Promoting the Agricultural Transformation in Africa: How to Create Sufficient Political Will?

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Abstract:
The recent literature on economic development in Africa emphasizes that the agricultural transformation still needs to play a key role for poverty reduction and food security. As compared to the situation of the Green Revolution in Asia, there are new opportunities for the agricultural transformation in Africa, but also new challenges. Against this background, the paper shows that it is essential that countries develop sufficient political will to achieve an agricultural transformation. The paper presents a concept of political will and applies this concept empirically, using a range of indicators of political will, such as government expenditure on agriculture. The paper proposes various demand-side and supply-side strategies to strengthen the political will to promote the agricultural transformation in Africa.

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Abstract
The recent literature on economic development in Africa emphasizes that the agricultural transformation still needs to play a key role for poverty reduction and food security. As compared to the situation of the Green Revolution in Asia, there are new opportunities for the agricultural transformation in Africa, but also new challenges. Against this background, the paper shows that it is essential that countries develop sufficient political will to achieve an agricultural transformation. The paper presents a concept of political will and applies this concept empirically, using a range of indicators of political will, such as government expenditure on agriculture. Finally, the paper proposes various demand-side and supply-side strategies to strengthen the political will to promote the agricultural transformation.

1 Introduction
For almost two centuries, development theory and policy has centered on structural transformation characterized by massive migration of labor from a relatively low-income rural agricultural sector to a high-wage urban industrial sector. An agricultural transformation defined in terms of rapid and sustained farm productivity increases is a necessary component of structural transformation. Development policies have been designed to encourage this type of transformation and quicken its pace.

The Asian countries that were able to launch a Green Revolution were able to follow this pathway of structural transformation. However, a similar transformation has not been achieved in Africa, even though many countries adopted similar policies in the 1970s that aimed to increase productivity through massive government support to agriculture (e.g., Djurfeldt et al., 2005). The Structural Adjustment policies of the 1980s and 1990s favored a more market-oriented approach that paid less attention to agriculture, but they did not set African countries on a pathway to structural transformation either. In the 2000s, agriculture re-emerged on the political agenda, and so did the question of how a structural transformation could be achieved in Africa.

Recent work on the topic suggests that the African transformation will be different in form (de Janvry & Sadoulet, 2010; Barret et al. 2017; Diao et al., 2018). New opportunities may create an environment that is more conducive to a rural-centered agricultural transformation. The increased competition for export markets and the decline in manufacturing’s share in total employment imply that the opportunity for growth based primarily on export-led industrial development may be limited for economies of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (McMillan, Rodrik, & Verduzco-Gallo, 2014). At the same time, new opportunities in the form of agricultural value-added products and services closer to farms allow households to generate incomes through non-farm activities. Institutional advances are allowing some smallholders to capture (as a group) economies of scale in the provision of input services such as mechanization and could have wide implications for SSA. Advances in information and communication technologies and other technical advances enable small-scale rural manufacturing and service development, and enhance opportunities for improved rural lifestyles, e.g., through better medical care via health information technologies.
There is an increasing body of literature that deals with these new opportunities for a rural-centered agricultural transformation. This paper builds upon this literature and focuses on a question that has received less attention, so far: Considering the past failures of achieving an agricultural transformation on the African continent, what are the prospects that African countries can seize these new opportunities and launch a rural-centered agricultural transformation? Is there sufficient “political will” to achieve this transformation?

2 What should the African Agricultural Transformation in the 21st Century look like?

The available evidence indicates that structural transformation in Africa still needs to be based on the transformation of the agricultural sector (see, e.g., Barrett et al., 2017). There has been debate on whether the agricultural transformation in Africa would still be based on productivity increase among smallholder rather than on large commercial farms. The focus on smallholders has been criticized as "romantic populism" (Collier, 2008), but again, both historical and contemporary empirical evidence suggests that the role of large farms is limited to rather specific conditions (see, e.g.,Binswanger et al., 1995, Deininger and Byerlee, 2012). Hence, as stated in the World Development Report 2008 on “Agriculture for Development” (World Bank, 2007: 1): “Using agriculture as the basis for economic growth in the agriculture-based [i.e., most African] countries requires a productivity revolution in smallholder farming.” This proposition does not, however, imply that the agricultural transformation in Africa will look like the Asian Green Revolution. In fact, it will have to look rather different since (a) it has to meet the specific conditions of Africa, (b) it is confronted with the challenges of the 21st century and (c) it can make use of the opportunities of the 21st century (e.g., Booth, 2015 reports an assessment parallel to the present). The following sections discuss these specific features of the African agricultural transformation, drawing on selected literature in this field, especially Byerlee et al. (2009), de Janvry & Sadoulet (2010, pp. 201-2) and World Bank (2007).

