

# Collective Advocacy Messages on Agriculture



Accelerating growth in Africa's agriculture is critical to the sustained growth of its economies and improving the lives of millions of poor people, particularly women, who depend directly upon agriculture for their livelihoods and food security. In sub-Saharan Africa agriculture contributes at least 40% of exports, 30% of GDP, up to 30% of foreign exchange earnings, and 70-80% of employment<sup>1</sup>. Business Action for Africa<sup>2</sup> members who operate in Africa in the agricultural sector recognise the crucial role of agriculture and call for action in five key areas:

## 1. Effective risk management lies at the heart of achieving agriculture that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

- There are many inherent risks in agriculture – such as unpredictable rainfall, depleted soils, pests, weeds and crop diseases and world commodity prices – and farmers in Africa face additional risks, including HIV/AIDS, malaria, political instability and unreliable infrastructure. Climate change will most likely increase these risks.
- It is crucial that farmers can obtain the information and means to better manage and reduce their already high exposure to risk. This can be achieved through better access to markets and capital, secure income streams through long term relationships with customers, appropriate technologies, farm inputs, diversified crop and animal portfolios, secure land tenure, and the availability of water and adequate irrigation.

## 2. Connecting smallholder farmers with local markets and supply chains that link with national, regional and global economies is crucial for scaling-up growth in the agricultural sector and improving the prospects and welfare of its farmers.

- Building the capacity of farmers to meet the requirements of customers is vital if they are to link successfully into commercial supply chains, which includes being able to meet product quality and environmental standards, and get products to customers on time and in good condition.
- Private and public agencies should not encourage farmers to move into new crops unless the farmers are in a position to meet customer requirements now or in the near future, which may require significant investment in training, inputs, irrigation and infrastructure.
- Developing effective farmer organisations, owned by farmers themselves are important support mechanisms that can contribute to joint assurance, certification, training and purchasing agreements. These are particularly effective where linked to support programmes such as farmer field schools.
- Local small and medium enterprises have an essential role to play in creating markets, supplying inputs, processing produce and providing employment for rural communities.
- Investment in research and rural institutions is needed to increase opportunities, choice and improve information on accessing markets – for example through mobile telephones.

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<sup>1</sup> Commission for Africa, 2005: 237

<sup>2</sup> Business Action for Africa is an international network of businesses and business organisations from Africa and around the world, created in 2005 to build on the momentum of the Commission for Africa and 2005 G8.

Visit [www.businessactionforafrica.org](http://www.businessactionforafrica.org) for more detail and membership information.

### **3. Developing long term, stable relationships with customers is key to improving the security of farmer income streams so that they can invest in their future.**

- Sustainable agriculture will not be achieved unless farmers have a realistic idea of the current and future levels of demand for their crops, the right incentives to invest in their farms over the long-term, and a diversified crop portfolio to ensure food security. Too often, farmers are encouraged to grow a different crop, expecting higher levels of demand and better prices than their existing crops, only to find that too many other farmers have been encouraged to do the same or cheaper imports have been allowed, leading to oversupply and much lower than expected prices.
- Efforts to improve the welfare and productivity of farmers should not be directed solely at particular crops which can create an over-dependence that is unsustainable if prices collapse for one crop, or if other extraneous factors make supply difficult. Rather efforts should focus on the farmers themselves, improving their capacity, knowledge, practices and livelihoods, and helping them grow a 'diversified and balanced portfolio' of crops.

### **4. Tackling land tenure issues is central to the sustainability challenge; farmers have little or no incentive to invest if they do not have secure tenure.**

- Land tenure across Africa takes many forms, typically informal, but what is almost universal is the absence of secure formal property rights that can be enforced and traded – as they can in much of the rest of the world. In sub-Saharan Africa only 1% of land is officially registered<sup>3</sup>.
- The absence of formal titles to land means that farmers have no collateral against which they can borrow and, faced with poor access to capital and prohibitively high interest rates, they lack the capital needed upfront to invest in their land or grow new, more profitable crops.

### **5. Sustainable agriculture is not possible without adequate water supplies and irrigation, but it cannot be looked at in isolation.**

- Barely 4% of arable land in sub-Saharan Africa is irrigated<sup>4</sup> exposing farmers to great risks from low rainfall. Farmers have little incentive or capability to invest in better soil and water management practices and irrigation systems if they don't have secure land tenure, can't access capital and if they can't rely on secure income streams through long term relationships with customers.
- The most profitable crops typically require the most water inputs; farmers should not be encouraged to farm crops where accessing water is a major problem.
- Appropriate micro-irrigation systems such as 'micro-dams', 'catch and store' technologies and drip feed' irrigation schemes should be encouraged as they can be effectively managed by rural communities and do not cause the considerable environmental and social disruptions that tend to accompany big dam projects.

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<sup>3</sup> Commission for Africa, 2005: 239

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