



Tropentag, September 17-19, 2018, Ghent

“Global food security and food safety:  
The role of universities”

## What Is Going Wrong with Agricultural Research in Africa?

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### Abstract

The book “What is the matter with African agriculture” (Henk J.W. Mutsaers, Paul W.M. Kleene (eds., 2012, 384 pages) brings together the views of a non-trivial sample of agriculturists from many walks of life. It discusses the achievements, failures and challenges of African agriculture and the role played by foreign aid in that story. Fourteen (40) “veteran” authors, divided between 22 Anglophones and 18 francophone, were invited. They answer three questions: (a) Why did we perform so poorly in our activities for agricultural development in Africa? (b) What are the most important drivers of change (social, political, technical) for more productive and profitable agriculture to flourish? (c) To what extent could reorientations in international policy and development aid improve the situation?

Recent reports and international events identify new drivers of change and calls for urgent action.

The interest of development cooperation for agricultural research projects has its ups and downs. The academic world and the development world still seem to operate in different spheres and a collaboration is still challenging due to lack of impact of such research. There is a growing call by research funders and development actors for impact of solutions at scale. This requires new ways of working together. In addition, there is an ever-increasing expectation for African agricultural research to create jobs and decrease the dependency on food import.

The context in which jobs have to be created and agribusiness developed is also changing rapidly. The changing farm size distribution in sub-Saharan Africa (especially in the 5 to 100 hectare range where the number of these farms is growing especially rapidly) reflects the increased interest in land by urban-based professionals or influential rural people. Given current trends, medium-scale farms will soon become the dominant scale of farming in many African countries. This suggests a new and hitherto unrecognised channel by which medium-scale farmers may be altering the strength and location of agricultural growth and employment multipliers between rural and urban areas.

Medium-scale farmers will increasingly dominate farm lobby groups, who add value to agricultural produce and influence policy making and public expenditures to agriculture in their favour. They will ask for research on processing and packaging food and African universities to focus more on farming technology.

**Keywords:** Drivers of change