2.1 Challenges of the 21st Century for African agriculture

African agriculture in the 21st century faces several risks and challenges that, if not addressed, could constrain growth and structural transformation. The first challenge of the African agricultural transformation is caused by the diversity of agro-ecologies and cropping systems, which seriously limits the possibilities to benefit from spill-overs from public and private research and development (R&D) investments from other regions (e.g., World Bank, 2007: 168). Overcoming this challenge requires particularly strong efforts to invest in R&D and to exploit economies of scale in R&D by collaborating within the region. However, expenditure on R&D, measured as percentage of agricultural gross domestic product, has remained rather low in Africa and the national agricultural research systems have remained fragmented and mostly rather small (e.g., Beintema et al., 2012; Beintema & Stads, 2014).

Second is the relatively low level of market development in Africa. Green Revolutions were underpinned by supportive market and social institutions. In Mexico, for example, land rights regulation and institutions were restructured before farmers could profitably adopt hybrid maize (Byerlee & de Polanco, 1983). (Kim & Neube, 2014) argue that a key difference between the growth experience of East Asia and SSA has been the lack of private ownership of land in SSA resulting in a vicious cycle of low investment, low productivity and low incomes. Asia had functional input and credit markets and output markets that Africa lacks, hindering African agricultural development (Johnson, Hazell, & Gulati, 2003; Dorward et al., 2004). Africa’s lack of institutional development that enables private sector activity has been cited as the underlying

Third, African agriculture is unique in that many African countries are still relatively sparsely populated, especially as compared to Asian countries at the time of the Green Revolution. In the late 60s, the arable land (ha) per person for developing countries in South Asia and East Asia was 0.3 and 0.2, respectively, which corresponds to the situation for much of SSA today with considerable variation across countries (World Bank, 2016) Induced innovation theory suggests that, therefore, labor-saving technologies would have to play a much larger role much earlier in the transformation process than was the case in Asia. Evidence indicates that not much progress has been made in this regard, as notwithstanding early contributions such as Pingali et al. (1987) mechanization has been largely neglected (e.g., Mruma et al., 2008; Kienzle et al., 2013). An analysis of changes in land and labor productivity from 1960 to 2013 by analysts such as Pardey (2015) shows that Africa has been the continent with by far the lowest increase in labor productivity. One reason can be seen in the predominance of manual labor, which still accounts for the major share of labor input. Considering that land is still relatively abundant in many regions of Africa, labor-saving technologies, particularly mechanization, need to be an essential element of the African agricultural transformation. African agricultural policy-makers, as shown by a recent study (Mockshell and Birner, 2015), are well aware of this problem and express concern that agriculture is mainly based on “hoe and cutlass”, the drudgery of which is not attractive to the youth especially. This concern is well reflected in the “push” type of migration from rural to urban areas, which is not based on labor-demand in the non-agricultural sector, but rather by the low returns to labor in the agricultural sector (Haggblade et al., 2010).

A fourth challenge for African agricultural transformation is climate change. As compared to temperate zones, tropical agriculture is more negatively affected by climate change, which exacerbates the already existing (especially R&D) challenges of increasing agricultural productivity.

A fifth challenge, which already existed in the 20th century but became better recognized in the 21st, is the need for environmental protection and sustainable natural resource management. The Green Revolution in Asia has had a range of negative environmental consequences, such as pollution by overuse of pesticides and inorganic fertilizer, depletion of aquifers and loss of biodiversity. This concern, which has been widely acknowledged in the literature, has led to calls for a “doubly green” (e.g., Conway, 1997) or “ever-green” revolution (e.g., Swaminathan, 2005). The African agricultural transformation not only has to avoid these problems caused through agricultural intensification, there is also a need to address the problems of natural resource degradation that have been caused during the past decades in the prevailing extensive farming systems, such as nutrient depletion due to lack of fertilizer use. What makes tackling these problems even more challenging is the lack of any consensus on the strategies that will be most suitable to tackle agro-environmental problems. As the controversies surrounding the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD, 2009) have shown, the global community is deeply divided regarding the question as to the role of modern industrial inputs vis-à-vis agro-ecological and organic approaches in future agricultural development (e.g., Scoones, 2009).

