

6. Literature review

6.1 Empirical Review

The literature is replete with series of empirical studies on commercial and smallholder agriculture. In a study conducted on smallholder farming in Nigeria, it was found that more than eighty percent (80%) of the farmers were smallholder farmers. Agriculture is a major contributor to Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and smallholder farmers play a dominant role in this contribution. The estimated value of smallholder agriculture in Nigeria is put at about 99% of total crops output and 98% of the food consumed in Nigeria with the exception of wheat (Mgbenka and Mbah, 2016). The implication of this finding is that, smallholder farming is critical to Nigeria's economic development and by extension the welfare of SSA. Thus, any effort made to promote smallholding farming would have positive impact on the development of Nigeria in particular and Africa in General. What we advocate here is that there is the need to make it a commercial endeavour.

Relatedly, another study conducted by Adeleke, Abdul & Zuzana (2010) on the state of smallholder agriculture in East African sub-region (Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania) it was found that, Smallholder agriculture continue to play important role in the agricultural-based economies accounting for about 75 percent of agricultural production and over 75 percent of employment creation. The implication is that commercialized smallholder agriculture has the potential to feed the region and create jobs for its teeming youth's population. With an expected growth rate of 5.8 percent in 2010 the longer-term growth prospects of East African countries, and especially the agriculture sector, remain bright for several reasons. Firstly, for as long as these economies continue to expand at rapid rates, their growth will translate into increased incomes and upward spirals in the aggregate demand for higher value-added agricultural outputs. This will in turn generate opportunities for expansion of more complex production outputs and value-addition in the agriculture sector in the region.

Secondly, the focus of donors on infrastructure will improve market access of the agriculture sector, leading to economies of scale. By utilizing their comparative advantages, smallholder farmers would be able to specialize and exchange products through the markets (Adeleke, Abdul & Zuzana, 2010)

In a survey conducted in a community in South-Africa to ascertain the contribution of smallholder agriculture to house hold food security, it was revealed that lack of sufficient state support for smallholder farmers at Thulamela local municipality in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province resulted in food shortage (Oni, Maliwichi & Obadire, 2013). The study also



advocated increased support for smallholder farmers in form of funding and supply of agricultural inputs. The finding is an indication that smallholder agriculture has the potential to feed the people and create more value addition especially for the rural poor. This would happen, if the smallholder agriculture is made a serious business by all stakeholders.

6.2 Potential of smallholder farmers and commercial agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa

Agriculture occupies a central role in human productive activities; it is the means through which humans put foods on their tables. Besides smallholder agriculture has gained as much impetus as commercial ones; they have become veritable instruments for job creation and income generation, particularly in the SSA region. This position is corroborated by AGRA as follows:

Agriculture is a proven path to prosperity. No region of the world has developed a diverse, modern economy without first establishing a successful foundation in agriculture. This is going to be critically true for Africa where, today, close to 70% of the population is involved in agriculture as smallholder farmers working on parcels of land that are, on average, less than 2 hectares. As such, agriculture remains Africa's surest bet for growing inclusive economies and creating decent jobs mainly for the youth (AGRA, 2017).

“As the global economic crisis eases, new and improved market opportunities are expected to emerge for African farmers in traditional as well as non-traditional agricultural exports... Population growth and urbanization point to domestic and intra-African markets as the most promising areas for stimulating medium to long-term agricultural growth. Several countries have opportunities for expansion into high-value labour-intensive products for both regional and international markets. The strong potential of agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa is welcome news: agriculture is the backbone of overall growth for the majority of countries in the region and essential for poverty reduction and food security” (HLEF, 2009).

It is widely believed that agricultural productivity is the best bet to combat poverty, especially in SSA countries. Unfortunately, SSA is considered the world's poorest region. According to the UNDP 2006 reports cited in Handley, Higgins, Sharma, Bird and Cammack (2009):

SSA is afflicted by many forms of poverty. HDI scores in most countries of SSA have stagnated or declined since 1990, leaving this region as the poorest in the world. Indeed, 28 of the 31 low human development countries are in SSA (UNDP, 2006). Analysis of income poverty is similarly disappointing. Since 1990, income poverty has fallen in all regions of the world except SSA, where there has been an increase both in the incidence and absolute number of people living in income poverty. This sees some 300 million people in SSA – almost half of the region's population – living on less than US\$1 a day (UNDP, 2006).



To combat poverty and drive development in SSA there is need to intensify effort to commercialise agriculture and promote smallholders farming, especially that that aimed at income generation and food availability.

