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Africa: Donors Pledge \$30 Billion to Boost Agricultural Sector

By Clea Broadhurst

NAIROBI, Kenya, Sept 13, 2016 (RFI) -- African farmers will benefit from commitments of more than \$30 billion that have been made, by African leaders, development banks, the private sector and international donors, at the African Green Revolution Forum, which took place in Nairobi this week.

Around 70 percent of Africa's population depends, in one way or another, on agriculture for food and income, but many farmers still struggle with poverty and poor nutrition.

The pledged money is intended to transform agriculture on the continent over the next decade - and it is the largest package of financial commitments to Africa's agriculture sector to date.

Landmarks and accountability

The money itself is quite a commitment already.

"The other landmark is the fact that leaders agreed on putting in place new and strong national plans, to make sure that these resources are directly delivered," Boaz Keizire, the Head of Policy and Advocacy for AGRA, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, an alliance led by Africans with roots in farming communities, told RFI.

"And the last outcome was the design of a 'continent agriculture plan', plan that will be used to track, measure, and report on the progress of the commitments they have made. It also creates the opportunity to start doing things differently, not business as usual, but putting in place a strong system that can deliver its goals."

Keizire said they had identified the specific actions that were needed to trigger growth. For example, they know that investing resources into what has been invested in before without getting success has to be stopped.

"We also have to pull our resources, and more importantly, we have to make sure that there is a stronger accountability system. This has never been the case in many countries in Africa, and that is the reason why we do not see much progress, because of the lack of strong accountability systems and instruments," Keizire said.

Changes on the ground

The people in charge said that on the ground, there is a need to strengthen relations between African countries and they need to work together to make agriculture profitable on the continent.

"This is a multi-disciplinary plan, it has to have everybody moving together, at the same time, and with equal measures. Now, this is something we have never seen before," Yemi Akinbamijo, who heads the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), the organization responsible for coordinating agricultural research for development, told RFI.

"We've seen sparks, we've seen success stories... but we need to see more success, more goodwill, and we need to stop the 'bla-bla' and do the 'do-do'. And President Kagame, in the opening ceremony could not have said it better, 'We have said all that needs to be said, now we're supposed to do what needs to be done.'"

Real political commitment

Moreover, he said there was one thing they all agreed on during this forum - the fact that African countries already knew how to bring the agricultural sector to the next level. They just don't have the means.

"We have concrete examples where small farmers know exactly what food they want to grow, on which markets they want to sell, what fertilizers they want to use, they have the choice, they have a set of options that can be customized to their needs," Fadel Ndiame, the Head of AGRA West Africa, told RFI.

"There's a growing political commitment, with the thought that agriculture needs to be supported and heads of States are taking responsibility to create the right environment for small holder farmers, the private sector, and the NGOs to build a sustainable system."

He said there was a need to really engage with governments, so they can play their leadership role in defining each country's agenda.

"It needs to be done in terms of transformation, mobilising the partners, the donors, but also discuss the technical support so that we can collectively provide effective support to farmers so that they can really scale up their achievements," he added.

We are seeing a "convergence of goodwill", said Ndiame, from leaders and donors - which is hugely important in order to unlock the potential of African agriculture.

Now, the priority for the next five years will be to give farmers access to markets, finance and insurance, while creating new jobs in farming and food production.

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