

CONCEPT NOTE (40921)

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE SERIES:

Agriculture as a Driver of Africa's Development – Achieving Food Security, Economic Transformation, Human Development, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

BACKGROUND

“Poverty and hunger amidst plenty” describes the African development paradox. Africa is replete with fertile yet uncultivated arable land, enormously rich river basins under-used for irrigation – all in an abundantly favourable climate. Yet, the continent spends over 60 percent of its hard-earned foreign exchange on food imports. Africa could be the world’s powerhouse of food security, adding handsomely to the value chain – if only natural resources were used productively, efficiently, and sustainably. However, Africa remains the global epicenter of low agricultural productivity, de-industrialization, hunger, malnutrition, and poverty.

Yet with the right institutions, leadership, public commitment – and the unalloyed support of the international community – collectively taking advantage of today’s opportunities, Africa can transform from this paradox into a powerhouse of food security, economic diversification, and transformation, as well as a pivot of achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Institutions of higher education, particularly those serving students of African descent throughout the diaspora, have a unique role to play in this transformative process.

Africa’s agriculture sector is uniquely capable of realizing this vision: spurring inclusive and sustainable development – if only the right policies and programmes are effectively implemented and strong political will and public support are galvanized.

CONTEXT FOR THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE SERIES

Aware of the agriculture sector’s promising contributions to Africa’s development – as informed by the latest research and operations across sectors – a series of international conferences to raise awareness of new, current, and urgent opportunities to advance achievement of Africa’s development through agriculture is an essential action.

Of note is the just-released, comprehensive textbook “*Africa’s Agricultural Renaissance: From Paradox to Powerhouse*,” ([click here](#)) which now joins latest research in the field – helping to guide the collective discourse through contributions to the literature.

Although annual meetings on Africa and agriculture pre-exist, rare is an opportunity to organize a series of continuous in-person, hybrid, and online events – all building upon each other – meeting to establish pan-African, cross-sectors answers to key development questions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE SERIES

Knowing that achieving Africa's development requires engaging a diversity of experts and stakeholders across all sectors and across a multitude of countries and development contexts, the specific objectives of this international conference series are to:

1. Advance a collective understanding of agriculture's importance – and existing opportunities – to act as a driver of Africa's development;
2. Spotlight the unique and essential roles each sector (across public and private) currently plays in Africa's agriculture sector – and what actions must be taken to reverse Africa's development paradox;
3. Promote the exchange of ideas and innovative thinking across all actors who influence Africa's agricultural sector; and
4. Provide an opportunity for young researchers and students across a variety of countries and contexts, especially those enrolled in the national network of Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) in the USA, to engage the important role agriculture plays in advancing development progress.

FORMAT OF THE CONFERENCES

The conferences, as appropriate, will take the form of in-person, hybrid, or online events that drive a results-oriented dialogue towards advancing Africa's development, through agriculture, with a focus on the above objectives.

They will offer a unique avenue for actors, across sectors, whose work promises a positive impact on Africa's development, to debate and build knowledge on agriculture-based solutions. The debates focus on propelling innovation, with a special emphasis on engaging policymakers, development experts, youth, and students through audience engagement, towards creating a consolidated understanding of agriculture for Africa's development.

The conferences will work towards an inclusive, all-hands-on-deck approach towards engaging a diversity of actors on this important subject.

Key questions for each panelist

Informed by latest research on agriculture for Africa's development, each panelist will answer at least four key questions:

- (1) What should Africa do differently to transform and modernize agriculture?
- (2) How can Africa use agriculture, in an innovative manner, to decarbonize, and drive economic growth, economic efficiency, and human progress?
- (3) What specific actions should be taken at the national, regional, and global levels to ensure a successful agriculture-for-development agenda?
- (4) What should Africa do differently to harness the vast potential of its agribusinesses capability that has been projected to be as big as its current GDP by 2030?

Each panelist will have approximately 15 minutes to address all four questions and engage in exchange of ideas as guided by the moderator. The discussion will then move to audience Q&A.

Question and Answer session

The 55-minute Q&A session will be led by the Moderator, who will pose audience questions to the panelist(s) that were collected when each participant registered for the conference. A limited number of spontaneous audience questions could be allowed towards the end of the session.

TIMELINES AND NEXT STEPS

The first conferences are planned be conducted via in-person/hybrid platforms during September 2021, with initial engagements in Washington DC, New York City, and Boston (tentative).

Multiple additional conferences, whether in-person/hybrid/online will follow towards engaging stakeholders across Latin America, Europe, and the African continent.

[Click here to register](#)