

**Commentary on:**

***An Africa-Europe Agenda for Rural Transformation: Report by  
the Task Force Rural Africa***

Submitted by the African Centre for Biodiversity



**May 2019**

## Background and Summary Information

This brief presents the African Centre for Biodiversity's (ACB) commentary and analysis on the report, *Africa-Europe Agenda for Rural Transformation*.<sup>1</sup> The report is aimed at guiding the implementation of the agricultural side of the European Union (EU)-Africa Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs, which guides the direction of cooperation between the two continents. The Alliance was announced in late 2018 and its content emerges from the commitments of the 5<sup>th</sup> African Union-European Summit held in late 2017. It is situated as part of achieving the goals of a number of frameworks, foremost of which is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The central logic underpinning the Alliance is that of the private sector: it aims to increase private investment, cement trade relations, strengthen the role of the private sector in creating jobs, enhance the business and investment environments, and develop education and skills in support of these.

The Alliance aims to facilitate financing started in 2014 to 44 billion euros by 2020 through blending and guarantees: around 10% from direct EU expenditure and the remainder leveraged through capital markets and national and international financial institutions.<sup>2</sup> Through this it aims to create 10 million jobs in Africa over the next five years.<sup>3</sup> The thrust of the Alliance, and the coordinates of EU support, is essentially a 'modernising' one, in which Africa is supported in developing its educational, technological, legal, financial and investment infrastructure so as to better integrate into and benefit from global trade and investment relations. The report emerges from one of the key action areas of the Alliance, which is to bring public, private and financial operators and academia together on a sectoral basis to 'examine and support strategic developments in critical economic areas'<sup>4</sup> – one of which is agriculture.

*Africa-Europe Agenda for Rural Transformation* says that while Africa's agricultural agenda is largely defined by CAADP, Europe has extensive experience and success in these areas of agricultural and rural development and so a high level of legitimacy in transferring the lessons into the African context. It thus promotes a particular conception of agriculture based on the European model and, more widely, on the European model of social, economic and political integration, and hence the transferability of its underpinnings. Key is thus to make the political and policy space that allows 'European

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (EC). 2019. *Africa-Europe Agenda for Rural Transformation*.

<sup>2</sup> See the graph at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/africaeuropealliance\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/africaeuropealliance_en)

<sup>3</sup> European Commission (EC). 2018. 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council: Communication on a new Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs: Taking our partnership for investment and jobs to the next level'. COM(2018) 643, Brussels.

<sup>4</sup> EC, 2018: 4.

experience, expertise and finance’ to help drive rural and agri-food transformation on the continent.<sup>5</sup>

The report proposes strategies and policies that, through cooperation between Africa and Europe, will enable the African agri-food and rural sector to generate jobs and income for a growing African population. It is planned that in the next few months it will be translated into an action plan by the EU and African Union (AU). The report proposes four key strategic areas for action over the long term, and in the last section six areas of more immediate action that can be undertaken as an ‘Action Plan’ to pave the way for the four longer term recommendations. These four main strategic areas that shape the EU-African agriculture and rural transformation programme are:

1. A territorial approach for income and job creation
2. Sustainable land and natural resources management, and climate action
3. Sustainable transformation of African agriculture
4. Development of the African food industry and markets

The present commentary will briefly describe the approaches proposed under each of the four strategic areas and a brief analysis. It will then provide a short general analysis of the report. Overall, on the one hand, the report appears to make many of the right noises, such as speaking to participatory approaches to planning and territorial approaches to development, integrated views of the position and role of agriculture and food systems, the need to support agriculture in the context of adaptation to climate change and to reduce agriculture’s contributions to ecological degradation, farmer-centred research and development processes, and so on. But on the other, firstly, these are channelled into the logic of commercialisation and private sector growth and investment.

The tensions between the two, and specifically how the former could be undermined by the logic of the latter, are not explored. Thus although it is mentioned that actual implementation of the report’s recommendations will be shaped by each country’s political, social and ecological context, the overriding objective is to get markets working, build entrepreneurs, develop agribusiness and trade, and organise commercialised food value chains, variation in interventions boiling down to where the country stands on the ‘development spectrum.’<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, and related to this, there is a silence on power relations, specifically in relation to the global food regime, and how this overriding logic of commercialisation lends itself to favouring the powerful global actors in the food regime, hence undermining potential

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<sup>5</sup> EC, 2019: 13.

<sup>6</sup> EC, 2019: 13.

efforts at autonomous, people-centred forms of development. Indeed, rather than just a silence, the report promotes a vision of the food system integrated into the global corporate-dominated food regime.

### **Conceptualisation of the Problem**

According to the report, a key problem facing African agriculture is the lack of competitiveness in domestic and foreign markets due to low productivity and lack of economic diversification, natural resource depletion and climate change – which it sees as ‘specific African problems’.<sup>7</sup> The second key challenge is the resource intensity and the ecological degradation caused by the global growth regime, especially climate change. The overarching solution then is that of greening growth, through technological uptake and increasing productivity.

A further problem identified is population growth and that as the African population is projected to grow to 2.5 billion by 2050, its rural population is also expected to grow and remain as a majority into the 2040s, despite urban migration. This poses further significance to supporting and developing the rural economy. It also notes that a high proportion of the rural population is and will be youth, yet African agriculture suffers from low profitability and income, further alienating youth. This is seen as linked to lack of access to land, finance, markets, technologies and practical skills that constrain the development of agriculture and so its attraction to youth.

