

Empty with Plenty; Revisiting the Rural Economies in Africa

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Received: December 18, 2019; **Published:** January 20, 2020

Abstract

Policy disconnect in Africa is an ailing syndrome that strangles from within. While the continent is a home to brilliant policies in various fields, these documents continue to gather dust across the countries in the continent. Various sectors become victims of poor or non-implementation of policy recommendations despite being backed by empirical evidences. A top-bottom methodology in policy designing has been the chronic approach in many parts of Africa. While Africa boasts to host most robust and renowned agricultural research institutions, agriculture still remains on its death bed. Malnutrition and food insecurity has been turned to a norm where food aids has become a policy in itself. Africa is 80% rural and to achieve economic takeoff, a multi-sector approach should be emphasized. While industrialization is the solution to high unemployment in Africa, it must begin with value addition of agricultural commodities. With emergence of agro processing firms, agro based industries will emerge based on comparative advantage across the continent. Transport network should be emphasized to link various markets across the continent. The multiplier effect of this is a pull factor towards a sustainable agribusiness where food security will be guaranteed. Unemployment will be resolved while sustaining economic growth of individual countries in the continent. Policy disconnects, corruption, the victim mentality and obsession for the western development formulae is what Africa is ailing from. It's imperative therefore that Africa designs its own economic development formulae based on the continents comparative advantage.

Keywords: *Policy Disconnect; Africa*

Discussion

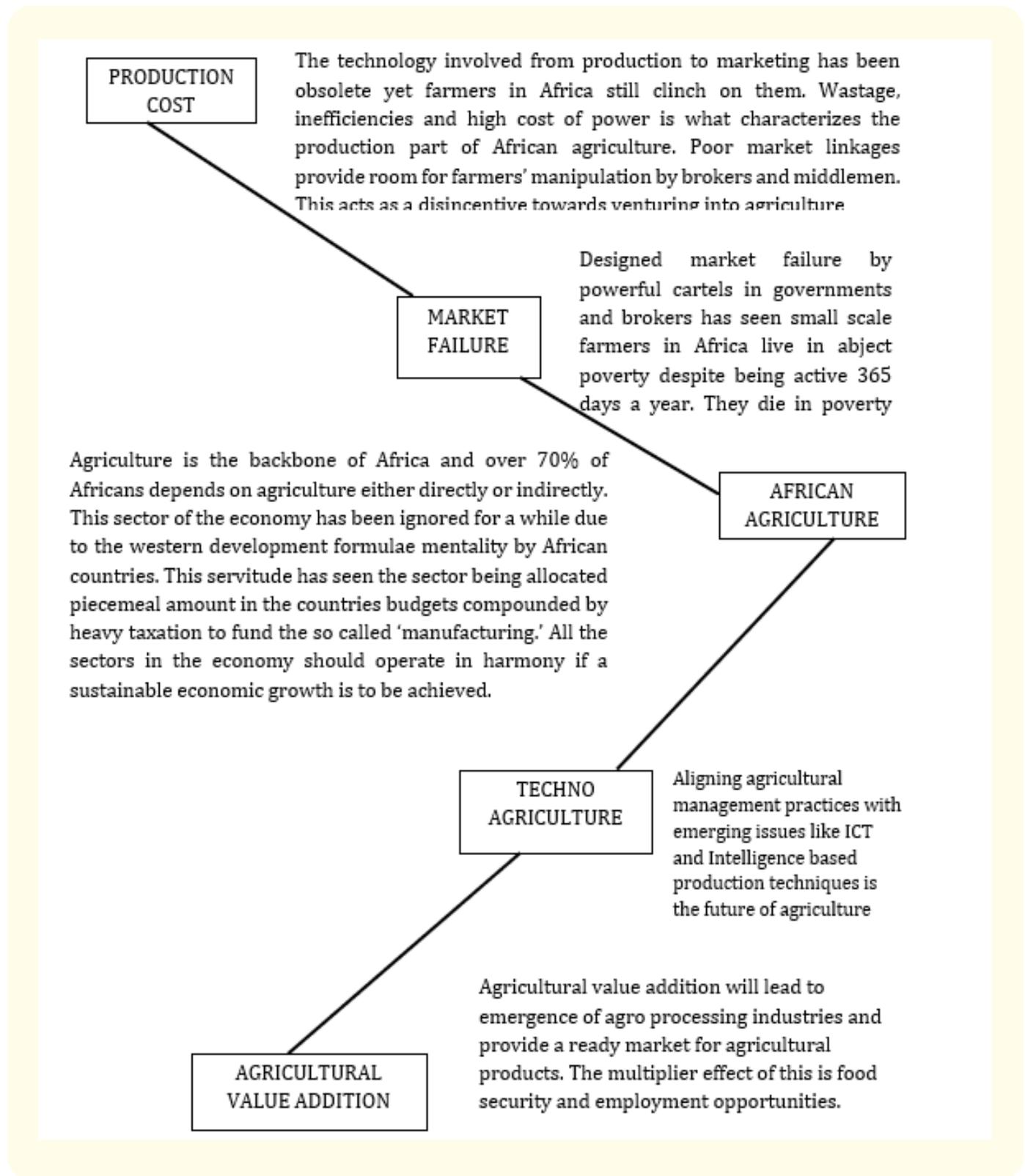
While poverty and archaic production methods is what dominates agriculture in most parts of Africa, technology adoption by these farmers must be a priority [1]. High production costs, market failures, information asymmetry and climate change are the major challenges that affect small scale farmers in Africa. With advancement in technology, agricultural technologies should be able to solve most of the calamities that hinder agricultural commercialization in Africa. To shift from subsistence farming to agribusiness, use of emerging technologies like mobile phone apps and social media can easily reduce the production and transaction costs involved during the production period. A gradual shift to agricultural mechanization and agro processing will guarantee a sustainable agricultural production in the continent.