6.2 Challenges to commercial agriculture in SSA

The effort to commercialise agriculture in SSA is constrained by a range of debilitating issues: stricter quality, health and safety standards/control imposed on SSA agro-products by the importing countries, and international organisations such as OECD and the EU. SSA agriculture is grossly undercapitalized, with capital per person working in agriculture being much less than in other developing regions. This reflects both insufficient investment as well as rapid growth in the region's rural population (HLEF, 2009). Others include the widening technology gap, slow development of input and output markets and associated market services, slow progress in regional integration, governance and institutional shortcomings in some countries, conflicts, HIV-AIDS and other diseases. Inability to connect smallholders to markets and helping them to adapt to new conditions so as to become more productive, increasing opportunities for rural employment, reducing risk and vulnerability, especially to extreme weather events and price swings, and increasing access to assets and skills will be some of the actions to make sure that agricultural and rural growth goes hand in hand with poverty reduction (HLEF, 2009).

7. Theoretical framework

The theoretical underpinning of this paper is anchored on the economic development model expounded by the 1988 Nobel laureate holder, Amartya Sen called the “**capabilities**” approach. Sen argues that the capability to function is what really matters for status as a poor and non-poor person. “As Sen puts it, economic growth cannot be sensibly treated as an end in itself”. Development has to be more concerned with enhancing the life we lead and the freedom we enjoy (Todaro and Smith, 2009).

Applying this theory to our discourse, we could argue that to achieve the desired level of commercial agriculture in SSA, there is the need to build the *capabilities* of the actors involved in the drive towards commercialisation of agriculture within the sub-region. In addition to securing for the farmers inputs and supplies, the political authorities and foreign donors/technical experts must as well be deeply involved in policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Farmers and other stakeholders must be empowered, through

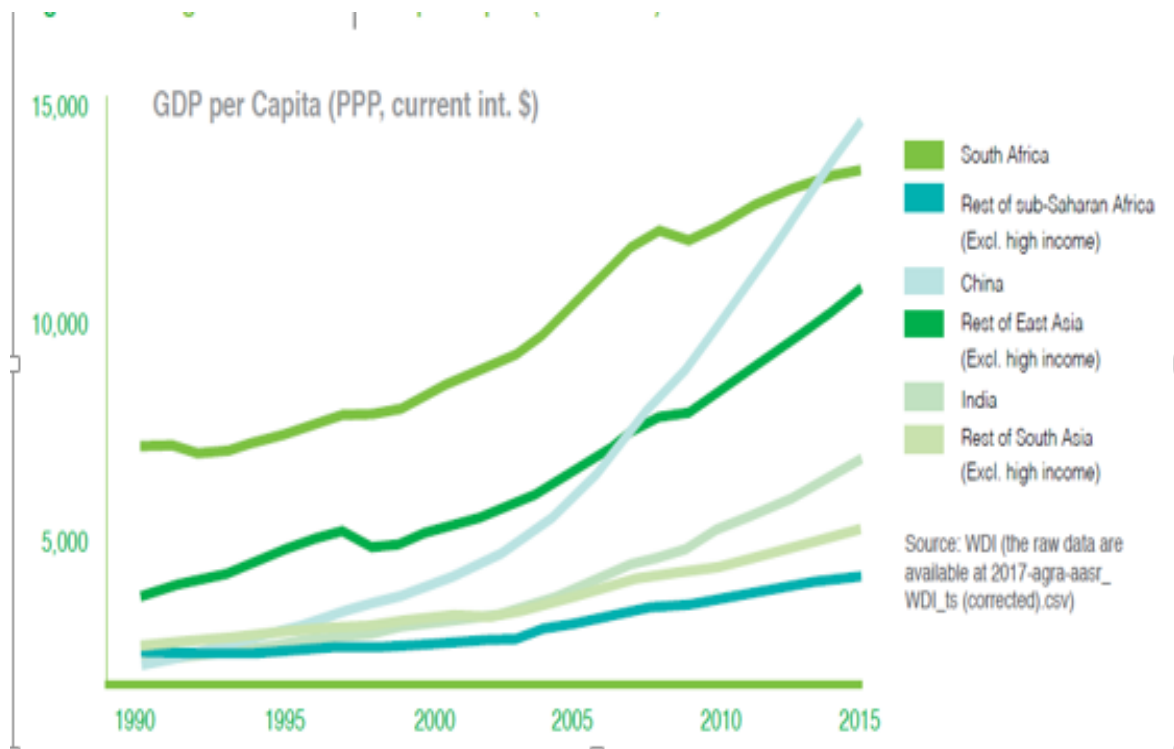
enabling legislation; including right to land and freedom to conduct legitimate business in the international markets in agriculture related transactions.

