

Rural Futures: unlocking a continent’s hidden promise

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Brief Report on Workshop Attendance

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Introduction

Amdissa Teshome, on behalf of Future Agricultures, was invited to this workshop by the NEPAD Planning and Coordination Secretariat (NPCS). This is the first time that FAC has been invited without us contacting the AU/NEPAD/CAADP so it is a progress which we must build on. This is a brief reflection on the workshop objectives and proceedings.

Organisation and objectives

The workshop was organised by the NPCS in collaboration with UNECA and support from the WWF. The objective of the workshop as stated in the invitation letter is to facilitate dialogue that will articulate the aspirations and joint action for Africa’s rural sector. The specific objectives were to:

- Share experiences and deepen the understanding around the potential for more integrated strategies, interventions and decision-making associated with development, environment and climate policy and practice;
- Elaborate on specific programmatic actions that could be put forward for immediate adoptions by key stakeholders;
- Identify ways in which regional organisations can support these and related programmatic actions on a continuing and systematic basis

Participants

The event aimed to bring together representatives from Regional Economic Commissions (RECs) and other regional organizations, with influence on the development, agriculture, environment, climate agenda and decision-making in Africa.

The event was attended by 27 participants distributed as follows:

- South Africa (5 mainly NPCA);
- Burikina Faso (3)
- Zambia (2)
- Ethiopia (10 most of them from UNECA)
- USA (2)
- Kenya (2)
- Rome/FAO (1)

The sessions

Opening session

Although the opening session was slightly long; each agency making a statement, the main discussion sessions were highly informal which allowed participants to reflect on how the major interrelated challenges in their sectors can be addressed and aligned more strategically to catalyze rural transformation across the continent.

Contemporary trends

A keynote by Prof Peter Ewang of the National Development Agency (ND) from South Africa, on Approaches to rural development & changing context for the rural sector, set the scene by opening up a whole range of issues in rural development. The issues were by no means new but good reminders of what the audience already knew. It helped us frame our contributions.

Contemporary actions

Two cases studies were presented (i) COMESA's efforts to support climate adaptation in the regions (ii) community based integrated watershed management development (Ethiopia case). These are just examples that were available to illustrate innovative ways of addressing specific issues (e.g. land degradation and community empowerment) in rural development. The presentations initiated a lively discussion and better examples of contemporary actions (e.g. conservation tillage) in rural development.

Rural futures

This session was chaired by Dr. Aberra Deressa, State Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. There were two short contributions to kick off the discussion for this session. Owen Cylke (WWF) presented his version of "an enlarged agenda for rural Africa". Estherine Lisinge-

Fotabong (Director of Program me Implementation at NPCA) summarised the issues raised during the day for the benefit of the State Minister.

The State Minister appreciated the efforts to focus on the rural community and he reiterated that this is in line with the Government of Ethiopia's development strategy. The Government has been implementing a Rural Development Policy for almost ten years and have registered significant improvements in rural lives. The next five years Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) is also rural focused. Although the plan is ambitious (e.g. doubling GDP by the end of five years), given the urgency of the matter, the Government cannot afford to be less ambitious. Following this brief remark, he opened the floor for discussion.

Defining the agenda and wrap up

The second half-day was devoted to consolidating issues raised on Day 1. I was able to distribute Future Agricultures Pack and generated lots of interest for future engagement.

Future Agricultures Perspectives

The NPCA plans to make this a regular forum. How do we view this initiative? Is it complementary or competing to our effort? Initially, when I received the invitation, I was not sure. But having attended the meeting, I see this as complementing our efforts. This could be a forum through which the evidence and knowledge we accumulate can inform NEPAD. All the ideas/issues I raised at this meeting were listened to and served as reference throughout the discussion. For example, the youth issue struck a chord with the audience. The integration/synergy between sectors almost became the theme of the discussion. We also emphasised that integration/synergy should happen at policy formulation not just at implementation. FAC is discussing with MoARD how to initiate a regular dialogue on integration and synergy.

The FAC Pack which contained information on several rural topics was appreciated by the recipients including the NPCA. Therefore, Rural Futures, if it becomes a regular forum, is complementary to our efforts. We have emphasised that it should be distinct from other platforms such as CAADP PP and must feed directly into the initiatives.

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