African countries should heavily invest in infrastructures like roads and railway to link markets in the continent. Most rural areas in Africa become inaccessible during rainy seasons hence compromising market access by farmers [2]. Border restrictions among African countries should be eliminated completely to create a huge pool in the domestic markets. With competition and comparative advantage among individual African countries, trade will set in and guarantee a sustainable market for agricultural produces in the continent. This will enhance food security in the continent while enabling the emergence of agro processing industries in the continent.

Africa has a comparative advantage in production of various livestock and crops yet malnutrition, food insecurity and languishing conditions is a summary to describe farmers in the continent. To be globally competitive, adoption of technology in agriculture is a must. From production to marketing, technology incorporation is the next sustainable frontier. Farmers should be encouraged to use their mobile phone apps and other applications to acquaint themselves with emerging production techniques and access to the global markets through the internet. Artificial intelligence and knowledge based production techniques ensure that the cost of production is minimized

while maximizing on output and quality [3]. Africa will remain a green desert as long as those in policy formulation are held captive by cartels and rent seekers who are beneficiaries of the lucrative import industry.

Faced by a myriad of challenges, agriculture in Africa still remain crucial in feeding an exponentially growing population juxtaposed by climate change, poor infrastructures, market failures, and obsolete farm management practices among others. Nonetheless, agriculture still remains a key driver towards economic growth in Africa especially through agro processing industries.



Conclusion and Recommendations

While policy documents gather dusts in African countries, economic hit men and the political class continue to enjoy their flamboyant lifestyles at the expense of the poor majority. The reason why most agricultural policies have never seen the light of the day is due to the interests of rent seekers who detain and compromise the systems in the continent. This is due to the fact that self-interests and individualism has plunged the continent into a pool of corruption where the value for public resources is no longer a priority. The gluttony by the state and public officers to embezzle funds and perpetuate their economic dynasties has led to the downfall of agriculture. After all, most African governments maintain their legitimacy by focusing on the urban populace whose degree of intolerance is highly elastic.

Agriculture in Africa has for long been characterized by ancient production techniques whose sole purpose is to advance subsistence farming [4]. With a rapid shift in agribusiness and hence agricultural commercialization, adoption of technology by African farmers is inevitable. Agricultural mechanization, computerizing the production chain and even use of drones and robots in agricultural farms has the potential of decreasing the production cost hence expanding the profit margins due to efficiency. It's therefore imperative that technological innovations become an integral part of agribusiness in Africa to make farm produces from this continent competitive in the global market.

Africa has an upper hand in smoothing its agrarian journey towards a food secure and agribusiness continent. Mistakes done by their predecessors during agrarian revolutions should be transformed into strengths and opportunities by Africa. Africa should capitalize on the loopholes that have been documented by the already developed countries in their struggle for food security and agricultural commercialization. African countries must address the cost of production which has a great implication on the viability of any agricultural project in the continent. African farmers can only remain competitive if the cost of energy in the continent is low and sustainable. To achieve production efficiency, technology adoption in agriculture is inevitable.

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Volume 6 Issue 2 February 2020

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