8. Discussion

1.1 Unlocking SSA commercial agriculture potentials: The Drivers

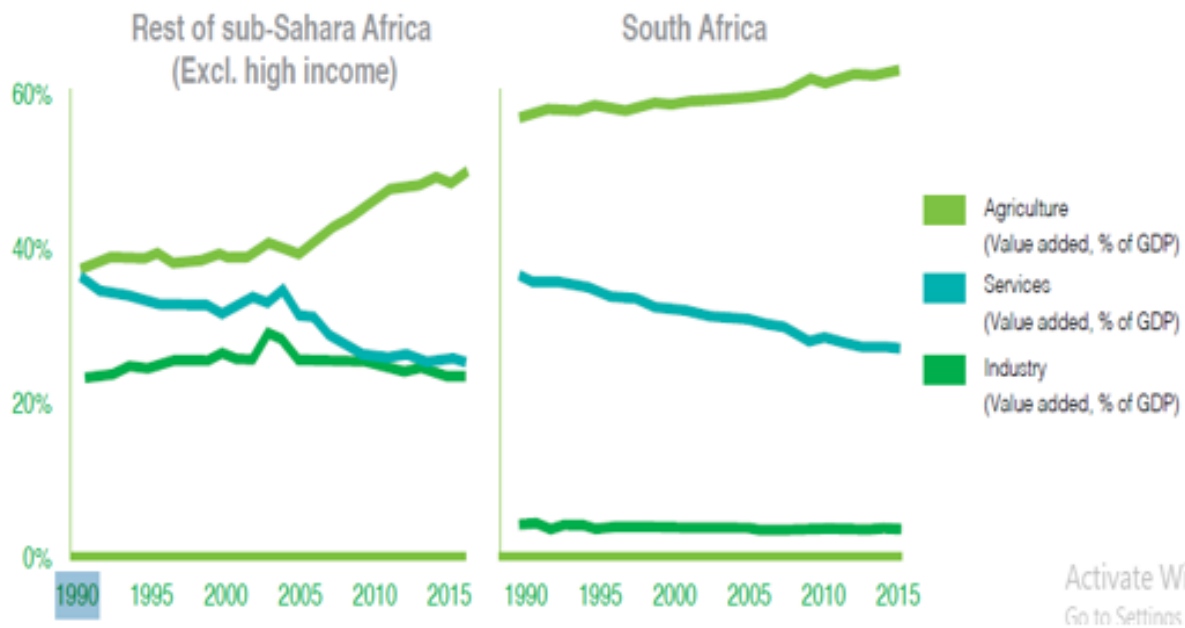
It is important to note that commercial agriculture has made remarkable progress in sub-Saharan Africa over the past two decades (AGRA, 2017). The statistics/graphs below tell the story much better. African agriculture is advancing, but there are more concerns to tackle.

Figure 2: Selected regional trends in GDP per capita (1990-2015)



Source: Adapted AGRA (2017). African agriculture status report 2017: The business of smallholder agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa, (Issue 5). *Alliance for a green revolution in Africa (AGRA)*. Nairobi, Kenya

Figure 3. Sector Shares in GDP, sub-Saharan Africa



Source: AGRA (2017). African agriculture status report 2017: The business of smallholder agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa, (Issue 5). *Alliance for a green revolution in Africa (AGRA)*. Nairobi, Kenya

However, there is more room for improvement or progress. To take commercial agriculture to an enviable position in SSA some drivers must be factored in. The following are possible drivers or options on our table for consideration:

Firstly, there is need to promote smallholder farming through a common regional policy regime intended to commercialise the practice of agriculture in the region, and with special funding support from the African Development Bank (AFDB) and national governments of member states. Expansion in smallholder farming has the potential to raise the income of the smallholder farmers and this could in turn raise their investment capabilities and ability to compete globally, and combat poverty (Adeleke, Abdul & Zuzana, 2010).

Secondly, commercialisation of agriculture is most contingent on the availability of necessary technology; examples from the Asian Tigers, the US, China, and other technologically advanced nations is a testimony of what it would take to advance agriculture to a commercial height. To this end we propose that there should be a policy shift, among SSA countries, towards technology transfer, and funding support for local agriculture technology initiatives.

Thirdly, there is a need for a regional initiative that would target the elimination of undesirable restrictions to movement of agricultural products within and beyond the borders of the SSA countries. The net benefits of this would mean that agricultural products in the SSA would get the markets and the buyers at least cost possible. This also means that a standard safety

measure for agriculture products, going across the border, must be put in place to minimise or eliminate incidence of consumption of harmful/bad products.

