

Analysing the pathways to agricultural commercialisation in Sub-Saharan Africa

'What are the pathways to agricultural commercialisation that have been most effective in empowering women and girls, reducing rural poverty and improving nutrition and food security?'



The **Agricultural Policy Research in Africa (APRA)** consortium is a five-year research programme which is working to address this crucial question.

APRA researchers are conducting multi-country studies to examine how African farmers engage with commercial agriculture, from production to processing and marketing, and the effects these pathways have on rural groups, particularly women and young people.

APRA research will assess the consequences of different types of market

engagement on poor rural groups across a variety of contexts, such as estates, plantations, contract farmers and small/medium sized farms. It will provide new insights into the changing dynamics of agricultural commercialisation trajectories, examining their impacts on disadvantaged women and men. Our research will offer high-quality evidence, to inform policy and practice on future agricultural commercialisation options and investments in Sub-Saharan Africa.





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Agricultural commercialisation and livelihood trajectories

APRA defines agricultural commercialisation as a process by which agricultural enterprises and the agricultural sector as a whole rely increasingly on the market for the sale of produce and the acquisition of production inputs, such as labour. It is a part of the process of structural transformation through which a growing economy transitions, over a period of several decades:

- from one where the majority of the population live in rural areas and depend directly or indirectly on semi-subsistence agriculture for an important part of their livelihood;
- to one where the majority of the population live in urban areas and depend on employment in manufacturing or service industries for the major part of their livelihood.

Agricultural commercialisation is successful if more people are **'stepping up'** (accumulating and investing) and **'stepping out'** (diversifying and creating non-farm rural economic activity), and fewer people are **'hanging in'** (simply surviving) or **'dropping out'** (moving away or slipping into destitution). APRA research will disaggregate outcomes to understand who wins and who loses from different commercialisation pathways. We will examine how they result in different types of displacement and transition, requiring, for example, support for 'stepping out' to non-agricultural livelihoods or social protection measures to support people 'hanging in' or 'dropping out'.

APRA will analyse four different models of agricultural commercialisation:

1. Smallholder commercialisation
2. Outgrowers/contract farming
3. Medium-scale commercial agriculture
4. Estate/plantation

Our goals

- 1 Generate high-quality evidence on routes to agricultural commercialisation in Africa, using a mix of rigorous methods.
- 2 Undertake policy research on agricultural commercialisation to fill gaps in knowledge and define policy options.
- 3 Ensure the sharing and uptake of research with a diverse range of stakeholders at national, regional and international levels.
- 4 Strengthen the capacity of the team, and associated partner institutions, to deliver high-quality, policy-relevant research.

Outcome areas and research themes

The consortium is exploring **five outcomes** of commercialisation:

- 1 Empowerment of women and girls
- 2 Income and consumption based poverty
- 3 Inequality
- 4 Employment rates and conditions
- 5 Food and nutrition security

In addition, **five cross-cutting themes** underpin our research:

- 1 **Dimensions of social difference** - the impact of market engagement on women and girls is central to APRA's structure, and we will analyse gender implications.
- 2 **Rural transitions; non-farm rural economies and rural-urban links** - our analysis will go beyond the farm to look at the broader rural economy.
- 3 **Policy processes and political economy** - we aim to understand the political-economic drivers of change.
- 4 **Climate change and livelihood resilience** - we will assess how climate change presents challenges to long-term market opportunities, especially for women and girls.

5 Science, technology and innovation for commercialisation- we will examine evolving labour-saving and labour-using technology, exploring how innovation shapes opportunities for farmers.

By adopting a multi-method, comparative approach to our research, we aim to analyse each outcome across six countries and three work streams. Each work stream will observe big policy questions to inform our understanding of the impacts and consequences of agricultural commercialisation processes in different settings.

Work stream one: What outcomes result from the selection of different types of agricultural commercialisation?

APRA will explore how different models of commercialisation selected by households, impact on poverty, employment, women and girl empowerment and food security.

Work stream two: What pathways of agricultural commercialisation lead to what outcomes?

The analysis will be carried out on the dynamic impacts of commercialisation on livelihoods over an extended period. Evidence will be provided on the key factors shaping households' pursuit of different commercialisation options and strategies over time.

Work stream three: What policies promote agricultural commercialisation with what outcomes?

Will analyse key policy issues associated with changing patterns of commercialisation through six multi-country studies:

- 1 Business investment in agricultural commercialisation
- 2 Growth corridors and commercialisation
- 3 Rise of medium-scale farmers
- 4 BRICS interventions and mechanisation
- 5 Livestock commercialisation in pastoralist areas
- 6 Young people and agricultural commercialisation

Where we work

Regional hubs

APRA has three Regional Hubs across East, West and South Africa: the Centre for African Bio-Entrepreneurship (CABE), Kenya, the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS), South Africa, and the University of Ghana, Legon. The hubs will provide ongoing engagement with NGOs, government, farmer organisations and businesses. They will also ensure APRA has a strong presence in the region and links APRA's research to broader policy networks.

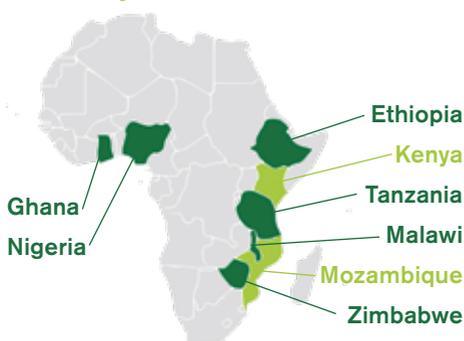
Countries

APRA's research is divided between priority countries (where the majority of our research will take place) and secondary countries (where specific policy studies will be conducted), enabling us to extend our research through coordinated regional engagement activities in East, West and South Africa.

Our research sites will provide examples of various places of commercialisation – established/mature and recent/emerging sites – with varying market connections and infrastructure. We will also examine different objects of marketing, including comparing lower-value staples, such as maize, rice and beans, with higher-value horticulture, industrial and export crops, such as cocoa, groundnuts and tobacco.

Priority countries

Secondary countries



Key facts

Funded by the UK Department for International Development, APRA will run until 2021. The consortium draws on expertise from academics and knowledge management specialists in Sub-Saharan Africa, UK, Sweden and the USA. The APRA Directorate is based at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK.

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