The report also highlights a generally low human capital index in Africa. A key aspect of this is growing numbers of malnourished and food insecure, which affects development prospects. In short, nutrition, education and health challenges pose a barrier to Africa’s general and agricultural development prospects, and so sustained investment in human capital is a further principle underlying the report’s approach to agricultural development and rural transformation.

We now turn to a more detailed commentary of the report, organised around the four long-term strategic areas. This is partly because the online commentary portal is organised around these same four themes, and so may make our work easier when we submit comments.

#### **1. Territorial Approach**

This section proposes the deployment of the territorial development approach of the FAO, in which improved planning of metropolitan areas and smaller cities and towns are

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<sup>7</sup> EC, 2019: 16.

undertaken together with connective infrastructure. The basis of proposing this approach is the rural-urban inequalities created as a result of colonial administration and economic priorities, and the consequent territorial inequalities. It also recognises that these inequalities were not addressed by traditional rural development policies, which tended to target agriculture at the expense of building ‘synergies’ with the urban network and providing rural education, health, water and electricity infrastructure. It also says that due to global integration on the basis of market liberalisation flagging, Africa should be looking less at exports as the key development strategy and more at developing domestic and regional value chains, but still globally integrated.

A key part of this then is strengthening the new rural-urban dynamics resulting from improved road infrastructure, transport and communications, and improve the ties between agriculture, industrialisation and urbanisation, which have structured economic transitions in the past.<sup>8</sup> This requires greater investment in smaller and regional towns to facilitate the economic linkages between them, the countryside and larger cities. It is in this approach to rural development that agriculture, agri-processing and agri-services can be further developed, according to the report.

This section is thus largely about the public provision of public goods that will in turn support the development of the agri-food sector and rural diversification. It suggests Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) can have an important role to play in financing investments, but also admits that they are not always adequate tools for delivering public goods and so African governments should remain as the main actors for funding. The key aim, however, remains to facilitate private investment and growth.

Proposing the territorial approach seems a useful contribution to conceptualising rural transformation. It acknowledges the importance of democratic participation in shaping priorities: it proposes that European support be targeted at supporting local processes for setting of priorities through ‘place-based innovative local action programmes,’ together with supporting collective action by ‘stakeholders.’ Furthermore, the territorial approach acknowledges that rural transformation cannot simply be reduced to agricultural support provided in an isolated way, but should be supported through an understanding of its embeddedness in a wider economy, rural-urban relations, household multiple livelihood strategies, ecology and social context.

However, at the same time, the technical approach to ‘stakeholders’ (which it variously sees as the state, business organisations, farmer associations and cooperatives, and civil society) does little to acknowledge the multiple actors that the approach would entail and the power relations between them, especially in the context of increasing global corporate

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<sup>8</sup> EC, 2019: 28.

interest in rural African investments, especially agriculture (discussed further below).<sup>9</sup> This section also highlights the role of digitalising rural areas, one of the proposed benefits being to link them to the benefits of Big Data Analysis.<sup>10</sup>

The implications of integrating rural transformation into the global social relations of Big Data are not explored, such as its position in increasing corporate control in agriculture, or of strengthening the wealthy while weakening the position of the marginalised,<sup>11</sup> such as African smallholders. Furthermore, the purportedly positive emphasis on participation should be viewed in the context of what the report believes EU-Africa cooperation in agriculture and rural transformation should aim for: the promotion of markets and technology to boost the commercialisation of African agri-food systems. Participation here might therefore be understood not as allowing for farmers and rural dwellers to frame the outlook guiding a programme of agricultural and rural development, but to use participation to incorporate them into a pre-defined project.<sup>12</sup>

## **2. Sustainable Land and Natural Resources Management**

This section of the report foregrounds the growing demand for natural resources and land use to meet African needs, as well as the growing impacts of climate change on African agriculture, food industries and hunger, and hence the necessity of developing sustainable management of land and natural resources. It also recognises how Africa will be hardest hit by climate change, posing the need to transform agriculture to cope with this, and reduce agriculture's contribution to climate change.<sup>13</sup> This section is thus about 'mainstreaming' climate mitigation and adaptation through land and natural resources management.

While the role of nomadic pastoralists is mentioned in this section, mainly in relation to the impacts of expanded pastoralism on overgrazing and land degradation, and conflicts with farmers, clearer recommendations need to be made on nomadic pastoralists that acknowledge their role in African food systems, and on addressing conflicts with farmers, especially under intensifying climate change conditions.

Although the term Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) is only sparsely mentioned outright in the report, it promotes key aspects of CSA throughout, especially in this section, like

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<sup>9</sup> FoE and ACB. 2016. *Who Will Feed Africans? Small-Scale Farmers and Agroecology Not Corporations!*; ACB. 2016. *Soil Fertility: Agroecology and Not the Green Revolution for Africa*.

<sup>10</sup> EC, 2019: 31.

<sup>11</sup> Mooney, P. 2018. *Blocking the Chain: Industrial Food Chain Concentration, Big Data Platforms and Food Sovereignty Solutions*.

<sup>12</sup> See ACB. 2018. *A Review of Participatory Plant Breeding and Lessons for African Seed and Food Sovereignty Movements*, p. 14-20.

<sup>13</sup> EC, 2019: 36.

responsible private investments in African agriculture, digitisation and Big Data, mobilising climate finance into investments in CSA, and ‘efficient and safe use of fertilisers.’<sup>14</sup>

It recommends tapping into the global financial architecture, especially around climate finance, and building a coalition to mobilise private investment, to finance the mainstreaming of planning links between agriculture, climate, environment and land and natural resources management in Africa. These market-based mechanisms such as REDD+ have generated much controversy as to their practical ineffectiveness, the marketisation of nature, and the reproduction of (rather than transforming) global inequalities.

