

# SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY BRIEF



POLICY BRIEF FOR THE MONTH OF OCTOBER, 2023

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**SUSTIANABLE AGRICULTURE FOR  
THE FUTURE**

## WHY SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Agriculture and rural development can only be considered sustainable when they are economically viable, socially just, culturally appropriate, ecologically sound and promoted through well tested and proven scientific approaches.

To this effect, agricultural policies must therefore aim at ensuring that practiced agriculture conforms to the principles of sustainable development. Such policies should ensure that agriculture is therefore economically viable, socially just, culturally appropriate and ecologically sound

On the other hand, rural development policies should seek to promote development that is sustainable in nature. In so doing, such policies should aim to meet needs of present and future generations; maintain and enhance the productive and regenerative capacity of the natural resource base. In addition, rural development policies must also strive to provide for durable employment opportunities through agriculture so as to reduce the vulnerability of both present and future generations. This will strengthen their self-reliance and ability to withstand any shocks.

### WHY THE NEED FOR ACTION?

#### **✚ Responding to demands for sustainable food supply**

The ever increasing consumer demand for safe and high-quality food products requires sustainable food supply processes that are built on a healthy natural resource base. Hence, policy frameworks that seek to enhance natural ecological processes for increased food production are of necessity.

It is only when such policies are put in place and fully implemented that sustainable food production will be assured to both the present and future generations.

#### **✚ Addressing an ever-increasing youth unemployment.**

There is no doubt that in Africa and in most developing countries, agriculture is the backbone of the economies of these countries. It is therefore only logical that the agriculture sector is the main source of employment in these countries. Despite of this fact being known in these countries, efforts to encourage youths to engage in agriculture are still very weak. As a result, majority of the youths find themselves not interested in agriculture and therefore unemployed. To this effect, sustainable agriculture and rural development policies need to pay attention to addressing this challenge so as to make life better for both the present and future generations.

#### **✚ Adapting to climate change**

Climate change presents itself as one of the major challenges to any sustainable development efforts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The challenge presented by climate change undermines all efforts towards promoting social, ecological, environmental and economical enhancements. This implies that, if sustainable agriculture and rural development are to be attained, challenges associated with climate change need to be addressed. In this regard, policies to mitigate these challenges need to be introduced. Such policies should be able to support both the present and future generations deal with climate change challenges so that they can meet their needs.

#### **✚ Making use of the most available resources**

Ecological balance in the use of the available resources is key to sustainable development. Hence, agriculture and rural development that are dependent on natural resources need policies that can support this interaction. Resources such as water, soils and forests need policies that will ensure their effective utilization such that they can continue to support agricultural activities and rural development efforts. It should be noted that if these resources are not well taken care of, stabilizing food production and accelerating rural development may also be compromised.

## WHAT SHOULD BE THE FOCUS OF POLICY GOALS FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT?

Promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development needs policies that will address the whole farming spectrum as well as paying close attention to major rural development obstacles. To this regard, such policies should seek to;

- respond to growing food demand in by increasing food production while reducing negative effects on the environment
- respond to growing youth unemployment to enable both the present and future generations to meet their needs.
- respond to threats created by climate change to ensure that agricultural activities and rural development can thrive.
- build the capacities of resource-poor households on how of effectively and efficiently use the available resources.

## KEY POLICY ISSUES THAT NEED ATTENTION

In this policy brief, four policy issues are brought to the attention of stakeholders. The four policy issues are as presented below;

### **✚ *Limited sense of awareness among youths on the potential of the agriculture sector to create for them employment***

The fact that the youth unemployment continues to be a growing concern in many countries on the African continent, this is a clear signal that most youths do not see agriculture as an option for employment. The prevalence of this situation implies that a sense of awareness on the potential of the agriculture sector to create employment for youths is missing. This is something that needs to be sorted. Massive awareness campaigns need to be explored targeting youths. Left unaddressed will imply that even rural development will consequently suffer. A continued mushrooming of youths from rural to urban areas will continue. In the end, these youths will miss the point of trying to meet their present needs since they will remain unemployed or underemployed. Amidst this situation, policies need to be initiated to respond to this situation.

