

SESSION REPORT | African Soil Seminar | Nairobi, 28-30 November 2016

SOIL RESTORATION FOR ACHIEVING THE 2063 + 2030 AGENDAS IN AFRICA: LINKING GLOBAL AMBITIONS TO LOCAL NEEDS

Title	Food Security Policies for 2030
Date	Tuesday 29 November 2016
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Host/s	AgriProFocus, Kenya Youth Farms, Nigeria Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG), Kenya Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania (SAT), Tanzania Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), Germany
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1 | DESCRIPTION

Food Security is the top priority when discussing the need for restoring degraded land and protecting soils from further degradation. Sub-Saharan Africa faces this priority while being affected by two major population trends: continued growth of the youth and fast urbanisation. These trends influence the availability of food and are in turn influenced by the way natural resources are managed. How do we design policies that respond to these shifts?



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This question can be answered in countless ways. International initiatives can complement on-going national food security programmes, but these will remain far from satisfactory shall they fail to incorporate the one group which constitutes, in effect, both the agents and subjects of Africa's future: the youth. So what are their opinions on how food policies should be designed to ensure a vibrant and dynamic rural area in Africa for 2030? This session approached this issue by giving the floor to youth representatives to both frame the debate and engage with more senior participants of the African Soil Seminar on how to design "Food Security Policies for 2030".

2 | MAIN DISCUSSION POINTS

The session comprised of two parts starting with four youth representatives from Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Tanzania presenting their visions and aspirations regarding needed food security policies through the practical examples of the initiatives they themselves lead. In the second part, four senior participants commented through the lens of their experiences on whether we are on track to achieve the presented visions. They also commented on what has been considered thus far, what is missing, and how to ensure youth engagement in policy-making.

The first part of this session was facilitated by **Matheus Zanella**, Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), who opened with welcoming the diversified group of participants from farmer groups, governments, academia, civil society, working in different areas and representing 11 countries (Benin, Belgium, Burkina Faso, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Kenya, India, Nigeria, South Africa, and Tanzania). **Alphaxard Gitau**, AgriProFocus (Kenya), the first youth leader to take the floor, focused **on the role of networks for promoting change makers in the agricultural sector**. He affirmed that the future of policy-making lies on linking different resources and stakeholders through networks that enable leadership and ownership of policy processes. He noted that we should not rely too much on standard policy-making processes.

The following discussions gravitated around the **current dominating notion where agriculture is seen as a retrograde sector by the youth**, and whether this should be considered as a problem within the youth itself. One of the reached conclusions is that a whole new imagery of farming is needed to make this sector attractive for the youth; one that is more urban, innovative, modern, and profitable. And therefore we should not limit our focus on agricultural production, but widen scopes to include other activities of the value chain (processing, packaging, distribution, etc) that tend to be more concentrated in urban areas.

Nkiruka Nnaemego, Youth Farms (Nigeria), built on this debate by pointing to how they managed to engage youth in campaigning, networking, mobilization and other activities of policy-making. She noted that **one of the key problems is recognition**, and that the agenda youth need to set into motion must include the identification of entry-points at policy-levels, capacity-building, and access to research and technology. She presented “eco-smart” approaches, that Youth Farms is promoting, to address these barriers for youth engagement in the whole value chain.

Discussions were very lively and focused around the idea that these youth-led initiatives are not awaiting some hypothetical government support – that is unlikely to come anyway – but are “hands-on” examples of youth dynamism and pro-activity. Other ideas that were raised were that such youth initiatives are **seeing farming as a whole circuit where waste is brought back to the production system in terms of inputs**. This is one example of the kind of new mentality that has to be fostered to change the retrograde imagery of agriculture commented before.

The session was carried on by **Siyabonga Myeza**, Environmental Monitoring Group in South Africa, who reported on the case of communities living in the Cape Town region that organize themselves in selling rooibos tea in organic and fair trade markets. The case involves many young farmers and demonstrates that **it is possible to strive in harsh social and environmental conditions such as those with low fertility soils and low rainfall**.