Thus, in line with CSA, much of what it promotes in terms of land and natural resources management rests on technical and technological solutions. It calls for the increased role of technology and data gathering on things like soil conditions, use of global positioning systems and digital soil mapping to inform farmers of nutrient needs of soil over time, and other digital technologies to support ‘smart farming’.<sup>15</sup> However, while the report makes numerous and bold claims about the transformative impact digitalisation can have on African agriculture, there is little proof that digitalisation is having such effects at all in global agriculture. Secondly, most African countries do not have a Data Protection Act, which means citizens’ (and farmers’) rights in terms of collected data and its use are not protected. Thirdly, according to ICT studies, 90% of the data on Africa is stored in Europe and North America, raising questions of sovereignty and neo-colonial relations. In agriculture as well, digitalisation is handing over huge amounts of data to corporate entities, particularly salient in the context of Big Data and its role in corporate agricultural consolidation and profit-making.<sup>16</sup> Fourthly, whereas the report sees digitalisation as an opportunity to enhance women’s and youths’ participation in agriculture, digitalisation is in many cases in fact reflecting and amplifying gender, class and rural-urban divides.<sup>17</sup> The report poses technology as a key solution to poverty, rather than focusing on how addressing social inequality is a precondition for more equitable benefits to accrue from technology diffusion.

The vision of agriculture promoted in the report, based on CSA, is essentially a response to the climate crisis that promotes more of the same. CSA is rooted in a Green Revolution paradigm where privately-owned technologies controlled by agribusiness are promoted, such as GM technology, which will supposedly sequester carbon and sold as carbon

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<sup>14</sup> EC, 2019: 37.

<sup>15</sup> EC, 2019: 37.

<sup>16</sup> Mooney, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> See Hernandez, K. and T. Roberts. 2018. *Leaving No One Behind in a Digital World*. K4D Emerging Issues Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

credits to rich polluters in the North – a further marketisation of the air and nature.<sup>18</sup> The Global Alliance on CSA includes some of the world’s biggest agribusiness and food corporations, who have the greatest resources to advance it in a way that meets their objectives, it imposes environmentally damaging technologies, and it shifts the burden of dealing with climate change onto those least responsible for it but who are the most vulnerable to its impacts – African small scale farmers and rural dwellers.<sup>19</sup> CSA is thus being elaborated through configurations of the global food regime in ways that extend the power of large agribusiness and food actors by repackaging industrial techniques and corporate-controlled inputs as the solution to climate change.<sup>20</sup>

The ACB’s extensive research in various African countries has revealed that the impacts of integrating small farmers into Green Revolution technologies and applications have been dire: farmers are trapped in a debt cycle as they become dependent on costly external inputs, synthetic fertiliser use is sky-high, adoption of hybrid seeds comes at the cost of abandoning the diversity and resilience of local varieties, and overall net transfers away from farming households towards agribusiness take place as a result of adoption of Green Revolution technologies.<sup>21</sup>

By targeting its work towards CSA, the EU would be supporting a false solution that integrates small farmers into serving corporate interests, when agroecology has increasingly been recognised as a more sustainable alternative to industrial agriculture grounded in social transformation and the shifts in relations of political power. However, the report does not acknowledge the recommendations of key high-level bodies and reports on the necessity for agroecology, such as the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) and the IAASTD.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. Supporting the Sustainable Transformation of African Agriculture

The key problem framing this section is that 60% of the sub-Saharan African workforce is employed in agriculture, but the sector suffers from low productivity, underemployment, lack of a Green Revolution<sup>23</sup> and poor ability to compete globally. The ‘transformation’ of African agriculture thus essentially means its modernisation,

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<sup>18</sup> ACB. 2015. *Profiting from the Climate Crisis, Undermining Resilience in Africa: Gates and Monsanto’s Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) Project*. Johannesburg: African Centre for Biodiversity.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*; Newell, P. and O. Taylor. 2017. ‘Contested Landscapes: The Global Political Economy of Climate-Smart Agriculture’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2017.1324426

<sup>20</sup> Newell, P. and O. Taylor. 2017. ‘Contested Landscapes: The Global Political Economy of Climate-Smart Agriculture’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2017.1324426

<sup>21</sup> ACB. 2014. *Running to Stand Still: Small-Scale Farmers and the Green Revolution in Malawi*.

<sup>22</sup> IPES-Food. 2016. *From Uniformity to Diversity: A Paradigm Shift from Industrial Agriculture to Diversified Agroecological Systems*; IAASTD. 2009. *Agriculture at a Crossroads: Global Report*.

<sup>23</sup> EC, 2019: 49.



inspired by the model of OECD countries, in which development of the sector involved massively increased productivity and competitiveness, as well as land and production consolidation, pushing labour away from agriculture. This in the African context, according to the report, will have to be compensated for through agro-industrialisation. This focus on modernisation is, however, highly problematic, based as it is on little exploration or consideration of the complexity of existing African food systems.