A final major challenge that African agricultural transformation has to cope with is globalization. Managing an agricultural transformation under the conditions of an open market economy brings
its own challenges, since African governments have fewer possibilities to protect the sector at least initially ("infant industry") than was the case during the Asian Green Revolution. Moreover, the African agricultural transformation is confronted with highly volatile agricultural prices and with rapidly changing demands of increasingly globalized value chains (e.g., de Janvry and Sadoulet, 2010).

2.2 Opportunities of the 21st Century

One of the big opportunities for African agricultural transformation is that it can take advantage of many technological and institutional innovations that have been developed during the past decades. The *World Development Report 2008* (World Bank 2007) as well as other sources, such as the World Bank’s *Agricultural Innovation Systems Sourcebook* (World Bank, 2012), provide ample evidence of such innovations that can facilitate the agricultural transformation in Africa. They include new low-cost land certification schemes that can help to provide security of access and support land rentals; technological innovations, such as drought- and flood-resistant varieties, new types of financial services, and new value chain approaches that bring smallholder farmers into contract farming with agro-industry.

The 21st century provides a range of new opportunities that have become available through scientific advances in a range of fields. Examples include innovations in breeding techniques (e.g., precision phenotyping, genomic selection, gene editing) or the use of sensor technologies for agricultural monitoring (with applications, e.g., in irrigation, pest control or animal and pasture monitoring; see Aqeel-Ur-Rehman et al., 2014 for a review). One promising group of technologies that are increasingly used in developing countries is information and communication technologies (ICTs). There are many opportunities to use ICTs in the agricultural knowledge systems (e.g., in research and extension), as well as in different segments of agricultural value chains.

The rise of tourism, both national and international, is another opportunity for rural areas that can be expected to gain importance as incomes continue to increase. Based on contracts with commercial tourism companies, farmers and pastoralists earn an income from tourism in exchange for a commitment to contribute to wildlife conservation. Such schemes fall into the category of PES. Empirical studies of such PES schemes that compare costs (e.g., increased damage to crops by wildlife and reduced livestock numbers) and benefits show mixed results, but they indicate a considerable potential for multiple benefits, including improved capacity to cope with droughts (see, e.g., Mburu & Birner, 2002; Osano et al., 2013; Kariuki & Birner, 2016). Next to PES derived from wildlife tourism, are numerous other examples of PES schemes that can create income opportunities for smallholder farmers. Payments for watershed protection and for carbon sequestration are examples (see Schomers & Matzdorf, 2013 for a review).

3 The political will to support agricultural transformation

3.1 Defining political will

Political will is a challenging concept. Hammergren (1998, p. 12, quoted in Post et al., 2010, p. 654) characterized it as “the slipperiest concept in the policy lexicon,” calling it “the sina qua non of policy success which is never defined except by its absence.” There have been various efforts to define political will since then. Post et al. (2010, p. 659) defined political will as “the extent of committed support among key decision-makers for a particular policy solution to a particular problem.” According to Brinkerhoff (2000, 2010), political will can be separated into
seven components described in Box 1. Brinkerhoff focused on the political will to combat corruption. His concept of political will is here adapted to the will to transform agriculture.

**Box 1: Components of political will**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Component Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Government initiative. This component deals with the source of the impetus for policies that support agricultural transformation. Political will is suspect when the push for such policies comes totally from external actors. Some degree of initiative from country decision-makers must exist in order to talk meaningfully of political will.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Choice of policies and programs based on technically sound, balanced consideration and analysis of options, cost/benefit and available evidence on the appropriateness and effectiveness of these policies and programs. When country actors choose agricultural policies and actions based on their own assessments of alternative options, taking evidence into account, then one can credibly speak of independently derived preferences and willingness to act.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Mobilization of stakeholders. This component concerns the extent to which government actors consult with, engage, and mobilize stakeholders. Do decision-makers reach out to members of civil society and the private sector to advocate for the changes envisioned? Are legislators involved? Are there ongoing efforts to build constituencies in favor of agricultural policies and programs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Public commitment and allocation of resources. To the extent that country decision-makers reveal their policy preferences publicly and assign resources to achieve those announced policy and program goals, these actions contribute to a positive assessment of political will.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Application of credible sanctions. Governance problems are widespread in agricultural programs, and without effective sanctions, they cannot be effectively implemented. Well-crafted and enforced sanctions, both negative and positive, signal serious intent to implement agricultural programs effectively. Symbolic and/or selective enforcement points to half-hearted political will.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Continuity of effort. Supporting the agricultural transformation requires resources and effort over the long term. One-shot or episodic efforts signal weak and/or wavering political will.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Learning and adaptation. Political will is demonstrated when country actors establish a process for tracking progress of agricultural policies and programs, and actively manage reform implementation by adapting to emerging circumstances. Learning can also apply to country policymakers observing policies, practices, and programs from other countries and selectively adopting them for their own use.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Brinkerhoff (2010) [Note: The text in the box is almost a verbatim quote from this source. References to anti-corruption programs have been changed to agricultural programs. Moreover, Point 2 has been reformulated to include the role of evidence.]
3.2 Measuring political will

