



# CONFERENCE NEWS

Daily updates from Toward a Green Revolution in Africa

Conference blog: [www.stepscentre-thecrossing.blogspot.com](http://www.stepscentre-thecrossing.blogspot.com)

## Rainbow revolutions and silver bullets

### One vision, one goal, but no one-size-fits-all solutions

The conference may be titled Toward a Green Revolution in Africa, but the colour of the revolution began to change hue on the second day in Salzburg.

A strong message was emerging in both roundtable discussions and plenary sessions – that moving in one direction, with one vision and one goal was the key to the future of agriculture in Africa. However this idea comes with a caveat: that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions.

The approach required to achieve effective change needs to move away from the single silver bullet method of a magic Green Revolution solution that can fit every African context.

What is needed instead, several delegates suggested, was a 'rainbow revolution' with a 'green ethic'. This multi-hued approach needs to go beyond a production focus to issues of environment, biodiversity, equity and rights. And new initiatives need to have effective prior resilience audits of their potential impacts. We don't have to make the mistakes of the past Asian Green Revolution, one delegate succinctly put it, because we have the benefits of hindsight.

Under the 'rainbow revolution', Africa's biodiversity would be maintained. The risk of narrowing Africa's genetic options should be kept in mind and building in multiple options to preserve and increase diversity and flexibility was called for. Only if you have diversity, will the continent be able to cope with shocks in the future.



Lindiwe Sibanda, Chief Executive Officer, FANRPAN, addresses the conference,

### DATA AND LEARNING DIVIDE

Why didn't we know about the current food crisis until the urban poor of Africa took to the streets in protest? This question exposes one of the main topics of today's discussions: the need for better data, increased use of data and the importance of learning.

The food prices issue took everyone by surprise. But if we were doing our horizon-scanning properly, why didn't we see it coming? There are things we know that we don't know – but what about the things we don't know that we don't know, asked one delegate? We need to think a lot more about the element of surprise. There are many threats out there that we don't know about, but we still need to be prepared.

In order to be better prepared, Africa needs to look forward, to scan the horizon to pick up trends: it needs better information. Improving data and learning and developing a learning culture is key. One delegate called for more, and better, statistics captured from world-class African universities and statistics services. At the moment, poor

### Views and voices

#### Mamadou Goita

"Farmers have been left aside from the process we have been debating for more than one year now and we cannot have a revolution, be it green, yellow or black, without the key players, who are farmers.

"We need to organise meetings at local, country and regional levels to see if farmers are content with what is being implemented now as we speak"

#### Godfrey Bahigwa

"The basics are there, we know what needstobedone, butweneedconcrete action, not new frameworks."

### Today in pictures



quality data is often poorly analysed or not analysed at all, particularly around agricultural production.

Improvements could come from boosting capacity and creating incentives for the accurate reporting of data. By improving the quality and reliability of data there will be more potential for setting benchmarks and reviewing progress, impact and outcomes, delegates heard.

Boosting learning can also mean finding out about things in a more opportunistic manner, by scouting for innovations and experiences and sharing those widely for scaling up. 'We are not starting from scratch,' commented one delegate.

## REACHING THE HARD TO REACH

Talking about a Green Revolution on a global level is the easy part, but how will the Green Revolution reach out to those that are hardest to reach?

A platform for dialogue in African countries – to talk at a regional and local level – was a recurring theme. The role of the citizen in creating the Green Revolution was not to be underestimated, delegates said.

Initiatives to build citizen action, accountability and representation are needed, the conference heard. Helping to bring excluded people into the debate and build the capacity of farmer organisations to be effective is key to this process. Representation and accountability need to be built up, using local, national and global networks to demand more effective government and donor responses.

But who will miss out? One key question is how to engage with those whose views do not usually form part of the policy process? What happens to those living in areas far from towns

where road connections are poor and where government and private sector presence is limited, such as the dryland pastoral areas of Africa?

Efforts must be put into including those who are hard to reach and those stuck in the 'poverty trap' where the benefits of a Green Revolution will be missed.

## INNOVATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS FOR WHOM?

There was much talk across the group and plenary sessions about the importance of coordination and alignment of initiatives and institutions. This is happening under the leadership of the AU-NEPAD CAADP initiative, but needs to be strengthened.

Such coordination and partnership is critical to the African Green Revolution, and needs alliances between the public and private sector, the conference heard. In the African context markets need states and states need markets. There is a need to enhance facilitation and coordination to make markets work effectively for poverty reduction. The basic enabling environment – infrastructure, research and development, irrigation – needs to be put in place; and this requires governments to take a lead.

However, even with all these efforts is Africa still missing opportunities? Marginalised and vulnerable stakeholders, especially female farmers, are still under-represented throughout institutional processes.

Barriers such as the digital divide, low literacy and a perceived absence of articulated demands contribute to the persistent exclusion. But it was argued that this last reason is unjustified, since there are plenty of examples of how informal, grassroots organisations

are setting up innovative systems and processes, such as intra-regional trade systems, which a lot of learning can be taken from. Informal institutions can make a difference in an African Green Revolution, delegates agreed.

## Views and voices

### Lindiwe Sibanda

"The ordinary citizen has been starved of space and evidence to articulate their needs. Can we empower them to strengthen their advocacy so they can hold their governments to account?"

### Mariam Mayet

"There is already a paradigm set in stone that is very simplistic, and is a false paradigm. We need to transfer power away from providers, donors and philanthropists to recipients and consumers. Until we do there can be no long term solutions. Those who have resources have power."

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### Conference News Editorial

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