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Prerequisite for Sustainable Agricultural Development in the Sub-Saharan Africa (Pp. 18-24)

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Abstract

The achievement of equitable and sustainable development remains the greatest challenge facing people of developing countries. Despite significant economic progress recorded in some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in the last decade or so, a substantial proportion of the people in Africa still live in acute poverty and suffer immensely from inadequate access to economic and social resources. As the agricultural sector dominates the economics of most Sub-Saharan African countries, it will be pertinent to improve the rate of agricultural growth and rural development that will in turn give a sustainable development. This paper explores the prerequisites and priorities for sustainable growth in Africa. Drawing heavily on lessons from the past, it examines the conditions for achieving sustainable development.

Keywords: Prerequisite, agricultural development, sustainable development

Introduction

The percentage of the population under the poverty line in Sub-Saharan Africa (Figure 1) hover around 48 per cent during 1985-90, while the number of poor people increased by about 17 percent. By the end of the century, the region will account for more than 30 percent of the developing world poor, compared with 16 per cent in 1985 (World Bank 1993).



Figure 1: Map showing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa

The average per capita daily calorie supply in Africa was 2027 kilocalories during 1986-89, less than the United Nations recommended minimum. Moreover, while per capita calorie supplies have increased substantially since 1965 in most of the world, they actually declined in Africa (from 2074 in 1965 to 2027 in 1986-89) (Rukuni and Anandajayasekram, 1994).

Recent work at IFPRI suggests that, by the year 2025, Africa will need to impart about 30 million tons of cereals each year to meet the gap between projected market demand and supply, but it will need another 185 million tons of food aid each year if all Africans are to be fed at reasonable standards.

Beside this, food insecurity has adverse trends on rapid population growth, worsening environmental degradation and alarming natural resources extinction. Closed forest cover is decreasing at a rate of 3.7 million hectares per year, and this is accelerating (Cleavers, 1993).

Priority of Agriculture to Economic Growth

The agriculture sector dominates the economics of most Sub-Saharan African countries. The sector still accounts for about 42 percent of gross domestic production (GDP) in low-income countries and for 27 percent in middle income countries unless agricultural growth and rural development improve the local earnings of the rural population, it will be difficult to sustain rapid growth in most African economies. There are a number of ways in which agricultural growth contributes to overall economic growth. Among them are:

- (i) The sector increases the export of agricultural products, which raises income and foreign exchange earnings.
- (ii) It increases the supply of food for domestic consumption and raw material for domestic industries in order to reduce the price of goods and promote growth in manufacturing, including agro-processing.
- (iii) It enlarges the size of the market for industrial output.

In developing countries, agriculture also promotes general economic growth through its forward and backward linkages to the non-agriculture sector. The consumption linkages that arise when increase in agricultural income lead to increases in household consumer demands for non-agriculture goods, especially labour intensive goods and services are of major significance. Ensuring a wider distribution of agricultural income gains among rural households can particularly lead to higher employment and income multipliers as well as help alleviate poverty more rapidly (Abdulai, 1994).

Therefore, agricultural growth and development must be vigorously pursued in low income developing countries for at least four reasons.

- (a) To alleviate poverty through employment creation and income generation in rural areas.
- (b) To meet growing food needs driven by rapids population growth and urbanization.
- (c) To stimulate overall economic growth, given that agriculture is the most viable lead sector for growth and development in many to low income developing countries.

- (d) To conserve natural resources and then ameliorate the sub-Saharan environments.

Prerequisites for Sustainable Agricultural Development

DFID 2000 re-defined sustainable development as development which meets the needs of the present without compromising our ability to meet those of the future following the submission of Brundtland commission of 1987. As the land degradation remains a key factor in constraining food production to levels below the current average rate of population increase, it is highly paramount to emphasis strategies and identifies the key requirements for successful agricultural growth.