Fourthly, further to the above, there is need to intensify research efforts in indigenous technology, and scientific research in agro-technology and agro-chemicals to support smallholder agriculture in SSA. This requires efforts in both funding and incentives for promotion of research innovations.

The SSA agricultural transformation is being threatened on several fronts by several hydra-headed monsters characterised by insecurity, economic and development disabilities. On the heels of these challenges SSA agricultural policy direction and implementation have too often been bedevilled by policy somersault/inconsistencies; dotted and decaying agriculture infrastructures, corruption ridden agricultural programmes and moribund oversight institutions; and copious white elephant agricultural projects. All of which represent a core challenge to SSA agriculture in terms of policy choices between dichotomous oppositions (Ian, 2006).

9. Challenges to Commercial Agriculture in SSA

All too often debates on these issues of the constraints to commercial agriculture reach appropriate but unhelpful conclusion: No single scenario is comprehensive, no single policy solution is appropriate. Taking the above into cognizance a bird eye view of the SSA agricultural sector should indicate that the SSA commercial agriculture, agro-food industries and smallholder agriculture is at a crossroad, confronted by several challenges in the form of uncoordinated institutions and chilling economic policy choices that has its roots in market transformation on a global scale, changes in natural food consumption pattern, technological advances, demand of private retail companies, rapid urbanization and lack of the local universities' capacity to contribute to agricultural projects (commercial agriculture inclusive).

The above raises serious concern about the capacity of traditional agriculture in SSA countries to contribute substantially to commercial agriculture and economic development of the region. Despite having in place policies, programmes and projects that should drive commercial agriculture in the sub region, commercial agriculture is at a crossroad for several reasons:

Most SSA governments (colonial and post-colonial) have over several decades formulated commercial agricultural policies (funding policies inclusive), but these policies have failed to yield desired results because agriculture have continued to suffer from inertia associated with

policies and programmes interventions. In addition agriculture has suffered from resource curse which have to do with the effect of oil production as a means of economic sustenance of the economies of some SSA countries, particularly, Nigeria, Angola.

The economies of the SSA countries will be robust if linkages/inter connection and interdependency or a symbiotic relation between the agricultural sector and other sectors of the economy can be crafted. This relationship should be exploited between the industrial and agricultural sector as a major catalyst in regional development, job creation and technological advancement.

In other to employ commercial agriculture as a tool for regional development SSA countries agriculture policy must include policy inputs that:

1. Provide for Effective Agriculture Extensions System (EAES).
2. Provide for agricultural financial/credit delivery system.
3. Provide for agricultural marketing system.
4. Proactive policy Framework.
5. Inputs support system.
6. Aggressive foreign policy that has commercial agriculture as an issue for regional development.
7. Provide for agricultural mechanization with the aim to increase both the qualitative and quantitative output of the sector for commercialization and export.
8. Reinforce agriculture with a massive and sustained extensive delivery (Ikhelowa, 2011)

Policy-makers face a dilemma with commercial agriculture in SSA in a transition were the provision of (private) goods is left to the market. Consequently if effective demand for output is critical for success, policy support must be crafted and implemented as follows (Steve Wiggins, 2005).

- Transport costs in Africa are often high; by the time farm produce is shipped a few hundred kilometres, costs can represent 50 per cent or more of production. Getting the railways in good working order and operated reliably is a priority for long-distance movements of food across the sub-region. Investing in physical infrastructure may be expensive, but the value of investments can be multiplied if accompanied by reforms to transport operations. Acting to reduce the power of cartels in trucking, for example, and allowing trucks to operate across borders can cut the costs.



- Governments may encourage and facilitate institutional innovation in agricultural supply chains to overcome market failure. This may mean providing seed capital to start-ups by producer associations, underwriting some risky investments, helping convene forums that bring together farmer representatives, co-operatives, government and commercial companies to find ways to promote particular sub-sectors and remove obstacles, and in general looking to develop competitiveness – a word not often used in agricultural policy circles. Few SSA government agriculture departments, however, have much experience of this kind of facilitation.
- A better understanding of markets and the possibilities for competing in them may help guide transport investments, key institutional innovations, and the direction of research. For example, international markets for farm commodities may not see rapid growth, but neither will they disappear and some farmers somewhere will make their living from supplying them. Lessons can be learned from countries with notable success in agricultural exports, such as Chile, New Zealand and Thailand. These may be useful for areas that have low-cost access to ports and abundant land. What is to prevent parts of Mozambique and Tanzania, for example, from becoming the lowest cost producers of selected agricultural primaries?

