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**Playing catch-up in the agricultural sector:
Some practical problems from West Africa**

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**PLAYING CATCH- UP IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR: SOME
PRACTICAL PROBLEMS FROM WEST AFRICA**

By

Frank De Veer

INTRODUCTION

Based on my experience and observations as a farmer over the past 17 years in Ghana, I will :

- Highlight some of the problems which contribute to low productivity levels leading to low returns on investment and income levels.
- Put forward some suggestions aimed at increasing productivity and income levels.

What Are Some Of These Problems?

- Land, Labour and Water
- Land Preparation, soil management, fertilizer and other Agro-Chemicals
- Seeds, Planting, Pest Control etc.
- Harvesting and Post harvest
- Extension Services, Information and Science & Technology
- Credit and Investment
- Productivity Levels
- Marketing and Farmer-based Organizations

Land

- Land acquisition
- Difficult to acquire large tracts of land (even 20ha).
- Competition: mining, quarrying , real estate development etc.
- Land for peri-urban agric fast vanishing

Labour

- Scarcity of labour – most farming activities still labour intensive.
- Competition with estate developers, mines, quarries- who pay higher wages .
- Urban attraction for rural youth.

Water

- Most farming is rain fed, irrigation is minimal.
- Erratic rainfall pattern – rains less predictable.
- Irrigation required, especially for growing of vegetables, to supplement rainfall.
- Paucity of data on crop specific water requirements.

Soil Management

- Information on soil suitability for specific crops
- Tests and Mapping too expensive for most farmers
- Poor quality of soil in peri-urban areas e.g. over cropping, overgrazing by cattle etc
- Soil improvement techniques
- Mechanization minimal and expensive for most farmers.

Fertilizers and Other Agro-Chemicals

- One general fertilizer – NPK 15-15-15
- Crop specific fertilizers – lack of knowledge and application
- Inadequate information and education
- Fake, dangerous and banned agro-chemicals
- High cost of fertilizer and other agro-chemicals.

Planting

Plant Pop, Seeds, other Planting Materials

- Small populations per hectare leading to lower yields
- Fake high yield varieties (HYVs) – result of trade liberalization
- Disease infected seeds, seedlings, cuttings, vines, suckers

Harvesting/Post-harvest loses

- Crude harvesting methods.
- Lack of availability of harvesting equipment e.g. threshers for grain etc.
- Lack of storage and processing facilities.
- High post-harvest losses – above 50% in some cases.

Extension Services, Information, Science and Technology

- Weak extension institutions
- Lack knowledge in current scientific and technological advances
- Low motivation, poor remuneration and logistical issues

Leading to :

- Prevalence unproductive traditional farming practices
- Inadequate information on ecology, soils, agronomy etc
- Lack of credible data on variety, breeds and their performance

Extension Services, Information, Science and Technology - Contd

- Trial and error approach to farming.
- Lack of co-ordination among sector ministry (MoFA), Research institutions, NGO'S and the private sector

Credit and Investment

- Farming viewed as very high risk and unprofitable.
- High interest rates - effective rate mostly above 60% per annum
- Virtually no insurance for agriculture sector.

OUTCOME

Low productivity levels

- Very, very low productivity levels for most farming activities.
- Low productivity → low returns → low incomes → low standards of living.

Examples...

Crops	Current Yield/Ha	Potential Yield/Ha
Cowpea	100-250kg	1500-2500kg
Cassava	3-5 tons	30 tons
Maize	2 tons	5-8 tons
Tomatoes	5 tons	5-30 tons*
Sweet Potatoes	5 tons	30 – 40 tons

* 230 tons/Ha when grown in greenhouse

Marketing and Farmer-based Organizations

- Low unstable prices
- High transportation costs
- Markets dominated by middlemen.
- Farmers have little influence over agricultural policy
- Farmers-based organizations poorly organized and ineffective

The Way Forward

- Accessible, acceptable and usable information for farmers – i.e. dissemination.
- Links and collaborations with institutions (both private and public)

Land

- Formalization of acquisition: signed and registered documentation.
- Implementation of clear land use policies by local and national institutions.
- Increased productivity through **Intensive Farming Techniques** e.g. high plant populations, green houses, permanent raised beds, ridges etc.

Labour

- Better incentives e.g. accommodation, healthcare, profit sharing?
- More intensive farming systems
- Increased mechanization
- Introduction of mini manual and motorised tractors, planters, cultivators

Water

- Drought resistant varieties– Research Institutions, seed companies (eg Wienco, Dizengoff), MoFA
- High optimum plant population
- Simple irrigation systems

Soil Management

- Dissemination of information - soil types and suitable crops to the farmer.
- Educate and inform on soil improvement techniques.
- Simple less expensive soil test equipment.

*To be provided by the Soil Research Institute and Agric Extension working with Farmer-based organizations.

Seeds, Fertilizer and Other Agro-chemicals

MoFA, Agric Extension, Research Institution, FBO and Regulatory agencies:

- Potential and availability of more crop specific fertilizers
- Fertilizers and agro- chemicals on the market are of the highest quality.
- Correct application of agro-chemicals and the dangers of misapplication
- High yielding certified seeds and disease-free planting materials.

Harvesting/Post-harvest loses – Storage & Preservation

- Simple and more efficient harvesting techniques
- Private local plant pools
- Simple storage systems e.g. narrow cribs, zipped plastic cocoon bags for grains or modernize traditional storage systems

Extension Services, Information, Science & Technology

- Extension Institutions – better training, more resources
- Extensions Officers - better remuneration; improved logistics, etc
- Current scientific and technological trends in the sector – workshops and conferences
- Private sector
- Awareness and access to information e.g. relevant web sites, research findings, Farmer-based organizations, radio and TV, mobile phones etc

Credit and Investment

- Financial institutions - employ group dynamics in borrowing and loan recovery
- Success stories must be amplified
- Potential high returns on investment highlighted and made known to investors
- Potential of modern farming techniques e.g. green houses, aqua – culture cages, drip and micro irrigation

Marketing and Farmer-based Organizations

- Regulation of farmer based organizations
- Farmers and farmer based organization - change attitudes, be proactive in searching for information and solutions.
- Improved market transparency

Thank You