The report favours supporting family farming as the bedrock of growth in the sector as opposed to large-scale corporate agriculture because of its labour absorption potential, ability to promote agricultural intensification, business development, and its linkages to the socioeconomic context.<sup>24</sup> It also acknowledges the problems and threats posed to family farming and ecological integrity by unregulated expansion of cropland, large-scale land deals, land concentration and elite capture, and thus acknowledges the need to formally protect land rights of existing users.<sup>25</sup>

Part of the modernisation of agriculture is that it states that in countries where significant agricultural growth has occurred there has been ‘structural transformation’ through non-farm labour productivity growth – one of the problems identified is that many small farmers are ‘trapped’ in agriculture, and so employment in other sectors of the economy would help them to escape poverty, decrease pressure on natural resources and increase the productivity of agriculture.<sup>26</sup> It recognises rural differentiation and so acknowledges that such ‘modernisation’ could produce what it calls social marginalisation, and to compensate for this calls for policies to support rural diversification, a big part of which includes agro-industrialisation. However, how exactly the global trend of ‘surplus populations’ that cannot survive off under-supported agriculture alone and are not absorbed by urban industry would be bucked is not entirely clear. It seems to simply assume that expansion of markets up- and downstream of agriculture will absorb labour from agriculture, without an analysis of winners and losers right along the value chain in the context of differing abilities in terms of power and resources to benefit from its development (discussed further in the next section).

Consistent with its modernisation thrust, a recurring theme of the report is the need for mechanisation of production, increased technology uptake, and digitisation. It calls for agricultural solutions to be developed based on context and guided by the necessity of reducing its ecological impact in the context of climate change, but still endorses ‘the rational use of biotechnology with modest external inputs’,<sup>27</sup> pointing to CSA, dealt with

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<sup>24</sup> EC, 2019: 44.

<sup>25</sup> EC, 2019: 47.

<sup>26</sup> EC, 2019: 43.

<sup>27</sup> EC, 2019: 45.

above. This includes potential subsidies to help farmers access input markets, such as for chemical fertilisers, to increase their yields.<sup>28</sup>

However, the lessons of current Farmer Input Subsidy Programmes (FISP), based on the provision of Green Revolution technologies, need to be taken into account. ACB's research has shown that farmer indebtedness increases, farmers are locked into dependency on high-cost external input markets, and subsidies are targeted at single cash crops, thus increasing farmer vulnerability and reducing nutritional diversity and resilience, via a process that channels public expenditure into private hands (seed and fertiliser companies).<sup>29</sup> Again, using the European model of agriculture as an aspiration for African agriculture is misplaced: the EU, and especially Germany, are key examples of disastrous overuse of fertiliser and pesticides and of a growth model that pushes farmers out of agriculture, with an annual loss of 2%-5% of farmers. It is essentially a well-recycled myth that the EU farming policies are doing well for farmers and nature.

It also promotes the establishment of coordinated agricultural research infrastructure that is not based on the top-down linear model, but co-elaboration of combining scientific and farmer knowledge and that is not simply centred on agronomic research but that is connected with social research in the context of the complexity of rural systems. The overarching aim, however, is to serve the purpose of market functioning, business development and the growth of the private sector. The section also recommends supporting farmers' collective action in the form of associations and cooperatives, in the context of this organisation of the 'private sector' in relation to the market and political processes.

The report also notes the importance of re-orienting food systems to local and regional markets to avoid long-distance movement of goods as much as possible and connecting local producers and consumers. This is also understood, however, in the language of improving 'efficiency'.<sup>30</sup> It is also not clear how this aligns with the bulk of the report, which emphasises international competitiveness and an apparent assumption of global market participation, and regional trade and integration through the likes of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and free trade agreements with the EU. One way to interpret this is that it favours the linking of local production and consumption, but through a commercialised industrial food model that is also globally integrated through trade, inputs and finance. Even if this were feasible, the core question remains: how to protect African producers and processors against the highly supported European farming

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<sup>28</sup> EC, 2019: 49.

<sup>29</sup> ACB, 2014. *Running to Stand Still*; ACB. 2016. *Soil Fertility*.

<sup>30</sup> EC, 2019: 49.

and processing sectors, and those of other countries. WTO trade rules continue to pose a barrier to supporting African agriculture.

#### 4. Development of the African Food Industry and Markets

This section is premised on the notion that growing African food demand presents a growth opportunity for the African food industry. The key challenges for this to be realised are constraints on competitiveness, low levels of investment, low levels of value chain organisation and value added, low export diversification, and barriers to increasing trade<sup>31</sup> (which also seems to contradict earlier proclamations about trying to focus more on local and regional production and consumption, but see possible explanation above).<sup>32</sup>

The section essentially advances proposals for developing and consolidating an industrial food system, exemplified by supermarkets, cold chains and so on.<sup>33</sup> This corresponds with the notion that a key need to develop the food value chain is private sector investment, which should come from the African private sector but foreign enterprises (another term some might use is ‘global food corporations’) and investments will also be key. Although a significant part of this section is devoted to discussing the need to ensure a flow of European financial investment into sustainable agriculture, rural entrepreneurs and agribusiness. However, this is premised on ensuring the profitability of private capital, which calls for public support to ensure so. The food value chain will thus be shaped by attempts to marry profitable investments for private capital with ‘pro-poor growth’.<sup>34</sup>

Further, within this approach, there would certainly be African winners, such as ‘emerging’ African farmers and those better positioned in the structure of rural social differentiation to take advantage of the opportunities created by this approach, but there is no guarantee that those winners will be the poor. The narrow approach of prioritising commercialisation and value chain development instead poses the risk of producing a pattern of exclusionary and unequal development in rural areas, which our research has shown is already happening as a result of the application of Green Revolution technologies through Farmer Input Subsidy Programmes (FISP).<sup>35</sup> In its current framing, it is virtually guaranteed that the poor will lose out through the implementation of this approach.

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<sup>31</sup> EC, 2019: 54.

<sup>32</sup> EC, 2019: 49

<sup>33</sup> EC, 2019: 55.

<sup>34</sup> EC, 2019: 57.