An indicator that specifically measures the political will to support agricultural transformation has not yet been developed, but there are indicators that can be used to measure related aspects. One is the budget share that a government dedicates to the agricultural sector. This indicator is especially related to the fourth component of political will mentioned in Box 1 (public commitment and allocation of resources). The budget share is only a limited measure, since the composition and effectiveness of public spending on agriculture matter as well. African countries had committed themselves under the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program to (CAADP) to spend at least 10 percent of their national budget on agriculture. As shown in Figure 1, the trend of his indicator is not promising for any region of Africa.

Figure 1: Percentage of agricultural expenditures in total government expenditure (1980-2015)

![Figure 1: Percentage of agricultural expenditures in total government expenditure (1980-2015)](http://resakss.org/node/2)


Few countries have achieved the explicit goal (Kolavalli, Birner & Flaherty, 2012). Of the 43 countries in the ReSAKSS database, only 10 were above the 10% threshold in 2010 (
More recent data from 2012 from IFPRI, albeit for smaller sample of countries also do not suggest any improvement in meeting this goal (only 2 out of the 25 countries).

A related indicator is the “Agriculture Orientation Index” (AOI) for government expenditures. This indicator is published by the FAO. It is calculated as the ratio of agriculture’s share of government expenditures to agriculture’s contribution to GDP. Unlike the CAADP 10 percent goal, this indicator takes the size of the agricultural sector into account. As shown in Figure 3 below, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa show a far lower political will to support agriculture according to this index than the developing countries on the average. The AOI for Sub-Saharan Africa also shows a declining trend. This is in contrast, for example, to Southern Asia, where the AOI has been increasing considerably and also registered a remarkable peak during the food price crisis of 2008. (See http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/investment/expenditure/en/ but as of 20/12/2016 country-specific time series of AOI has just been found at http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/IG )
One concern with the use of a budget share figure as an indicator of political will is the problem that many African countries spend a considerable share of their agricultural budget on subsidies, rather than investments in agricultural R&D and other public goods, which may well yield higher
returns (World Bank, 2007; Jayne & Rashid, 2013). Therefore, one may also consider investment in agricultural research and extension (R&D) as a useful indicator of political will.

Figure 3: Agricultural Orientation Index (AOI)

![Agricultural Orientation Index](http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-economic/expenditure/en/)


