

Section: Enabling Environment

Introduction

This section emphasizes the important role policy plays in creating enabling environments in fast-tracking agricultural productivity in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The African smallholder farmer faces numerous challenges, most of which require sound policies to create structures, and platforms, for vital services. Services such as diagnosing problems, communicating solutions, ensuring access to technology, credit and market access, as well as data management to aid in monitoring are discussed in this section.

Identification of, and addressing, the continent's agricultural challenges need to be both context- and locality-specific for effective diagnosis and management. Thus, far prescriptive measures have been used with limited success. In the article, "*Ethnography in Agricultural Research: A Tool for Diagnosing Problems and Sustaining Solutions*," the authors call for more adaptive ways of diagnosing, and addressing, problems based on local capabilities and resources. They proposed the use of an ethnographic framework termed the "Livelihoods as Intimate Government (LIG)" approach and showed its application in Ghana and Malawi as an adaptive research tool that can be used to identify local problems and promote the development of appropriate and sustainable solutions.

Another area important for increasing agricultural productivity in SSA is policy geared towards improving agricultural extension services. In "*Performance Incentives and Information Communication Technologies in Ugandan Agricultural Extension Service Delivery*," the authors noted the ineffectiveness of the traditional fixed-wage scheme currently in use in Uganda. They proposed a performance-based incentive scheme using information communication technology (ICT) to improve extension services. Their study showed that overall, the youth are more receptive to the incentive-based ICT approach and using this system has the potential to create much-needed jobs for the underemployed youth in SSA.

Developing reliable delivery systems in ensuring technology access by farmers in SSA requires multi-sectoral approaches. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are essential strategic tools for fast-tracking the demonstration and adoption of new farming technologies. For example, PPPs in investments and participatory frameworks help bridge gaps for farmers' needs. The authors of "*The Role of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Ensuring Technology Access for Farmers in sub-Saharan Africa*" showed how private sector engagement and government interventions have led to increased availability of farm inputs such as improved seeds and machinery. This approach is being used to increase the production and sustainability of the food systems through the provision of critical agricultural services including seed production, veterinary care, commodity supply chain, and post-harvest processing.

Although cooperatives have shown economic benefits in many African countries, supporting policies have faced many challenges due to political interference, limited administrative support, and lack of human capital. In *“Agricultural Cooperative Marketing and Credit Policy Reform in Uganda: An Opportunity for Poverty Reduction,”* the authors focused on the role of cooperatives in the transformation of agriculture and poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa. The authors further proposed a recentralization approach that could positively strengthen agriculture cooperative marketing and credit policy reform in Uganda.

Both documentation and data handling are important for farmers and other stakeholders to create a platform for assessment of farmers’ needs and for setting goals for future improvement. Due to current low literacy rates, information is often transmitted orally and in process, much important information is lost. The know-how of collecting, managing, and interpreting, data is a useful skill to help African agriculture to grow, expand, and meet its goals. The authors of *“Documentation and Data Handling: How can Africa Promote Record Keeping and Investment in Data Management?”* summarized the importance of managing agricultural data on the continent. The paper reviews why it is important that the continent develops simple, accurate, and verifiable data management systems that are suitable for use by poor, and mostly illiterate, smallholder farmers. It concludes that investments should be directed to facilitate innovative digital tools for data collection and management.

These studies, although performed in specific SSA countries, address problems that are familiar to other countries within the regions. Therefore, the solutions proposed may be seen to be adaptable to similar situations across SSA.