Appropriate Policies and Good Government

Trade and industrial policies have a major influence on agricultural performance. In virtually all African countries, traditional agricultural products were subjected to heavy export taxes throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and this reduced prices for domestic producers and discouraged production (Krueger, *et.al.*, 1988). Good governance on other hand can improve agricultural development, but much government policy has been neither economically nor environmentally efficient. Where corruption subverts the public interest, both livelihoods and development suffer.

Reforms of the last two decades around the world have brought markets back into many areas of policy and public provision, reducing subsidies and bringing prices closer to their true economic cost. The effects of policies that indirectly influence agricultural prices is often far greater than the effects of policies that directly attempt to influence agricultural prices. A number of empirical studies have demonstrated that a large proportion of industrial protection in African countries during the 1970s resulted in an effective tax on agricultural export (Oyejide, 1989; Abdulai, 1994). Major reforms of macroeconomics and industrial policies that discriminate against agriculture are therefore required.

Appropriate Technologies

Since most of the region is at a very stage of agricultural technology, there is a need for increased support for agricultural research to raise productivity. In the labour constrained systems (widely observed in West and Central Africa) technologies that permit rapid increases in labour productivity are essential (Delgado and Pinstrup-Anderson 1993).

The often fragile soils in Africa, erratic rainfall patterns which significant drought risks, limited scope for irrigation, poor infrastructure, and high transport costs, agricultural intensification will typically have to be different from the green revolution model. In many areas, it will require development of mixed farming systems that integrate annual crops with perennial crops, farm trees and livestock (Agroforestry technologies) in order to improve management of soil fertility and organic matter, for conservation of moisture as well as erosion control for sustainable plant recycling.

Governments must also play an active role in the provision of extension services capable of disseminating relevant information to farmers and encouraging non-governmental organization (NGOs), working on research and extension problems.

Agricultural Inputs and Rural Infrastructure

The provision of agricultural services also needs to be made more efficient. In many Sub-Saharan African countries, shortages of subsidized inputs, together with high rates of farm input, lead to situation in which a few large scale farmers appropriate most of the inputs. Subsidies that favour large scale farmers, rather than low income farmers contribute to the bias in the structure of income growth against small farmers. Inadequate credit has also contributed to the limited expansion of farm input market in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Transport and communication infrastructure is an important constraint on agricultural productivity in low income developing countries. Rural roads and transport systems, which constitute perhaps the most important single factors for transforming rural Sub-Saharan Africa have deteriorated to the point where costs of transport add significantly to the costs of input and outputs in agriculture.

Therefore, reasons must thus be mobilized for rural infrastructure creation and improving the access of small farmers to such infrastructure to support agricultural development.

Managing the Environment

Agricultural intensification can lead to the mismanagement of modern inputs, especially fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation water, often with serious environmental consequences. These include water logging and salinization of irrigated land, chemical contamination of water, pesticides poisoning, and destruction of beneficial species.

The more serious environmental problems in African agriculture relate to great mismanagement of resources in extensive farming systems. Poverty and population growth have reached the point where serious resources degradation is occurring. Welson (1994) reported that one of the major causes of the environmental stress in the developing world is poverty, and one of the major causes of poverty is environmental stress. The rural poor largely depend on agriculture, and hence on natural resources for 40 to 85 percent of their income. Environmental degradation sets in when the poor loses the capacity to sustainably support themselves for their natural resource base. Population pressures and lack of adequate agricultural technologies among other factors are major forces driving the poor to make desperate choices.

The negative relationship among poverty, population and environmental degradation can end only according to researchers, with the help of more productive agriculture in the areas that have already been cultivated by the poor. This will slow encroachment on rain forests hill sides, and desert margins.

Without adequate increases in agricultural productivity to secure their livelihoods, farmers expand into new areas many of which are environmentally fragile and easily degradable.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to argue that agricultural growth will be essential in most Sub-Saharan Africa countries for achieving economic growth and for addressing poverty, food security and environmental problems. Sustainable and profitable technologies cum good governance and policy have been identified as necessary tools to conserve efficiently African scarce resources and increase the supply of useful biomass in Sub-Saharan Africa countries.

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