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

By

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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 framers
- Poor quality of soil in peri-urban areas e.g. overcropping, 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...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crops</th>
<th>Current Yield/Ha</th>
<th>Potential Yield/Ha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cowpea</td>
<td>100-250kg</td>
<td>1500-2500kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassava</td>
<td>3-5 tons</td>
<td>30 tons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maize</td>
<td>2 tons</td>
<td>5-8 tons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomatoes</td>
<td>5 tons</td>
<td>5-30 tons*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet Potatoes</td>
<td>5 tons</td>
<td>30 – 40 tons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 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