Available data on investments in R&D indicate that such are typically “too little and too late”, especially in the low-performing countries that need those investments most (see review by Alston & Pardey, 2014, and the literature quoted there). A recent report on R&D capacity in Sub-Saharan Africa found that investment has increased substantially in absolute terms during the period from 2000 to 2011. However, the investment intensity, that is the investment in agricultural R&D expressed as share of agricultural GDP, did not increase (Figure 4). Moreover, growth in R&D investment was concentrated in relatively few countries (Beintema & Stads, 2014). Fuglie & Rada (2012) find that returns to national agricultural research are also robust, at least for large countries, although less than for international effort such as through the CGIAR, and they observe that overall investment in agricultural research has remained low, and increases in research capacity will likely be necessary to significantly accelerate agricultural growth in the region (see also [http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1037838/err145.pdf](http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1037838/err145.pdf)).
The budget share of an activity that is funded by donors could conceivably be considered as an indicator of political will that is linked to the first and the fourth components indicated in Box 1. To approach this possibility, consider some dated data published by OECD in 2006 through its “Creditor Reporting System on Official Development Assistance”, official development assistance (ODA) for 24 Sub-Saharan countries averaged 28 percent of total agricultural spending. In Mozambique, Niger, and Rwanda, ODA was even more than 80 percent (World Bank, 2007, p. 257), which could perhaps be seen as an indication of rather low government commitment to supporting agriculture. On the other hand, that impoverished governments choose to permit donors to invest so strongly in their agricultural sectors could perhaps more tellingly be interpreted as an expression of genuine positive commitment to supporting agriculture. This latter interpretation would seemingly apply rather readily to a country accepting an agricultural development project supported by a World Bank IDA Credit, for instance, such Credits being treated by most authorities as ODA. There are other problems with indicators based on ODA, deriving in part from data deficiencies and incomparabilities that stem from diverse procedures among donors as to how sectoral destinations are defined and data reported (e.g., Lowder & Carisma, 2011; ODI, 2012). Further confounding issues relate to the varying development effectiveness of different types of delivered ODA (e.g., Collins & Elliott, 2013). In sum, given the potential ambiguities involved, it seems that measures of ODA intensities in agricultural sectors are much less than ideal indicators of political will.

The World Bank’s “Enabling the Business of Agriculture” (EBA) indicator can also be interpreted as an indicator of political will. EBA applies a scoring methodology to assess good
regulatory practices in the fields of seeds, fertilizer, agricultural machinery, finance, and markets as well as transport. Having good regulatory practices in place in these areas can be seen as an indicator of a government’s commitment to support agricultural development. This indicator is related to the second component of political will displayed in Box 1. As shown in Figure 5, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) scores below average in all areas covered by EBA – but there are several areas where SSA performs better than other regions, such as machinery, finance and transport.

**Figure 5. Enabling the Business of Agriculture (EBA) Scores on topics, by region**

![Average score on EBA topics (0–100)](image)


Another indicator related to the political will to support the agricultural transformation is the support to, or discrimination against the agricultural sector. This indicator reflects the effect of all policies on the agricultural sector. The data set on distortions to agricultural incentives compiled by Kym Anderson and colleagues shows that in recent decades, most developing countries stopped taxing their agricultural sector and started to subsidize it. However, this trend has been less pronounced in Africa than in other continents. In the period from 2000 to 2005, the Nominal Rate of Assistance (NRA) for import-competitng agricultural commodities was 1.6 percent in Africa as compared to 26.5 percent in South Asia (Anderson, 2009: 23).

A related measure to the NRA is the FAO’s Market Development Gap (MDG), calculated as the average cost to producers from distorted sectoral policies (e.g., illicit taxes), high market access cost (poor infrastructure) and inefficiencies in domestic value chains. For the 10 SSA countries that FAO has collected data the average MDG has decreased from -14% in 2005 to -3% in 2014 (Figure 6). NRA and MDG can only partially be interpreted as an indicator of the political will to
transform agriculture, because the indicator also captures policies that indirectly affect agriculture, such as exchange rate policies, and it does not capture investments in the agricultural sector such as spending on the important agricultural R&D noted above.

**Figure 6: Average Market Development Gap (%), 2005-2014**

![Graph showing average market development gap](http://www.fao.org/in-action/mafap/data/en/; Accessed September 10, 2016). The average is for 26 commodities across 12 countries.

3.3 Explaining the political will to transform agriculture

The previous section suggests that, according to various indicators, the political will to support the agricultural transformation is likely to be lower in SSA than in other regions of the developing world. This finding begs the question as to how differences in the political will to support the agricultural transformation can be explained.