What else does experience suggest? There is a warning (Wiggins, 2005) with only a few exceptions, large-scale public investments in specific agricultural projects that should support commercial agriculture fail all too often. The clearest examples come from irrigation, where time and again governments have invested millions in large public schemes for surface irrigation. The usual result has been a scheme developed at costs much higher than originally estimated, then poorly operated, and which yields a miserable return. If there is one reason these schemes fail, it is that they try to change too much too quickly in complex systems, and almost inevitably run into a series of unforeseen obstacles.

In the character of SSA agricultural body politics is the short duration of agricultural policies and programmes, inconsistency/incompatibility of regional agricultural policies/programmes with national policies/programmes and the dominance of lack of adequate monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects. Consequently despite the huge number of agricultural policies, programmes and projects that SSA countries have formulated and implemented the story line is not positive as the region is still far from the desired in terms of export and agro-commercialisation. This is compounded by a deepening recession, unexplained or politically motivated policy discontinuation and abysmal yield, poor



agricultural infrastructure, degrading environmental resources, erratic weather and civil conflicts.

Taking these into cognizance at a time of rising and decapitating unemployment, rising poverty, rising de-industrialization and dwindling petro-dollar revenue to finance the region's economy, a deepened policy and programmes for unleashing the region's agricultural potential become critical and fundamental. Not minding the fact that these variables couple with the financial crisis has gingered renewed interest in commercial agriculture, the fundamental policy issue should be how to translate this interest into reality? How to avoid the recycling and repackage of old and often failed ideas, policies and programmes? How to generate new thinking rooted in SSA developmental aspirations contexts and ground realities that should make the difference?

Conclusion

For SSA commercial agricultural development the time has come for the various countries agricultural policy and decisions makers to develop a peer review mechanism on a qualitative and quantitative basis with a view to assessing where they are and where we should be heading. This demands the precepts of coordination, complementarities, cooperation, and synthesis. In order to make an attempt to synthesize commercial agricultural development, it should be guided by a structured analytical approach that should comprise of seven central elements.

- Long term policy process approach towards identifying and analysing the efforts made in the area of commercial agricultural development policy and operation.
- A close scrutiny of the complexity, timing and the different types of pressures that affect commercial agricultural policy formulation and implementation in SSA countries.
- There must be recognition that policy coherence and alignment in a multi-policy environment and ecologically diverse region such as the SSA should be the product of outcomes of agricultural and non-agricultural institutions coordination, inter-sectorial cooperation and collaboration, and sustained political commitment at the highest level.



- Increasing recognition of the need to create a nation with reservoir of practical experience as to how a nation tackles commercial agriculture as a development, employment and poverty reduction instrument.
- Clarity as to what type of impact is being sought by the mechanisms that were created to tackle commercial agriculture deficits in a region wide context – sensitive way, for continuous further consideration.
- Promoting a work – in – progress for commercial agriculture policies with a broad based (cross-regional) political support combined with reinforcing oriented planning, monitoring and evaluation that should support and ensure the long- term impact of the measures taken.
- Systematic and incremental approach to promoting agriculture (financing inclusive) which should combine mutually reinforcing mechanisms of different types (Joint planning frameworks inclusive).

To unleash SSA commercial agricultural potential needs rethinking a number of ways (Ian, 2005):

- Challenging inappropriate assumption about what commercial agriculture is about, and avoid been misguided by simplistic version of modernization theory.
- Emphasizing the social, political and institutional dimensions of technical change in commercial agriculture.
- Highlighting agro ecological questions and environmental impact and influences on commercial agriculture, including climate change.
- Interrogating whose knowledge counts not just in disciplinary terms, but by drawing more on traditional and local agricultural understanding of complex traditional contexts and integrating them into mechanized and large scale commercial agriculture for regional development.
- Recognizing technical agricultural changes, which carry major social and political commitments; and major consequences for commercial agricultural development.



Adapting Calestous Jumna (2017) SSA countries need to derive lessons from the value of technical knowledge in continuous agricultural architecture management. Organisms do not wait until their dying moments to get into flurry of seeding the maintenance of their species. But unlike organisms that carry their enabling information in their DNA, physical infrastructure (commercial agriculture inclusive), draws its technical support from associated knowledge-based institutions such as universities and research institutions. To deprive them of such support is to condemn them to extinction. The same logic applies to commercial agriculture, whose survival is heavily dependent on continuous maintenance. This is because the stoppage of maintenance breeding, which involves improving adaptive capacity to respond to change, would collapse agricultural production.

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