

How Africa can feed itself and the world

 By [Sandy Peters](#)

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[Professor Adipala Ekwamu](#), executive secretary of the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RuForum), gave an inspiring keynote presentation at the third [International Conference on Global Food Security](#) held in Cape Town this week.



Professor Adipala Ekwamu, executive secretary of the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture ([RuForum](#))

Focusing on Africa's potential to feed itself and the world, Ekwamu emphasised that we cannot eat potential - that potential must be turned into reality, and in order to do so, the continent needs to address a number of key issues, including social stability, investment in the youth, a stronger science base, population growth, and developing a robust human capital base.

Nurturing the youth

Ekwamu noted that 60% of the African population is made up of its youth. "People see this as one of the biggest dividends that the continent has, but we must be able to nurture it, to make sure that they benefit, that they see value for themselves, and that they add to economic development, otherwise we are heading for disaster," he warned.

Another challenge Ekwamu highlighted was that of a declining rate of productivity in agriculture which has dropped from 1.8% in the 1970s to its current rate of 0.5% - this in the midst of rising world food demand.

Africa's physical agricultural production potential, in terms of land and water availability, varies from region to region, he noted, but even those areas with bountiful resources may not be fully able to harness this opportunity without significant investment in science, technology and innovation. "Having enough land is not enough," he said. "You must make it productive while at the same time ensuring environmental health and sustainability."

Investment in smallholder farmers

Smallholder farmers dominate in Africa, and that has policy implications, said Ekwamu, in terms of investment and improving productivity so that they are able to maintain large populations in the region. "The science that underpins development must look at how we can enhance productivity and sustainability within smallholder agriculture."

This level of farming, however, is threatened by Africa's high level of population growth and a youth population that do not see farming as a lucrative business, said Ekwamu, noting that majority of farmers in Africa entail an aging generation.

Previously, global food demand was largely met by Europe and North America, however, this region has seen very limited growth of late, noted Ekwamu, and while Latin America has seen a rise in agricultural potential, this is also declining due to environmental concerns in the region. Along with India and the Far East, that leaves Africa with the opportunity to contribute to an increase in global agricultural outputs and feed the world, he said.

Harnessing regional policies

To do this, significant public and private sector investment must be made in dealing with the continent's current challenges related to health, nutrition, hunger etc. Africa must also better harness the regional policies it has in place, he said, such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, the Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa, and the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa.

Partnerships and knowledge-sharing will help take things to scale, he noted, pointing to the examples of Ethiopia and Rwanda which have both made significant strides in becoming food secure nations.



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Ekwamu believes that Africa can indeed feed itself and the rest of the world, but recognises this as an enormous task. "We must have, above all, the skills and policies to help us take advantage of the opportunities," he concluded, emphasising once again the need to engage and invest in Africa's youth, and that it manages its population growth.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

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