### **✚ *Low knowledge on efficient and effective use of natural resources***

As earlier stated, sustainable agriculture and rural development need ecological balance in the use of natural resources. This will seek to ensure that people do not miss use the available resources. Unfortunately, in most communities, there is evidence of low knowledge level on how to efficiently and effectively make use of the available resources. Activities such as charcoal burning which involves cutting down of trees, overgrazing which impacts soil, over resource extraction and poor farming methods are very common. These activities have serious diverse effects on sustainable development and especially on sustainable agriculture and rural development. Policy measures that can respond to the situation are therefore needed if hopes of attaining sustainable agriculture and rural development are to be kept alive.

### **✚ *Need for incentivizing the agriculture sector***

To encourage youths to engage in agriculture activities, a key catalyst to this process will be the provision of agricultural incentives. Such incentives should seek enable youths access cheap technology, access, markets as well as quality seed. In addition, youths could also be supported with seed money as start-up gesture. By so doing, a number of youths will see agriculture in a different perspective as opposed to how they view it at the moment. Subsequently, this will encourage youths to join agriculture and thus contribute to sustainable agriculture and rural development. In the same spirit, youths running away from rural areas will now find it better to stay and engage in agriculture. Hence, in order for all this happen, a need for a policy that accommodates this situation is of necessity.

### **✚ *Need for a common strategic vision towards sustainable agriculture and rural development***

Strategic thinking reminds us of the need to know where we are heading and how to get there. Similarly, in order for us to attain sustainable agriculture and rural development, there is a need to develop a common strategic vision to this effect. Precisely, such vision should inform us where we want to head and how to get there. Experience shows that, most agricultural efforts are based on political slogans that at times do not have a well-articulated strategic vision. Hence, it is common for countries through political campaigns to claim in their manifestos that they intend to have modernized agriculture, mechanized agriculture etc. Failure to have common strategic vision towards sustainable agriculture

and rural development compromises any efforts towards this end result. To this effect, it is of paramount importance that policies should clearly respond to this gap.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Moving forward, this policy brief recommends four major actions that need to be undertaken. These actions in the form of recommendations are as presented below;

### **✚ Invest in Research, Learning and Knowledge Sharing**

Promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development requires the adoption of innovative approaches. However, in order to obtain such innovative approaches, there is a need to engaged in research so that best agricultural and rural development practices are invented. In addition, learning and sharing best practices is another opportunity that needs to be embraced. Insights from research, learning and knowledge sharing have the potential to uplift the agriculture sector as well as facilitate rural development. As such, nations need to apportion part of their budget to this activity.

### **✚ Encouraging Agriculture Diversification and Mechanization**

Past experience shows that most countries have tended to give more attention to agricultural crops that they have labelled as chief cash crops and food crops. This in most instances has narrowed down the focus of the agriculture sector in these countries. Worse more is that the production level is normally at substance level and of low mechanization. In the context of this policy brief, it only when agriculture diversification and mechanization are given due consideration that we will see a shift towards sustainable agriculture and rural development. This is something that countries need to highly consider since agriculture in most developing countries is a backbone of their economies.

### **✚ Improve Access to Agro-inputs**

Another take home point for action from this policy brief is to improve access to agro-inputs. Experience shows that, low agriculture production is among other factors attached to failure access required agro-inputs. Such inputs range from quality seeds, land for cultivation and cheap mechanized equipment among others. It is therefore of vital importance to ensure that farmers; especially small scale farmers have access to these inputs so as to increase their productivity levels. In

addition, by enabling them to access these inputs, opportunities to pave way to move into modernized and commercial oriented agriculture will come up.

### **✚ Improve access to current and new markets**

Farmers need to be assured of the presence of markets for what they produce. Hence, besides producing to meet food demands at household level, progressive agriculture will require a farmer to be in position to meet both his/her food and financial needs. Hence, as a take home factor for action, the need to ensure that farmers have access to both current and new markets for their agricultural produces cannot be under estimated. Policy mechanisms that strengthen marketability of farmer produces will encourage farmers and especially the youths to engage in agriculture. By so doing, sustainable agriculture in terms of producing quality and sufficient food will be ensured. In the same way, rural development will be encouraged as many rural youths and farmers will find it profitable to engage in agriculture.

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