

Dr. Bekele Shiferaw – Lead Development and Resource Economist (Food Systems, Climate and Environment), The World Bank, DC

- There are lots of opportunities for investing in agri-food systems in Africa. While land, water resources and human capital are there, it's important to bring technology, finance and know-how to boost productivity in the agriculture sector.
- Private investment is not moving sufficiently to the agriculture sector. There is a need to scale up investment in all stages of agriculture production.
- One of the big challenges facing the continent is creating an enabling business environment. Agriculture in Africa is seen as less competitive, unprofitable and risky due to lack of sufficient infrastructure besides the impact of the peace and security situation in some parts of the continent which negatively impacts attracting private investment into agriculture.
- An enabling business environment requires investing in hard infrastructure, including irrigation and roads and also soft infrastructure in terms of investing in research and development which is not sufficient despite the commitments in CAADP.
- Private sector participation is important to boost productivity, soil data and market access, and market information.
- In the context of climate change, there are other issues that require attention including also challenges and issues about market access is also important for Africa.
- Land is a major issue in terms of investing in agri-food systems. There is a lot of interest in investing in land in Africa and the problems associated with land grab and Large-scale agriculture projects. Unfortunately, this did not go well in many countries because of many reasons as some of these projects were implemented in areas where infrastructure was lacking. Also, social and environmental assessments were not adequately done to avoid mass displacement
- African governments need to focus on impact assessment of investing in land and take the interest of local communities into consideration.
- Public sector needs to do more about doing feasibility studies and identifying investment opportunities and bankable projects to strengthen the participation of private sector, particularly SMEs. Governments can also explore other public support mechanisms such as the provision of credit guarantees to commercial banks to provide loans to smallholder farmers and SMEs when additionality of private sector is clear and critical.