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Photo: Claudia Jordan

## “ We have to align the transformation agenda with African realities ”

Per capita growth had slowed down in Africa years before the Covid crisis and the war in Ukraine. Also, the number of people going hungry has been on the rise again for some years. These and other factors have to be borne in mind when discussing food systems transformation on the continent, argues Ousmane Badiane of AKADEMIYA2063.

**Dr Badiane, how can a transformation of agricultural and food systems succeed in Africa?**

I guess it will succeed if the agenda is broad enough to address the most burning questions around food system development. Firstly, comprehensiveness is important: that all the different components are taken into consideration and dealt with: health, nutrition, equity, inclusions as well as adapting to and mitigating climate change, production, processing and technologies. Science, innovation and the environment require a comprehensive approach. Secondly, such an approach has to be rooted in the African agenda. The question should be: Where do we find ourselves today in terms of food systems and approaches and development in Africa? Where are we strong, where are we weak, and where are the gaps that need to be filled? That's where our partners can find the biggest opportunity to make a contribution. Thirdly, we need to align the agenda with African realities, constraints and opportunities. It's not going to be one size fits all, although we are all dealing with the same food systems.

**What relevant transformational activities, initiatives and processes are already taking place on the African continent?**

We have the Malabo Agenda. When the agenda was developed around ten years ago, the emphasis of food systems wasn't there. You would find that food security and nutrition were really strong then, but the complexity of an approach to nutrition and dietary health was missing. Similarly, there is a strong focus on gender and youth which you could expand to the equity and inclusion part of the food system agenda. As the African Union now gets ready for the Post-Malabo Agenda, it's time to engage and see where there are opportunities for cooperation and technical assistance in forging a much stronger food system-oriented agricultural agenda.

**What role do you see for an institution like AKADEMIYA2063 in contributing to the transformation agenda?**

If we want to do things better, more efficiently, at lower cost within a shorter time and with better outcomes in Africa, we need to understand the challenges better in all their nuances. That requires data and analytics to provide the information that can guide action. And to do that we need to deploy the existent African expertise. AKADEMIYA2063 has focused on this from its beginning. It's a 20-year agenda that attempts to improve the data, analytics and evidence base, which will allow Africa to improve the quality of the planning and implementation of policies. We mobilise, strengthen and deploy local expertise but also serve as a bridge to connect with the global science communities. Our role is right in the middle of data and includes innovation. To generate data and foresight capacities, we are investing heavily in trade data and in tracking the Biennial Review (BR) Report of the African Union Commission on the Implementation of the Malabo Declaration, which we are supporting. We are also investing a lot in remote sensing and artificial intelligence, in order to improve the data and analytics environment.

**Where do you see the role and potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area in driving the transformation of agricultural and food systems?**

People often talk about the huge import bill in Africa, and they tend to see this as a problem, even as an issue with a negative connotation. What we are missing here is that the import bill is not synonymous with stagnating agriculture. Import is surging, while agriculture is growing faster than it ever has in the continent's history. What is driving the rapid increase in imports is two decades of strong economic growth coupled with rising populations. The two combined are fuelling demand

for food at a pace that is higher than the rate at which agriculture, as a biological process, can sustainably grow.

Since we had managed to import, fewer people went to bed hungry. Africa was feeding itself through production and import. It's going to be like that as long as we continue growing for the next couple of decades. If we can produce and compete in the domestic markets and grab a share of that demand, we're creating a market for our farmers. The growing demand is for food that is ready to cook and ready to eat in most urban centres. That means it has to go to the processing sector. Competitive processing sectors require access to skills, technologies and investment to enable micro-enterprises to mature and become medium to large enterprises ready to compete in these markets.

### **2025 marks the target year for the African Union's Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation. To what extent is the continent on track to achieve the ambitious goals of the Declaration?**

The Malabo agenda and especially the Biennial Review which is tracking its achievement represent a set of ambitions. They don't necessarily measure progress taking place on the ground. In other words, failing to achieve the Biennial Review outcome doesn't mean that there is no progress on the ground. But neither does progress on the ground mean that we're achieving the Malabo Declaration. We can distinguish between the two. The results framework for the Biennial Review wasn't put together in an open and rigorous process to get the best indicators and the best matrix suited to support the agenda. That has actually resulted in ever fewer countries achieving the goals, because it has been practically impossible to achieve them. Such realism lacked when the results framework was being set up. Nevertheless, a number of countries are making progress, although not enough to achieve the goals set.

What worries me is that everybody is seeing Covid and Ukraine as the source of the deceleration of progress in Africa. But already three years before Covid, there had been something going wrong after almost 20 years of solid growth. Expenditures were flat or didn't increase as they should have. The pace of per capita GDP growth has slowed, and the number of hungry people and the level of public debt have started rising after a decade



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long decline. That debate has to take place now so that we can again create the conditions that assured us the longest period of economic recovery in Africa's history.

### **How is the continent currently preparing for the post-Malabo decade?**

The ambition is a post-Malabo agenda that is much more reflective of the need for food system transformation. There are lot of issues that need to be clarified around health and healthy diets, nutrition, climate mitigation and adaptation, inclusivity and equity in addition to what we already have in the current Malabo agenda. It's also going to be important to coordinate this process. It cannot be that each and every organisation is throwing something into the pot. We should seek the right ideas and expertise for the products and services intended for the African Union.

### **Who could take up coordination in your opinion?**

In the early years of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, there was a good partnership between the African side and the development partners' side. The CAADP donor platform worked well, and the CAADP Partnership Platform was a very good vehicle in coordinating and was better managed than it has been in later years. Donors and development partners were well organised in coordinating among

themselves. The African Union Commission brought in the African side, and the non-state actors were well organised too. Most of the work happened at country level. Development partners will have to find ways of aligning locally, meaning to support the same goals using the same indicators to track progress at local level. They also have to coordinate among each other, while using the same targets and goals. If we can achieve that, we will have the synergies to give us better outcomes going forward.

### **In its efforts to support the transformation of agri-food systems on the African continent – which actors and processes should German development cooperation pay more attention to?**

There are several levels where German development cooperation can link up with the CAADP process and connect with actors that are driving the agenda. At the continental level, it is with the African Union Commission, in particular the commission in charge of agricultural development in blue economy. There are also opportunities to work with the regional economic communities as well as, and more importantly, with stakeholders at the country level, not just in government, but also with non-state actors. This will require that German development cooperation aligns with the goals and priorities of the agenda, at continental, regional and country levels. It will also need to embrace the same review and evaluation processes and find space as much as possible to participate in the mutual accountability processes around the agenda.

### **Are farmers' organisations already included enough in these processes?**

It's not sufficient to just sit around the table. You must have the capacity and the opportunity to contribute. In terms of principles, we need farmers' organisations to find a voice when we are planning and executing programmes and policies. And it's not a once-off, it's a continuous process. It has to be refined and improved as we go. So, no matter how much influence they have, farmers' organisations need continued support.