<sup>35</sup> ACB. 2019. □ ACB. 2019. *Input Subsidies in Mozambique: The Future of Peasant Farmers and their Seed Systems*. Johannesburg: African Centre for Biodiversity; ACB. 2016. *Soil Fertility*, p. 15.

This section also sees growing African food demand as a growth opportunity for the African food industry to organise the formal value chain, develop quality controls and phytosanitary standards, boost regional trade through free trade agreements, and so on. However, it has been widely shown how increasing urbanisation and the growth of the middle class also goes along with increased consumption of processed food, increased meat consumption and, consequently, increased non-communicable diseases (NCDs). This has sometimes been called the ‘nutrition transition’.<sup>36</sup> How these issues are linked to the very model of food system the report promotes is not addressed.

Furthermore, although the report acknowledges the diversity of agroecological zones, this seems to have little bearing on its recommendations. The reproduction of the model of the European food value chain remains the objective. However, the massive variations of agroecological zones on the continent make certain forms of production and food systems necessary, but which do not conform to the European model.

In its rush to propose the development of private sector-organised, commercialised value chains, the report exhibits an astounding vacuum in comprehension of existing African food systems, describing them only in terms of their deficiencies. However, food systems such as the case of milk production in the Sahel, the maximum production of which is shaped by rainfall patterns but which feed millions, will never be able to compete on world market-based prices, and so these systems and their farmers will be marginalised through the process of increased global integration and narrow commercialisation, in turn having severe implications for African food security.

The model thus being promoted here is that of the commercialised industrial food system. There is no consideration in this section of how consolidation of commercial food value chains might reduce dietary diversity and therefore also agricultural biodiversity (the latter being concern raised elsewhere in the report) as particular crops gain prevalence in commercial food circuits of value-adding. This, together with not considering the ecological implications of dietary change (recently put on the global agenda most forcefully by the EAT-Lancet Commission, and also outlined in a little-publicised FAO report)<sup>37</sup> seems to contradict the report’s stated aims of dealing with ecological implications of agriculture; something perhaps partly explained by its promotion of the dominant agro-food system.

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<sup>36</sup> Tschirley, D. *et al.* 2015. ‘The Rise of a Middle Class in East and Southern Africa: Implications for Food System Transformation’, *Journal of International Development* 27, pp. 628-646; Steyn, N. *et al.* 2006. *Dietary Changes and the Health Transition in South Africa: Implications for Health Policy*. Cape Town: South African Medical Research Council.

<sup>37</sup> EAT-Lancet Commission. 2018. *Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems: Food Planet Health*. Summary Report of the EAT-Lancet Commission; FAO. 2018. *The Future of Food and Agriculture: Alternative Pathways to 2050*. Rome: The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.

Which brings us to the following point: there seems to be a siloing of agriculture (Chapter 5) and the food value chain (Chapter 6): little is said of how a more commercialised and profit-organised food system drives agricultural change by shaping demand; while it focuses on the need to make agriculture more ecologically sustainable, it says little about the ecological effects of the food chain up- and down-stream of farming, which globally are large contributors to greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>38</sup>

## **General Comments**

An overarching omission of the report is its failure to deal with power relations and inequalities. Its analyses and proposals largely centre on markets and technology. While it alludes to inequalities, it never quite proposes anything about dealing with them. However, understanding general and food system challenges facing Africa, its position within global inequalities, and inequalities manifested within and across African societies, are surely crucial to engage with. Instead, the bulk of the report proposes technical and technological solutions, which means that while questions of land rights, access to climate finance and so on are mentioned, little is said about how to substantively address them. For example, it acknowledges that while Africa is only responsible for 4% of historical greenhouse gas emissions, 27 of the 33 countries to be most affected by climate change are African.<sup>39</sup>

This raises a stark question of justice and inequality, which many believe should therefore frame questions of issues like climate finance, in the form of climate debt. Yet the failures of initiatives like the Green Climate Fund are not mentioned, nor the broader failure of the rich world to mobilise the necessary finance to assist the less wealthy world to adapt and mitigate, and are instead couched in terms of development cooperation. It says little about global ecological debt.

Similarly, population growth is a prevailing consideration underpinning the report's approach to climate change, natural resources use and management, and hunger. In this regard it does not mention unequal distribution of resources (globally and within countries) as shaping environmental impacts.

Part of this unequal distribution of resources is that while Africa has no Common Agricultural Policy, that of the EU is worth close to 60 billion euros annually, thus manifesting a global injustice of agricultural support within which African farmers cannot compete. Of course, the report mentions that after independence African

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<sup>38</sup> GRAIN. 2016. *The Great Climate Robbery: How the Food System Drives Climate Change and What We Can Do About it*. GRAIN, Daraja Press, Tulika Books and Spinifex Press.

<sup>39</sup> EC, 2019: 36.

governments failed to develop something like a CAP and taxed rather than subsidised their agricultural sectors, but subsequent to this the capacities for public investment and support to African farmers have been systematically dismantled in the context of structural adjustment programmes and WTO trade rules, and the vacuum is being filled by private sector- and donor-led programmes like AGRA, as discussed above, distorting agriculture in favour of multinational interests.

This failure to adequately deal with questions of inequality extends to its processual recommendations. The report adopts a stakeholder approach, in which participatory mechanisms of planning and dialogue are promoted in order to bring all actors, potentially conflictual, and understood as being from the realms of government, business and civil society, together. However, power inequalities are therefore shunned aside. For example, if business must be treated as a stakeholder, agrochemical and seed corporations have been growing their stake in African agriculture: should they be brought around the table to play a purportedly 'equal' role as resource poor peasants in agricultural planning? How do the power relations given rise to by programmes like AGRA and the G8's Alliance for Food and Nutrition Security in Africa, which are largely about advancing corporate interests, relate to this stakeholder approach?

