

REPORT ON**THE 3RD ANNUAL AFRICA FOOD SECURITY CONFERENCE AND AGRI-EXHIBITION 2015.
HELD AT HOTEL ROYAL ORCHID AZURE, NAIROBI KENYA. SEPTEMBER 22-23, 2015**

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The 3rd annual Africa Food Security Conference and Agri-Exhibition was held at Hotel Royal Orchid Azure, September 22-23, 2015. The conference was convened by AIDEM Business Solutions (www.aidembs.com) and the theme was *Technology in Food Securing Africa*. The main sponsors were Amiran Kenya Limited and Act Change Transform (ACT!). Corporate exhibitors were Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS) and SciDev.Net. The meeting brought together about 100 stakeholders in the agricultural value chain to discuss climate change related food insecurity in Africa and possible solutions. Participants came from Ministry of Agriculture, research organizations including Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO), policy institutions, finance institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations and Community Based Organizations.

The conference brought to light the threat of climate change on agricultural production worldwide, but more so in Africa. Sub-Saharan smallholder farmers depend on rain for farming and with increasing temperatures, rain patterns have changed and more farming areas are becoming drier. Decreasing soil fertility and crop land areas also contribute to this problem. It is estimated that by 2050, Africa's population will more than double to 2 billion people. Today, 250 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa go hungry every day, yet the continent holds 25% of the world's arable land. Therefore, all players in the value chain need to be involved, and new solutions need to be tabled to avert disaster.

The full conference program can be found [here](#).

The following are the main points discussed as possible solutions in the two day conference.

Technology for food security: Most of Africa's arable land remains underutilized. The average age of farmers in sub-Saharan Africa is 60 years old. With an ageing population of farmers, huge tracts of land that could be worked within hours, take days, even weeks, due to lack of mechanization. Farm mechanization increases farm productivity, saves time and is also attractive to young people who turn away from agriculture due to the laborious nature of farming. Irrigation and greenhouse farming both could address the problem of drought, poor soil fertility and shrinking land sizes.

Genetic engineering reduces breeding cycles so that new climate resilient varieties are developed faster, to match rapidly changing climatic conditions. Seed varieties that African farmers are currently using were bred for 1980s conditions (and climate change threats) because (conventional) variety development takes at least 20 years.

Agripreneurship: Farming in Africa is largely seen as poor, uneducated people's job. But actually agriculture is a serious business. African countries could tap into an increasing number of unemployed (working class) youth to revamp agriculture and capacity build for already existing programs, like agricultural extension. As agriculture becomes agribusiness, African leaders have the task of creating enabling environments that will enable young entrepreneurs to develop skills and get the resources they need to be involved in every aspect the value chain.

SoilCares Ltd. presented a modern and faster way of soil testing using a handheld scanner. When this innovation is rolled out, young people could make this a business venture where they could go around rural/agricultural areas offering quick soil tests and analyses, with interpretations and recommendations.

The value chain: Sustainable agriculture discussions in Africa have been handled in very piecemeal ways that do not engage the entire value chain. Inputs, production, harvesting, postharvest, value addition (agroprocessing) and markets- all need to be part of food security conversations. Post-harvest losses in Africa cost up to USD 4 billion. One example at the meeting was the use of (processed) orange fleshed sweet potato (OFSP) puree in baking. The agroprocessor in Siaya, Kenya, packs and delivers OFSP puree every day to Tuskys supermarkets in Nairobi and other areas for their sweet potato bread. This is a good example of partnership involving the farmer, agroprocessor (value addition) and market.

Including a growing number of youth (65% under 35years) in the value chain will ensure sustainable food security in the continent. Enabling environments and opening up markets will encourage young people to experiment and innovate around agriculture.

Financing: Equity and loan financing options are available for farmers and agricrepreneurs. Some organizations like Root Capital, Phatisa, Voxtra have financing models that are aimed at ensuring longevity of farming by engaging the farmer where he is. Some aspects that distinguish these private funds from traditional banks are: lower interest rates, risk assessment mechanisms, repayment plans, financial advice, and catalyzing markets. These private financiers also give startup capital to innovators in the agricultural sector as long as they see the value of the product or service.

Markets: Reforms in trade policies and practices in the continent are needed in order to unlock Africa's trade potential and inclusivity in the world market. An increasing population, growing middle class and urban population all present new market prospects within Africa. Only 13% of African airspace is utilized and ground transportation is unsustainably expensive due to poor road networks. The Yamoussoukro Declaration sought to open up African skies for African airlines in order to increase regional trade and create better supply chain and delivery through regional cooperation. There is an opportunity to boost regional trade by implementing The Yamoussoukro Declaration.

The two days of discussions and presentations yielded the following points as next steps to food securing Africa:

- Urbanization is becoming a real threat to food security in Africa. Therefore, governments need to secure agricultural land by launching reforms on land use and the minimum/maximum acreage debate. Policy discussions on land tenure need to involve women, who are the primary producers and in many African cultures are not allowed to own land.
- Embracing technology (including biotechnology and farm mechanization) will greatly improve agricultural production in the continent in the face of climate change.
- African leaders should look at capacity building especially in youth and women to counter the problem of an ageing population of farmers and high youth unemployment.
- African leaders can encourage creation of more Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) from smallholder farmer organizations by having supportive tax laws.
- Policies governing markets, imports and exports need to be put in place so that African farmers can benefit from local markets.
- African governments need to see the potential of future agriculture and invest more into the value chain rather than wait for foreign investment.
- Africa needs to look at new solutions that will lead the continent towards climate smart, sustainable agriculture. Sustainable agriculture is multi stakeholder and multi-disciplinary, including all relevant actors in the value chain.