

# Envisaging alternative futures for African agriculture

The Future Agricultures Consortium was established in 2005 with support from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) as a learning alliance of leading African and UK-based research organisations. The Consortium provides independent analysis and advice for improving agricultural policy-making. The aim is to encourage critical debate and policy dialogue on the future of agriculture in Africa, elaborating the practical and policy challenges of establishing and sustaining pro-poor agricultural growth.

Agriculture remains a crucial pathway out of poverty in Africa: absorbing labour, producing food and generating economic growth, both within and perhaps most importantly beyond the sector. While there are various ongoing efforts focused on promoting agriculture to increase food security and generate growth in the wider economy, a huge gap prevails in understanding the political incentives that underlie agricultural policy-making in Africa.

Since 2005, the Future Agricultures Consortium has aimed to fill this gap by looking at politics and policy processes shaping agricultural research and development in Africa: examining how and why decisions are made, the conditions for change, and the practical and policy challenges of establishing and sustaining agricultural growth that benefits poor producers, pastoralists and consumers.

With original research, analysis and debate, Future Agricultures aims to provide critical insights and dialogue on African agricultural policy agendas, through a network of over 90 researchers in 15 countries in Africa, as well as in the UK.

### ■ Agriculture: more than just a technical challenge

Too often it is assumed that the key to policy change is better evidence and enhanced technical design, yet many of the best designed policies falter when implemented. The best technologies or the most sophisticated economic analysis may not be enough. Future Agricultures' research is focused on understanding these 'implementation failures' and the importance of politics

and policy processes in realising policies and plans on the ground.

Insights drawn from comparative studies in Future Agricultures' themes are informing and influencing several national and regional policy debates. This includes looking at key political economy issues related to a number of important themes, such as the commercialisation of smallholder agriculture, the role of young people, social protection and growth, innovation, land deals, accountability, climate change, pastoralism and the increasing influence of China and Brazil in African agriculture.

*Livestock exports in the Horn are booming among pastoralists. Supporting policies that capitalise on innovations and local knowledge are vital for economic growth, livelihoods and poverty reduction.*

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Photo: Abdurehman Eidi/Future Agricultures Consortium

**Unpacking the ‘black box’ of policy processes.** How do African political systems shape the incentives for policy and investment support to smallholder agriculture? Understanding political decision-making is central to the Consortium’s work on *Political Economy of Agricultural Policy in Africa* (PEAPA), which has explored specific regional/country settings, from cotton in Burkina Faso to fertilisers in Malawi. Insights from Future Agricultures’ PEAPA project are feeding into major programmes and initiatives, including discussions around the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition (NAFSN).

**Creating policy space for pastoralism.** Future Agricultures’ research challenges negative stereotypes of pastoralists in the Greater Horn of Africa to reveal their often-ignored innovation, opportunities and successes in the livestock trade. For example, our researchers have worked closely with pastoralists and local government officials in Kenya and Ethiopia, convening policy dialogues to address misunderstandings and challenges to this centuries-old way of life. A major conference held in 2011 on *The Future of Pastoralism* reinvigorated this debate and resulted in launching the book *Pastoralism and Development in Africa: Dynamic Change at the Margins*.

**Land deals and land grabs.** In 2010, in response to concern about large-scale land deals in Africa, Future Agricultures brought together leading researchers from across continents working on transnational commercial land deals in Africa and the policy frameworks governing them. The organisation helped to form the *Land Deal Politics Initiative*, an international network which convenes research and dialogue on the subject. Its new project, *Land and Agricultural Commercialisation in Africa* (LACA), explores which new forms of commercialisation of land might promote growth and reduce poverty and inequality, through case studies in Ghana, Kenya and Zambia.

### Towards a regional focus

In early 2013, the Future Agricultures Consortium (FAC) launched three Regional Hubs linked to academic centres of excellence in East Africa (Tegemeo Institute of Agricultural Policy and Development, Egerton University, Nairobi), West Africa (ISSER – Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research, University of Ghana, Accra) and Southern Africa (PLAAS – Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town) to co-ordinate the Consortium’s research and policy engagement efforts. Each Hub has a Coordinator to support Future Agricultures’ activities in the respective region. The Consortium also maintains a CAADP Coordinator at the West Africa Hub and a Communications and Networking Coordinator at the East Africa Hub.

The three African Hubs are supported by a small Secretariat located at a fourth regional centre in Europe, based at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK. Each Regional Hub is linked to and supports a network of national, regional, and international partners. The new structure marks a transition to an African-led, Africa-centred organisation which will ensure that Future Agricultures Consortium continues to conduct high-quality, policy-relevant research, communicate findings and implications, and create spaces for debate and dialogue in order to inform and influence agricultural policy across the region.

► [www.future-agricultures.org](http://www.future-agricultures.org); Twitter: @FutureAgrics

**Convening and communicating.** Throughout its history, Future Agricultures has aimed to convene high-profile policy debates responding to policy moments. On each occasion, the organisation has been able to bring local level evidence and insights to illuminate wider debates. Future Agricultures’ conference with the Salzburg Global Seminar on *Towards a New Green Revolution for Africa?* explored lessons from recent successes in African agricultural development and how recent growth can be sustained, expanded, and accelerated.

Two *Global Land Grabbing* conferences focused on the politics of global land grabbing and agrarian change. The issue of how young people engage with the agri-food sector in Africa was debated at the *Young People, Farming and Food* conference held in 2012, while our *Political Economy of Agricultural Policy in Africa* (PEAPA) conference held in March 2013 brought together key figures from research, politics, donor organisations and civil society to understand the influence of African political systems on agricultural policy. Through our growing website complemented by an active publishing programme, the Consortium has become a hub of infor-

mation exchange on political economy of African agricultural policy.

**Building next-generation capacity.** Building capacity among the academic community is also vital for addressing the problem of ‘brain drain’ of Africa’s researchers. The flagship Fellowship Programme focuses on mentoring young academics, enabling them to produce high-quality publications and launching their careers. So far, Future Agricultures has awarded 27 fellowships to young researchers addressing themes related to the political economy of agricultural policy processes in Africa.

**Engaging with CAADP.** One of the most important aspects of Future Agricultures’ engagement work has been working with the ten-year-old Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), the flagship programme of the African Union’s New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). Over the past five years, Future Agricultures has been contributing to CAADP regional and national processes and events, including regular participation in Partnership Platform meetings and jointly reflecting on lessons learned from the past decade.