The report therefore does not deal with the dynamics of the global food regime, and how powerful food and agrochemical corporations are shaping agri-food systems in their interests. Much of the report proposes public-private partnerships, but hardly explains who it conceptualises these actors will be, especially as to the private actors. In existing leading PPP arrangements promoted by North towards agriculture in Africa, like AGRA and G8's Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Africa, large multinational seed, fertiliser and agrochemical companies set the agenda. While it phrases such PPPs and foreign investment by 'foreign enterprises' in the form of 'partnership', it takes little cognisance of the unequal power relationships that cohere when huge multinational agri-food corporations that operate as part of the global food regime meet small African farmers and African states that, according to the report, are currently poorly equipped to regulate and direct the development of 'modern' food value chains.

A critical concern of the report is growing the private sector and harnessing private investment and trade relations. This involves harmonisation of trade laws, phytosanitary measures and so on, to facilitate greater formalisation of cross-border trade and investment under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The AfCFTA is seen as providing impetus and opportunities to the development of Africa agri-food chains. The assumption is that farmers and rural dwellers will be incorporated into this 'formal' system through the organisation and greater commercialisation of the food value chain. However, how it might in fact marginalise and render illegal trading by farmers

and small traders outside of this system is not considered.<sup>40</sup> In this regard, the report repeatedly emphasises the need to support and align with policies and objectives defined by CAADP. However, CAADP has been criticised by African civil society for advancing a logic of trying to create the conditions for investment by bowing to the requirements of multinational companies that will allow them to extract profits and resources from African land and agricultural investments.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, the report acknowledges the tensions that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) caused around dumping of surplus European production in African markets opened up by trade liberalisation. However, it ultimately sees the problems of African agriculture as caused by poor African policy decisions and sees the CAP as a source of lessons for agricultural development in Africa.<sup>42</sup> However, how liberalised African food and agricultural markets and subsidised European agriculture put African and European farmers in (unfair) competition with each other is not considered in the report. Rather, African policy changes and greater trade integration are the solution, without questioning the global trade regime and WTO regulations and inequalities shaping it.

Furthermore, as the report focuses on transforming African food systems, this inevitably includes impacts on urban food systems, which again are also heavily impacted by trade relations, and in turn reduce demand for African produce from the rural areas. Many urban food systems in Africa are linked to import harbours that deliver food products from the global market, which blocks local producers from entering the markets. This further links to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which is increasingly targeting these markets with processed products. This is further shaping both African diets and shrinking the market for African produce. Thus the report's emphasis on enhancing regional and global trade poses grave threats of further marginalisation of a great portion of African producers.

The report therefore fails to deal with the current wave of corporate investment in African agriculture and the implications for agri-food system transformation (beyond referring to the CFS's responsible investment guidelines and the FAO's Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land). This leads to a lack of clarity on issues like seed. It states that access to improved seed remains a problem for many farmers, but does not clarify what kind of system should be advanced for improving seed: farmer-centred systems or corporate-centred ones embedded in globalised input sources? It references reports by those like the Access to Seeds Index, which focus on growing the commercial seed sector in Africa. However, in other parts of the report it mentions the importance of

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<sup>40</sup> See 'Statement by Civil Society in Africa – Modernising African Agriculture: Who Benefits?' No date.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> EC, 2019: 21.

farmers being supported in managing and sustaining their own seeds on-farm. This possible inconsistency partly points to the fact that the dynamics of corporate control and consolidation in the global seed sector, how this is playing out in Africa, and the implications for African agri-food systems,<sup>43</sup> are insufficiently considered in the report.

The report acknowledges that contributions of agriculture to climate change but, firstly, fails to name the particular model of agriculture that is responsible and, secondly, at the same time aims to promote the European model of (industrial) agri-food systems in Africa, a model that is responsible for significant contributions to climate change. Similarly, in its rush to promote this model, there is virtually no consideration of existing African food systems: how they are currently organised to meet food needs, their practices, roles in conserving and reproducing agricultural biodiversity, stores of generational and indigenous knowledge, ecological dimensions, and so on. Instead, it is limited to describing African agriculture as unproductive, uncompetitive, insufficiently mechanised, lacking in technology, and therefore in need of interventions to correct these failures. Indeed, improvements in African agriculture on some of these fronts can surely be positive if conceptualised in particular ways, as many African farmers themselves might desire, but the model and social and economic relations through which these should happen are promoted by the report in relation to marketisation, the dominant food regime, private sector investment, and business development.

A critical concern of the report is thus growing the private sector and harnessing private investment. This involves harmonisation of trade laws, phytosanitary measures and so on, to facilitate greater formalisation of cross-border trade and investment under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The AfCFTA is seen as providing impetus and opportunities to the development of Africa agri-food chains. The assumption is that farmers and rural dwellers will be incorporated into this 'formal' system through the organisation and greater commercialisation of the food value chain. However, how it might in fact marginalise and render illegal trading by farmers and small traders outside of this system is not considered. In this regard, the report repeatedly emphasises the need to support and align with policies and objectives defined by CAADP. However, CAADP has been criticised by African civil society for advancing a logic of trying to create the conditions for investment by bowing to the requirements of multinational companies that will allow them to extract profits and resources from African land and agricultural investments. Lastly, a foundation of the report is that the youth and women must be at the centre of programmes and policies advanced through the EU-Africa partnership. The constraints on young people and on women are hardly disaggregated, and its approach to

