



Tropentag, September 20-22, 2017, Bonn

“Future Agriculture:  
Socio-ecological transitions and bio-cultural shifts”

## Future Agriculture: Challenges for Africa

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### Abstract

Agriculture is central to the growth and sustenance of Africa, accounting for over 70 per cent of the workforce and 30 percent of the continent’s gross domestic product (GDP) yet the continent remains unable to feed itself, relying heavily on food imports and food aid. Despite decades of concerted efforts by governments and development partners, the continent continues to suffer recurrent hunger epidemics with malnutrition increasingly becoming a major health concern especially for children. The logical explanation for the poor performance of African agriculture is low production and productivity caused by several factors such as under-utilisation of land, low technology adoption, low capacities for innovation, population explosion, rapid urbanisation, infrastructural decay and climate change which are further exacerbated by poor policies.

Of the 200 million hectares of arable land in Africa (which is more than 25 percent of the world’s arable land) only about 10 percent is cultivated making it the continent with the highest underutilised arable land reserve in the world. Where they are cultivated, most farm lands are either ancestral or communally owned with no deeds or titles which presents a challenge to obtaining credit. Land degradation due to soil erosion and salinity also affect productivity. For example, UNEP estimates that 70 percent of Burundi’s land is severely degraded and 30 percent of the total land in Africa are facing similar environmental challenges.

Africa’s irrigation potential is also largely untapped, only 4 percent of the total area under cultivation is irrigated compared to China and India with 44 percent and 26 percent respectively. African agriculture is mainly rainfed and utilises only 2 percent of its renewable water resources compared to 5 percent obtainable globally. Neglect of research and low technology dissemination and adoption also impede productivity in terms of seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and irrigated systems. Low value addition and poor market infrastructure like feeder roads and storage facilities increase post-harvest loss. ECA estimates that as much as 50 percent of Africa’s agricultural produce go to waste due to poor access to markets and storage facilities.

As Africa struggles with the burden of the crash in demand for mineral and oil resources and a rise in unemployment, agriculture remains the key to economic growth and transformation. With its abundant natural and human resources, Africa can feed the world through strategic investment to increase production and productivity by 60 percent over the next 15 to 20 years. This can only be achieved by addressing pertinent issues relating to land policy, soil management, water, climate change, energy, ICTs, technology and innovation, value addition and agribusiness, research, agriculture education, urbanisation, population, and agriculture financing.

The presentation will explore the prospects of African agriculture and the fundamental challenges to accelerating economic growth through increased investment in the sector.

**Keywords:** Agricultural change