With regard to the Nominal Rate of Assistance (NRA), there is a substantial body of political economy literature that aims to explain differences in distortions to agricultural incentives, using the data set compiled by Kym Anderson and colleagues mentioned above (see Anderson et al. 2013, for a recent review). One study that included data from all regions indicates that democratization has played a major role in explaining the shift from taxing to subsidizing agriculture (Olper & Raimondi, 2010), which reduced the “urban bias” problem that dominated agricultural policies in developing countries earlier (e.g., Lipton, 1977). A study using the data for African countries in the same dataset arrived at similar conclusions: Competition among political parties turned the lobbying disadvantage of the rural majority into a political advantage (Bates & Block, 2010). Block (2013) showed that the macroeconomic reforms that reduced the taxation of the agricultural sector resulted in an increase in Total Factor Productivity, which is an important element of agricultural transformation. Government spending on agriculture also seems to be related to democratization. A study examining the factors that explain the government budget share dedicated to agriculture found that larger rural population shares are associated with higher spending on agriculture in democracies but not in authoritarian regimes (Birner & Palaniswamy, 2006).
Such quantitative political economy models have gone a long way in explaining agricultural policy choices, but they have generally neglected factors on which limited data are available, such as the role played by emerging farmers’ organizations, the role of private sector and the influence of international development agencies on agricultural policies. Likewise, the role of ideas and ideologies in explaining agricultural policy choices has been largely neglected (Binswanger & Deininger, 1997; Birner & Resnick, 2010). A recent study conducted in Ghana, Uganda and Senegal found that donors and domestic policy-makers held rather different policy beliefs on what it actually takes to promote productivity growth in agriculture (Mockshell & Birner, 2015). This study suggests that the relatively large budget shares spent on input subsidies are, along with other political economy factors, also caused by a strong policy belief of domestic policy-makers that directly improving farmers’ access to agricultural inputs, including machinery, is essential achieve a successful agricultural transformation.

A recent review that draws on qualitative case-study evidence as well as findings from the literature throws light on the question of why the political will to support agricultural transformation in SSA has remained limited in spite of democratization (Poulton, 2014). This paper is in line with the indicators presented above, which suggest that the political will to support agriculture is lower in SSA than in other regions of the world. Poulton’s study identifies several reasons that may account for this outcome. One is the credibility challenge that politicians face in new democracies. Since semi-literate rural voters with limited access to information have difficulties to assess the performance of politicians, they often opt for a candidate from the same ethnic group or they rely on intermediaries, such as local patrons or chiefs. Moreover, presidential candidates often try to win elections by forming alliances of regional voting blocs rather than by focusing on national issues. These factors lead to policies that focus on the provision of benefits to particular regions or localities rather than on the provision of public goods at the national level.

Poulton’s study finds that political will to invest in smallholder agriculture and achieve broad-based rural growth is higher in countries that depend on agriculture rather than other resources, and in political regimes that perceive a substantial internal or external threat to their continuation, such as Ethiopia or Rwanda (Poulton, 2014). This finding is supported by studies on the political economy of the Green Revolution in Asia, which show that the governments in charge at the time, e.g., in India, Indonesia and the Philippines, needed to deliver outcomes, most notably national food security, to be able to continue to stay in power (Djurfeldt et al., 2005; Birner & Resnick, 2010). As Poulton (2014, p. S119) notes, “this is an uncomfortable finding for those seeking to improve agricultural policy-making in Africa, because the factors that create strong state incentives to perform are ‘exogenous’.” Section 4.1 discusses which strategies can be applied in spite of this uncomfortable finding in order to strengthen the political will to support agricultural transformation.

4 How to overcome the obstacles? Strategies for strengthening the political will in support of African agricultural transformation

4.1 Distinguishing supply-side and demand-side strategies

One can distinguish two basic types of strategies that can be used to strengthen the political will to promote agricultural transformation and to address the associated governance challenges (Figure 9). One set of strategies targets the government institutions involved in agricultural policy-making and implementation. These strategies may be labelled “top-down” or “supply-
side” strategies as they target the political and administrative institutions responsible for the formulation and implementation of agricultural policies and programs. These institutions include parliamentary committees in charge of agriculture, agricultural ministries and their departments as well as agencies and organizations in charge of agricultural research, extension, regulation and agricultural infrastructure provision. The second set of strategies aims to strengthen the ability of citizens, particularly farmers and their organizations, to demand better policies and services and to hold politicians and service providers accountable. These strategies can be labelled “bottom-up” or “demand-side” strategies. Due to the rise of democracy, and the experience that supply-side strategies have had limited effect, demand-side strategies have gained increasing importance in the past few decades (World Bank, 2007: 252-255).

