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L'Afrique et les défis du XXIème siècle
Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty First Century
A África e os desafios do Século XXI
إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

**Transforming African Agriculture: Challenges, Opportunities
and the Way Forward in the 21st Century**

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Abstract

Africa remains the continent with the greatest unexploited agricultural potentials and yet a home to the highest proportion of hungry and malnourished people. Following statistics from various sources, of the 900 million people suffering from chronic malnutrition around the world, about 240 million are from Africa, constituting more than 25 percent of the continent's population. In addition, about 35 million African children go to sleep malnourished and hungry every night. Africa is one of the poorest and least developed regions of the world. There is widespread concern at the continuing and indeed deepening poverty situation particularly in the sub Saharan region. To compound this, there is the lack of processes of rapid and broad based economic growth and development to combat the situation despite many international discussions on the issue. This is largely an outcome of a neglected agricultural sector even though statistics reveal that this sector constitutes the mainstay of sub Saharan economies. It contributes about 40 percent of GDP, 35 percent of export earnings and provides employment to more than 60 percent of the labour force. In addition, it supplies food to meet the ever-increasing population, savings and capital accumulation and finances the development of other sectors through tax revenues. The average growth rate of agricultural production stands at less than 1.8 percent since 1960 as against more than 2.5 percent growth in population. This reflects a decline in per capita terms.

Why has the agricultural sector performed so poorly in Africa compared to other developing regions of the world with less resource endowment than in Africa? What are the opportunities particularly at this era of globalization that Africa can tap to transform its agriculture in a sustainable manner? How can the best of science and technology be harnessed to help Africa increase its agricultural productivity, profitability and sustainability, thereby contributing to improved food security for all? How, precisely, can we produce higher crop yields and more nutritious foods from thinning soils, making food both affordable and accessible to the increasing numbers of people? What are the larger socio-economic and political conditions necessary for the effective use of science and technology in both the public and private sectors?

This paper is conceived based on this mind frame and is structured to provide answers to the above research questions. Specifically, the paper examines constraints to agricultural

development in Africa since independence from both the domestic and external fronts, assesses the potentials and opportunities that are inherent in the 21st Century global arena and speculates on what needs to be done to target agriculture for the continental development in order to achieve the much cherished Millennium Development Goals as time is winding out. The main premise of the paper is that agriculture constitutes the foundation for an industrial revolution in Africa. In order to achieve the above objectives, a descriptive approach is used with information drawn from secondary sources particularly from the FAO, IITA, IFPRI, CAADP, AGRA, CGIAR and World Bank data bases.