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The case resembled the inspiring narrative of **Janet Maro**, founder of Sustainable Agriculture Tanzania (SAT), an organization that directly involves hundreds of young farmers in the organic market in her home country. She commented on several of the soil and land restoration activities that they undertook to restore fertility and the role of farming sharing and training centre that SAT supports. In her opinion, **such successes of the localized youth can reverse the negative and unattractive imagery that farming carries in contemporary context, including tackling the current urban bias shared by the youth.**

Discussions reflected on the policy-making aspects of these examples and questioned how such relative successes were seen by policy-makers. On the one hand, it was argued that they did positively influence some aspect of agricultural policy; such as contributing to a recently-approved Tanzanian national strategy for the youth and to organic farming support. Yet, **risks of political and opportunistic capture also exist**, as Siyabonga affirmed “the risk of political hijacking is real”. Participants also highlighted the relevance of land ownership for the youth, specially noting the difficulties this group faces in terms of access to land with the added challenge that most soil restoration activities pay-off only in the long term. They shared their varied experiences in public participation targeting involving the youth in policy-making and affirmed that positive examples do exist, although sadly many are regarded as mere check-list exercises.

Facilitating the second part of the session, **Boniface Kiteme**, from the Centre for Training and Integrated Research in ASAL Development (Kenya), introduced the two main questions: Are we on track for achieving the youth’s vision? What can we do better and what is missing?

Roch Mongbo, the National Council for Food Security and Nutrition (CAN), Benin, presented their experience in placing the youth into current political responses to food insecurity. **He clarified that youth can be seen both as actors and subjects of policy.** As ‘subjects’ policies could include school children education (e.g. hygiene habits at school) and teenager education (e.g. food diets and sexual health). As ‘actors’ policies would consider the youth as special promoters of a cultural change in unhealthy and unsustainable habits including to older generations.

Diana Lee-Smith, Mazingira Institute, Kenya, focused on food security from the urban perspective, as dynamic spaces for youth innovation and many examples in, e.g. initiatives re-using waste in agricultural production inside highly urbanised areas. Shared examples addressed key challenges related to soil protection in urban areas, and **creating needed synergies between health and agriculture while tackling core problems in malnutrition;** such as in diversifying diets through vegetable production.



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Special attention to urban mothers, a particular segment of the youth, was highlighted by **Elizabeth Kimani Murage**, the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC), Kenya. The high prevalence of **teenage pregnancies** coupled with poor breastfeeding practices put **this group in a special risk situation deserving targeted policies and stronger political engagement**. Policies in this domain should include social-protection measures, workplace support, maternity protection, as well as more long-term measures such as targeted micro-financing.

The last contribution was made by **Baba Galley Diarra**, the General Directorate for Water Management and Irrigation Development from Burkina Faso, who recapped many of the issues touched upon during this session, linking those with his own personal experiences of involving youth in policy-making. He agreed that frustration by the youth with the time-pace of policy-making is recurrent, but that there are ways of managing expectations so that policy hearings care for youth opinions. **Connecting the first and second parts of the discussions he concluded that many of the policies targeted at the youth could see this group as both subjects and actors simultaneously**. This opinion was also affirmed by Diana Lee-Smith who summarized the discussions with outlining that a promising way of engaging youth in policy-making could capitalize on opportunities underlined in making the links between nutrition, urbanisation and soil policies.

3 | KEY MESSAGES

- Two major trends mark population change in Sub-Saharan Africa: continued growth of the youth and fast urbanisation. In this context, agriculture continues to be seen as a “punishment”, the backward, retrograde sector, one for those with little opportunities in life. **However**, agriculture is much more than production at the farm: **Value “circuits” can offer a different kind of engagement in the agricultural sector that is much more attractive**; one that has an urban, modern, sustainable and profitable imagery;
- For youth engagement in agriculture access to land, capital and inputs remain crucial thresholds. This carries important implications in terms of ownership of change and long-term thinking needed for soil restoration, inter-generational knowledge transfer, among others. This session showcased four **inspiring successful examples** on how to address this in practice from four youth-led initiatives from Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, and South Africa;
- We have acknowledged that youth must be engaged in policy-making. The “how” questions remain not sufficiently addressed. **Standard policy-making procedures** such as ministry consultations, parliamentary activity, etc, **tend to be seen as bureaucratic, slow and check-list exercises by the youth. However, policy-making comprises much more than this. It includes networking, activism, campaigning, community-based initiatives, internet mobilizations, etc.** Any “youth policy framework” must think of appropriate incentives to engage youth under these more fluid formats.

Further Information: [IISD Highlights](#) [Global Soil Week](#)