**Figure 9: Supply and demand-side strategies to strengthen political will and improve governance**

### 4.2 Strategies to strengthen the political will to support agricultural transformation

#### 4.2.1 Overview of strategies

Strategies to strengthen the political will to support agricultural transformation can target each of the seven components of political will listed in Box 1. Table 2 displays supply- and demand-side strategies that can be applied to strengthen these different components (cf. Brinkerhoff, 2000, 2010). The focus is placed on strategies that development partners could support to strengthen the political will to support an agricultural transformation. The subsequent sections describe selected strategies in more detail.
Table 2: Strategies to strengthen the political will – Options for development partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Supply-side strategies</th>
<th>Demand-side strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Government initiative</td>
<td>Identify and support politicians and public officials who are committed to promote the agricultural transformation; support parliamentary committees in charge of agriculture; avoid funding programs for which the government’s own funding share is low;</td>
<td>Identify and support journalists who report on agricultural issues; support farmers’ organizations and their involvement in policy processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Evidence-based policy-making</td>
<td>Strengthen the capacity of planning units and research organizations to assess and select agricultural policies/programs based on evidence</td>
<td>Support information campaigns among farmers about the performance of agricultural programs to promote performance-based voting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mobilization of stakeholders</td>
<td>Promote the establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms for agricultural policy-making; strengthen parliaments’ capacity to conduct public hearings</td>
<td>Strengthen farmers’ and agribusiness organizations and build their capacity to participate in multi-stakeholder policy processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Public commitment and allocation of resources</td>
<td>Collect data on public expenditures for agriculture and perform agricultural budget analyses; make findings publicly available</td>
<td>Strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations to engage in public expenditure tracking and participatory budgeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Application of credible sanctions</td>
<td>Support reforms that establish sanctions for mismanagement of agricultural programs; offer technical assistance and training</td>
<td>Offer training for watchdog organizations and journalists; assist in the establishment of complaint mechanisms for farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Continuity of effort</td>
<td>Provide multi-year funding to support agricultural policies/programs; invest in long-term agricultural institution-building</td>
<td>Provide multi-year support to farmers’ organizations and NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Learning and adaptation</td>
<td>Support institutional twinning; support monitoring, learning and evaluation of agricultural policies and programs using advanced methods such as experimental design; build capacity in these areas</td>
<td>Engage farmers in program evaluation, e.g., by using citizen report cards; Create options for North-South and South-South exchange among farmers’ organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Brinkerhoff (2010).

4.2.2 Strengthening farmers’ organizations

As shown in Table 2, an important demand-side strategy to create political will is the strengthening of farmers’ organizations. The literature on the political economy of agricultural policy suggests that smallholder farmers in developing countries face particularly high transaction costs and collective action problems in organizing themselves as effective interest groups due to their large numbers, dispersed locations, limited resources and high time discount rates. However, there is evidence that the ability of smallholders to organize themselves has been underestimated in this literature (e.g., World Bank, 2007: 153-157). For example, farmers’ organizations and peasant movements played an important role in the Green Revolution in Asia (Birner and Resnick, 2010). The past few decades have seen the rise of farmers’ organizations in several African countries. Importantly, farmers’ organizations have increasingly been able to federate at national and regional level. An example is ROPPA (Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs Agricoles de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (ROPPA), which consists of ten
national farmers’ organizations in West Africa (Resnick and Birner, 2010). Democratization as well as improvements in rural infrastructure and education may have contributed to this development.

Development partners can support the development of farmers’ organizations. IFAD, for example, has provided grants to regional and national farmers’ organizations in SSA. An evaluation found that such grants are more effective when they were used for the institutional development of the farmers’ organizations rather than for supporting micro-projects that the farmers’ organizations implemented. (IFAD, 2014: 44-45). The key for donor engagement in this area is ensuring that their support does not undermine the autonomy of these organizations, but rather strengthens their ability to build a strong grassroots base. One promising approach is “twinning” emerging farmers’ organizations in Africa with national farmers’ organizations in industrialized countries so that they can learn from their experience in representing farmers’ interests. For instance, the German development cooperation agency is currently pursuing this approach by involving the German Farmers’ Union in the implementation of its program “One World without Hunger.”

4.2.3 Promoting participatory and evidence-based policy processes

Farmers’ organizations can influence policy processes in different ways, such as lobbying, mobilizing rural voters and participation in multi-stakeholder policy processes. During the past few decades, development organizations have pushed for stakeholder participation in agricultural policy processes (e.g., Resnick & Birner, 2020). CAADP is a prominent example: It has involved “Round-Tables” to create fora for multi-stakeholder participation. Such participatory policy processes can play an important role in developing buy-in and consensus about agricultural policy choices. However, they have to be organized carefully to avoid bias and unrealistic expectations by the participants. Building the capacity of farmers’ organizations as well as rural women’s organizations, as discussed in the previous section, can help to make such participatory policy processes more inclusive. Support to multi-stakeholder policy dialogues at the regional level can also be useful. As pointed out by Resnick and Birner (2009: 112), it is also important to involve at the outset the major political bodies responsible for decision-making, such as parliaments. For example, participatory processes to develop agricultural strategies could be steered by parliamentary committees with responsibilities for agriculture. Ensuring such political buy-in might also be conducive to overcoming the governance challenges of policy implementation discussed above.