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<sup>43</sup> See ACB. 2017. *The Three Agricultural Input Mega-Mergers: Grim Reapers of South Africa's Food and Farming Systems*; ETC Group. 2015. *Breaking Bad: Big Ag Mega-Mergers in Play: Dow + Du Pont in the Pocket? Next: Demonsanto?* ETC Group Communiqué 115.



their empowerment is simply to target them for inclusion in all policies and programmes. For the youth, it is to modernise agriculture so as to make it more attractive for them, to create employment opportunities through agro-industrialisation, and to introduce technology and digitalisation. For women, there is no attempt to understand the multiple determinants of gender inequality, and the solutions of markets and technology fails to consider how they affect women under relations of inequality.<sup>44</sup>

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

If one were to try and capture the essence of the report, one might say it is oriented towards promoting the capitalist transformation of African agriculture, through a path of ‘accumulation from below’ based on family farmers, participatory democracy and planning, policy space, technological improvement and efficiency, ecological balance, protection of land rights and rural diversification. It thus includes some of the demands of those like the food sovereignty movement, around local markets, public support for family farmers, participatory planning and knowledge building, but embeds them in a framing of private sector and entrepreneurial growth that essentially intends to tie African farmers into global circuits of finance and accumulation.

These thus become constituent elements of reproducing what Selwyn calls the anti-poverty consensus, which ‘advocates for the continued expansion and deepening of capitalist social relations.’<sup>45</sup> The ultimate aim of the progressive methodologies that might be contained in the report are to develop entrepreneurs/‘agripreneurs’, grow the private sector, and embed ‘business’ as the organising logic of African agri-food systems. This elides the multiplicity of existing agricultural and rural pathways, knowledge systems, inequalities and struggles, and the ways in which alternatives like agroecology and food sovereignty are being advanced on the continent.

If the EU wishes to support an agricultural system and rural transformation that achieves true environmental sustainability, social equality, improved incomes and democratic participation and decision-making, we recommend that the following informs its approach to investment:

### ***Investment and Finance***

Currently the report emphasises private sources of investment and leveraging funds from the market-based climate finance mechanisms. These sources are oriented towards

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<sup>44</sup> Clapp, J., P. Newell and Z.W. Brent. 2017. ‘The Global Political Economy of Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Systems’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies* DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2017.1381602

<sup>45</sup> Selwyn, B. 2017. *The Struggle for Development*. Cambridge: Polity Press. p. 152.

private returns of financiers and Northern corporations and hence promote risky and corporate-oriented agricultural systems. Instead, the EU should:

- Explore ways of supporting public investment, not simply as a means of laying the framework for the diffusion and consolidation of private goods, but as an integral overarching element for supporting transformed agri-food systems;
- Increased public investment presupposes the building up of public finances and thus also relates to other possible areas of cooperation beyond agriculture, such as establishment of just tax and redistributive regimes (including appropriate corporate taxation), improving tax collection capacities, measures to alter the global flows of finance that currently bias wealthy Northern countries, with the aim of concentrating necessary finance in Africa, beyond the whims of capital markets. Such measures are of course well beyond the direct remit of this report, but systemic thinking is required that sees how the fortunes of agricultural and rural areas are interlinked with global flows of finance, investment and accumulation.
- Part of such public investment should aim at credit and input schemes that are centred on a democratically-derived vision of agri-food and rural transformation, grounded in collective benefit, true ecological sustainability and agricultural biodiversity, and democratic economic relations, rather than on capital markets.

### ***Digitalisation***

- If the EU wishes to promote digitalisation, there needs to be Data Protection Acts in place in the partnering African countries. Although the report states that the EU ‘can help build the capacity of African countries in Big Data Analytics for agriculture’, it can be more specific in that the EU should first support the formulation of a model Data Protection Act.
- The EU also needs to provide support to enabling African countries to store the data themselves and to ensure that existing social inequalities do not shape who benefits from increased technology and digitalisation.

### ***Agroecology, and Socially and Ecologically Just Food Chains***

The ACB’s and others’ research has shown that it is those farmers who maintain diverse agricultural systems that are better able to withstand climate and economic shocks.<sup>46</sup> Rather than Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA), what is required for agroecological transitions in African agriculture include:

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<sup>46</sup> ACB. 2019. *Input Subsidies in Mozambique: The Future of Peasant Farmers and their Seed Systems*. Johannesburg: African Centre for Biodiversity.

- Rather than facilitating greater market access for fertiliser companies, focus on means of expanding organic content in the soil within an orientation to nurturing soil life as the basis for soil fertility; agroecological methods of soil improvement and water retention; and diverse rather than monocultural production.
- Enhancing understanding of the best ways and tools to facilitate and augment agroecological practices – this involves recognising multiple, interconnected sources of knowledge and research. As the IPES-Food advises,<sup>47</sup> this includes that African farmers and rural dwellers should be viewed in relation to their massive stores of knowledge that needs to be supported and expanded as a basis for transformed food systems, rather than as a blank slate of insufficiency in need of Western technology, productivity and competitive enhancement.
- The significance of farmer associations and cooperatives should not only be seen in relation to their stakeholder role in engaging government, business and regional and export markets, but in connecting agroecological knowledge and practice through farmer networks, and in representing locally determined priorities that should guide foreign assistance programmes like those of the EU.<sup>48</sup>
- Food policies should thus be developed arising from these principles, rather than on the imperative of free trade regimes like the AfCFTA. The focus should be on human health and nutrition and breaking with the use of agrochemicals and fertilisers.<sup>49</sup> The proposals for harmonisation of food safety rules should be reconsidered, given their tendency to be tailored to industrial food systems and trade, with reduced diversity and negative impacts on peasant and agroecological systems.<sup>50</sup>
- Such considerations should also be extended to the conceptualisation of supply chains and retail infrastructures. Of course, African farmers need markets. However, mass (supermarket) outlets are not the only option for connecting production to consumers. Throughout Africa, ‘informal’ distribution channels and markets selling farmers’ (and other) products remain a key source of food consumption. Rather than being seen as outmoded in favour of supermarkets, such channels and market forms should be further supported, elaborated and modified on the basis of connecting agroecological production, farmer incomes, and nutritional diversity and security in consumption. Research should also be undertaken to further understand the diversity of African food systems, the need to keep them working and support needs.<sup>51</sup>
- In further relation to this, clearer recommendations need to be made on nomadic pastoralists that acknowledge their role in African food systems, and on

