

Panelist discussion on 4 thematic areas including;

Human Capital Development, Climate, Energy and Food systems

HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Human Capital is the critical driver of all Policies, Programs, and Services in a country so there is need to build the Capacities and Competencies required as the Tools of Trade, to achieve the driving force in a Collective Action for the development of the policy framework and the practical steps, required to achieve intended objective(s) for the enhancement of the countries' economy. In the context of Africa, this may be true in some cases but not consistently, thereby losing a concerted front for a Unified African Position (ie CAADP 10% CAPITAL EXPENDITURE & 6% ANNUAL GROWTH in agriculture)- only a few MEMBER STATES have achieved that in their agricultural development, though agriculture is the main driver for employment generation. There is no gainsaying that one of the objectives of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to attain poverty free by 2030 adopted by member states. However, the prevalence of poverty in most African Countries is a direct result of high unemployment defeating the essence of SDG 4 which talks about universal quality education as the foundation for building sustainable human capital for economic growth and prosperity of African nations. SDG 4 is so fundamental to all the SDGs that once it is achieved and managed sustainably, the rest of the SDGs will fall in line. For example, achieving human capital development posited by SDG 4 will positively impact on other SDGs such as; SDG 1 – No Poverty, SDG2 – No Hunger, SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being etc.

Human capital development allows us to create the high-level expertise necessary to research and develop viable policy options that lead to collaborative engagement along the regional and continental arena. When human capital increases in areas such as science, education, and management, it leads to increases in innovation, social well-being, equality, increased productivity, improved rates of participation, all of which contribute to economic growth.

A sustainable economic growth will in turn lead to creating jobs consequently increase wealth of the people.

There is a strong correlation between human capital development and economic growth emanating from developing high technical competencies and skills to identify innovative policies and activities not only in-country but that are aligned at the regional framework especially affecting Climate change. Energy diversification (adoption of solar and waste management conversion to develop affordable energy that will impact the sources of our foods, food systems, food value chains and the critical value addition to raw commodities. Additionally, these technical skills can be utilized to provide for the adoption of local raw materials (conversion of clay to bricks) for housing which is in short supply in various member countries.

African governments and leadership should make conscious efforts to develop human capital within their countries by investing in education and skills development, from primary level to advance levels. These skills development will also result in verifiable research to develop practical options to mitigate the impact of climate change through the engagement of public private partnerships to address the challenges.

It is in this spirit that the government of Ghana has taken a giant step in making education free for all citizens of Ghana up to the SHS level. Parents in Ghana are free from payment of education bills including, boarding, feeding, teaching and learning, learning materials and education infrastructure etc. This policy of the Ghanaian government is in full swing since 2017, but the big question is whether it is sustainable without compromising government support to the other sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, health, private sector support etc.

CLIMATE

Until recently human beings have taken climate and the environment for granted. Human activities have been done haphazardly without due recognition of the impact on our climate and environment. According to research, the Ozone layer has been virtually eroded so badly by human activities that it is going to cost us heavily to repair it or find an alternative means of livelihood without compromising on the quality of life.

Agriculture which is the main stay of many African economies is heavily dependent on climate. Nature is kind to provide for everything agriculture, including fertile land, rainfall, a balanced ecosystem, plant pollination, etc.

With good climate and predictable weather, farmers can plant their crops at the right time, and in good quantities, to feed both humans and animals at an affordable price for home consumption and export.

The use of hydro-carbons and the extraction of fossil fuels (such as; coal, coal products, natural gas, derived gas, crude oil, petroleum products and non-renewable wastes) to power our industries since industrial revolution era has consistently impacted badly on our environment, notwithstanding the volumes of automobiles, alongside the powerful supersonic airplanes that crisscross the skies. The effect of these emissions cannot be addressed by individual countries but in a Collective Partnerships worldwide or at least at the regional levels. The impact of these huge carbon emissions has made farming so expensive in Africa and not profitable or sustainable to produce rewarding returns.

There is a demand for consistent policies and practical solutions from the technical research to develop a common front of mitigating and adaptation programs directed at the producers of these pollution either to compensate the impacting locations and their businesses to forestall the continuous negative impact on climate and the African agribusinesses at least.

Today, it is highly impossible to farm a particular piece of land for two continuous farming seasons without resorting to the use of fertilizers and other agro-chemicals because of the bad climate. The weather has been unpredictable and unbearably hot to the detriment of crop and plant cultivation. Our rivers and water bodies have dried up and large-scale farming is almost impossible without dug-well irrigation which most communities in Africa cannot afford.

SDG 13 is seeking to reverse the adverse effects of climate change on humans and agriculture by making clarion calls on governments and the private sector to invest in productive activities which is premised on green revolution. Unfortunately, the developed economies who have benefited in many ways from activities that have had inimical effects on our climate don't seem to pay much attention.

INCENTIVISED AFFIRMITIVE ACTION IS REQUIRED TO REVERSE THE NEGATIVE IMPACT ON AFRICAN AGRICULTURE!

One of the tenets under SDG13 is to implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to a goal of mobilizing jointly \$100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund (GCF) through its capitalization. This has not happened fully. Besides the GCF is not accessible to the private sector who can complement the implementation of various policies it to bring the needed change. The Western World continues to exploit the system without paying heed to the UNFCCC.