Participatory policy processes are more effective if they are informed by evidence on the appropriateness and effectiveness of different agricultural policy choices. Such evidence-based policy-making requires the development of capacity in planning units of Agricultural Ministries to use appropriate data, tools and analyses. They need to be able to identify the agricultural policy instruments that are most relevant, depending on the phase of the rural and structural transformation process. A tool that has been developed to facilitate evidence-based agricultural policy-making is the Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System (RESAKSS, see http://www.resakss.org/). Since this tool is available in the form of an interactive web-site, it contributes to transparency and can be used by various stakeholders.

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1 See http://www.bauernverband.de/eine-welt-ohne-hunger.
Evidence may also be useful to address one particular constraint to political will: a widespread perception among political elites in several African countries that promoting agriculture, especially smallholder agriculture, is not a promising strategy to promote economic development (Djurfeldt et al., 2005). More research and stories of successful supply chains may convince African elites that agriculture can be a major contributor to economic development and provide good jobs. Publications such as “Successes in African Agriculture” (Gabre-Madhin & Haggblade, 2004) could play a role in this respect, but it would also be important to find out how research-based knowledge could best be communicated to political elites. Young (2005) suggests that think tanks and regional networks may be important for communicating research-based knowledge to policy makers in developing countries. Social media and new formats such as TED-Talks will likely also play a useful role in this respect.

4.2.4 Promoting performance-based voting

As discussed above, rural voters have often limited incentives to vote on the basis of a party’s or a candidate’s political performance because they have limited ability to assess it. Information campaigns are an important demand-side strategy that can be used to create transparency about political performance and, thus, promote performance-based voting. This, in turn, could strengthen the political will of politicians to select and effectively implement agricultural programs that benefit smallholder farmers and promote agricultural transformation.

4.2.5 Changing the conditions of providing development aid

Changing the way in which donor agencies provide funding can also contribute to the strengthening of political will. One strategy is to avoid funding of activities for which the governments’ own contribution is low since such activities lack explicit government commitment. This strategy is, however, not without problems. As indicated above, the government’s own budget shares for agriculture are extremely low in many countries. Moreover, activities that have high returns in terms of productivity growth and poverty reduction, such as investments in agricultural R&D, are politically less attractive than, for example, subsidies. Such investments may then remain even more underfunded if donors withdraw their support. Another option is to move from aid conditionalities, which are often not enforced (van de Walle, 2001) towards rewarding countries that have already put in place policies that support agricultural transformation. This approach is known as Results Based Aid (RBA) or Results Based Financing (RBF). These approaches have been tried in health and education, and the evidence on their effectiveness is still weak (Pearson et al., 2010). Still, it might be worthwhile to experiment with this approach in agriculture, as indeed the World Bank, for instance, has been doing, although perhaps there has yet been too few well documented cases to be analyzed (e.g., IEG, 2011: 83).

5 Conclusions

The challenges implied by the title of this paper are large and can hardly be fully tackled by a single contribution. Still, three main conclusions can be derived from the considerations presented in this paper. First, as in case of the “classical transformation”, African countries still need to focus on increasing productivity in smallholder agriculture to be able use the agricultural sector as an engine of economic growth and structural transformation. Second, in many aspects, the African agricultural transformation needs to be different from the “classical transformation”, especially the Asian Green Revolution. In particular, the African agricultural transformation needs to be tailored to the highly diverse agro-ecological conditions that characterize African agriculture, it needs to be more conscious of environmental sustainability, and place a stronger
emphasis on improving labor productivity. It also needs to meet the challenges of climate change and an increasingly globalized world. At the same time, African agricultural transformation can make use of new opportunities that arise from technological and institutional innovations that were not available in the past, and can benefit from the rising global bioeconomy. Third, African governments need to play an important role in promoting agricultural transformations. To be able to do so, they need to develop the “political will” to invest in agriculture.

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