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<sup>47</sup> IPES-Food. 2016. *From Uniformity to Diversity*.

<sup>48</sup> FoE and ACB. 2016. *Who Will Feed Africans?* p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> IPES-Food. 2016. *From Uniformity to Diversity*, p. 69.

<sup>51</sup> IPES-Food. 2016. *From Uniformity to Diversity*, p. 70.

addressing conflicts with farmers, especially under intensifying climate change conditions. Simply building a private sector-led, industrial food system without specifically considering the role of nomadic pastoralists could amplify existing conflicts.

## **Regulation of Seed Systems**

There is growing recognition that farmer seed systems remain the foundation of agricultural production in Africa and are tightly linked to the ability to transition agriculture to the required agroecological (not Climate Smart) systems through strengthening biodiversity.<sup>52</sup> Hence, rather than fostering a narrowly commercial seed system, support and cooperation would be better aimed at:

- Promoting greater public investment in R&D and extension services that focus on identifying, prioritising and supporting work around participatory plant breeding and participatory variety selection;
- Farmer managed seed certification and quality assurance systems;
- Identifying and supporting the development of locally important crops on the basis of decentralised participatory R&D;
- Re-crafting farmer input subsidy programmes (FISPs) to integrate the outcomes of the above.

Furthermore, the report does not deal with the harmonisation of seed laws taking place across the continent through regional protocols and agreements, which aim at orienting seed systems towards commercial control and multinational interests.<sup>53</sup> Any work on seed, alluded to in the report, should aim at:

- Legal frameworks that support and facilitate farmer managed seed systems (FMSS) and non-commercial intermediate seed systems;
- Address aspects of existing harmonisation laws and programmes that restrict smallholder farmers' access to quality seed and restrict their abilities to exchange and trade seed. Specifically, frameworks that ensure exemptions for farmer plant varieties currently outside of the legal frameworks, as well as flexibility for farmer use relating to varieties protected in current legal regimes, both based on farmers' rights;<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> ACB. 2019. *Towards National and Regional Seed Policies in Africa That Recognise and Support Farmer Seed Systems*. Johannesburg: African Centre for Biodiversity.

<sup>53</sup> ACB. 2019. *Production Quality Controls in Farmer Seed Systems in Africa*. Johannesburg: African Centre for Biodiversity.

<sup>54</sup> ACB. 2019. *Towards National and Regional Seed Policies in Africa That Recognise and Support Farmer Seed Systems*.

- Overall, the EU's support to legislative reform should not simply focus on trade and harmonisation but should be framed by farmers' rights. In this sense, the EU should be guided by the International Treaty for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), especially Article 9, which specifically speaks to farmers' rights. At the moment, the Treaty is not even mentioned in the report, although EU member states are signatories to it.
- Hence, rather than growth of the private sector being the driving goal, the EU should support countries in developing national action plans for implementation of Article 9 of the Treaty. Farmer organisations should further be engaged and supported on the basis of Article 9, hence not just in terms of connecting them to the European growth model or accessing commercial inputs. Article 9 suggests a reconfiguration of how the EU frames its support to African agriculture. It suggests a key focus on agriculture should be on promoting biodiverse production systems and facilitating participatory approaches to plant breeding, preservation of genetic resources, seed fairs and so on.
- Rather than simply emulating the EU food system model, this also requires supporting platforms for sharing of experiences and knowledge *within* Africa of implementing Article 9 of the Treaty.

### ***Research and Extension***

The emphasis in the report on expanding research and extension infrastructure involving the state and co-elaboration with farmers is important. However, it is important to avoid a leading role for the private sector and the current emphasis on private extension services.<sup>55</sup> Support should instead emphasise:

- The building of *public* research and extension services that are insulated from the accumulation priorities of global agribusinesses;
- Are informed by smallholder farmer priorities in the context of climate change, democratic participation and social transformation.

**Indeed, the recommendations provided here imply a complete paradigm shift from that exhibited in the report, *Africa-Europe Agenda for Rural Transformation*, whose stated rationale is increased cooperation between the agri-food sectors in Africa and the EU,<sup>56</sup> thus implying a corporate-driven approach.**

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<sup>55</sup> EC, 2019: 67.

<sup>56</sup> EC, 2019: 12.

**Nonetheless, this commentary and its recommendations provide a perspective that might inform an agenda for cooperation that takes as its starting point the ideals of democratic agenda-setting, responsive public institutions that prioritise the climate crisis and the imperative of socially just relations, ecological restoration and diversity, and imperative alternatives to the dominant agri-food system, rather than the European, corporate-organised agri-food system.**

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mariam Mayet', written in a cursive style.

Mariam Mayet

Executive Director  
African Centre for Biodiversity