African countries that are the worst affected need to enforce rules where thousands of aircrafts that fly on the continent are made to pay fees to fund African's version of GCF and other multinational companies whose activities directly or indirectly affect the ozone layer in order to carry out repairs and other remedial activities purposely meant to improve the climatic conditions of the African continent.

ENERGY

SDG 7 seeks to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, but this objective is going to be a mirage if we continue to power our energy from conventional sources which have become expensive recently. Energy sources from coal, coal products, gas and oil have become terribly expensive.

The world lacks safe, low-carbon, and cheap large-scale energy alternatives to fossil fuels. Until we diversify and scale up alternatives, the world will continue to face energy problems that may well escalate in the nearest future are facing. The energy problem that receives most attention is the link between energy access and greenhouse gas emissions.

Besides, the energy from these conventional sources that creates environmental problems directly related to energy production and consumption include air pollution, climate change, water pollution, thermal pollution, and solid waste disposal. The emission of air pollutants from fossil fuel combustion is the major cause of urban air pollution.

Energy and environmental problems are closely related, since it is nearly impossible to produce, transport, or consume energy without significant environmental impact. The emission of air pollutants from fossil fuel combustion is the major cause of urban air pollution. Burning fossil fuels is also the main contributor to the emission of greenhouse gases.

Diverse water pollution problems are also associated with energy usage. One problem is oil spills. In all petroleum-handling operations, there is a finite probability of spilling oil either on the earth or in a body of water.

Changes in groundwater flow produced by mining operations often bring otherwise unpolluted waters into contact with certain mineral materials which are leaked from the soil and produce an acid mine drainage.

We should therefore use non-conventional thermal energy such as solar and wind which is in abundance in Africa. This is a cheaper source of energy that the Africa has not exploited yet. We need to focus technology and invest deliberately in these areas for future gains. Once we can generate cheaper energy to power our industries such as agro-processing plants, we can add value to our agricultural products along the value chain to compete with other imported products.

African continent has a huge market size, similar to China and India. Based on the latest United Nations estimates, the current population of Africa is about 1.4 billion. It is estimated that African agriculture will command a value of nearly USD\$ 3 trillion by 2030, but trading among African states is just about 15%. Over 80% of the African market is in the hands of non-African countries. Part of the problems is that most of Africa does not have cheap sources of energy to power our industries in addition to uncoordinated policies to develop and produce agriculture products with long shelf life to compete with imported products.

Africans should therefore explore cheaper non-conventional sources of energy to help our agro-processing industries to grow. This will reduce export of raw non-processed materials to Europe and America. Rather, with cheaper energy sources we can power our industries, produce at cheaper cost, increase wealth and create jobs to grow the economies of African states.

Investment in renewables is the way to go and it is expected to surpass that in the upstream oil and gas sector. South Africa currently has the biggest solar capacity in Africa at 2.8 GW but plans to increase this to 8.28 GW by 2030. With deliberate efforts the rest of Africa can do the same.

FOOD SYSTEMS

Food systems are the sum of actors and interactions along the food value chain—from input supply and production of crops, livestock, fish, and other agricultural commodities to transportation, processing, retailing, wholesaling, and preparation of foods to consumption and disposal.

SDG 2 foresees that there should be zero hunger for all by 2030. This means that by 2030, hunger should be a thing of the past to all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.

Improving our food systems in a scientific way will complement SDG 2.3 which is seeking to double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family and farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.

Essentially, the current food systems are failing us in terms of livelihoods, human health and the environment. Africa must produce quality food for our people using technologically advanced processes that produces our food using quality systems, safety and zero tolerance for waste.

The local and national food systems need to be strengthened to adapt to the climate change and become better equipped to provide diverse diets for consumers in food-insecure communities. Diversity in diets can help farmers diversify their risk, provide markets for food crops, break their dependency on perennial commodity crops, and increase biodiversity and resilience.

Statistics reveal that over 226.7 million people are starving in Africa and over 21% of African people are malnourished, but the continent is rich in natural resources capable of supporting agriculture that we do not have to cry for food.

African leaders should re-direct investments into agro-processing along the value chains by attracting and incentivizing the private sector to invest in agriculture to help remove the root causes of hunger, including poverty, conflict, climate and weather problems, lack of investment in agriculture, and unstable markets on the African continent. We therefore need to deliberately focus on intentional investment that will resolve the crises in our food systems by producing abundant quality food for our people and export the excess. The African continent has the land, the natural water bodies capable of supporting irrigation-agriculture and natural foods that are abundant in the wild that can be preserved and improved upon to support our food needs.

One way to improve our food systems is to encourage local farmer to build cooperatives, own and operate community silos to help reduce waste. It is common knowledge that between 20 to 40 percent of agriculture production in Africa is lost in transportation. Thus, storage facilities close to the farm-gate will help increase overall stocks.

Another way to improve the food systems is to process our food and store them for marketing. Identifying and improving access to market will boost food security as farmers will be encouraged to produce more because of ready market.

QUESTION:

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT TOOLS TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE, ERODING YIELDS OF AFRICAN AGRICULTURE AND THE CONTINUOUS IMPORTS OF FOODS IN AFRICA WHILST THE CONTINENT IS FLUSHED WITH ABOUNDANT RAW FOOD COMMODITIES, SOME OF WHICH GO TO WASTE.