



Editorial

Fostering Agricultural Transformation in Africa: Possible interventions and challenges

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SUMMARY

This Issue of AFJRD, Vol 9 (4), presents six research papers that examine issues related to fostering agricultural transformation in Africa, formal and informal Savings Groups participation, Retrenchment and Job Security, enhancing digital technology competences for extension service delivery, and use of plant breeding to improve crop productivity. The above Issues are important for improving productivity and livelihoods of most rural households across Africa including improving organisation performance. The papers provide useful insights for development practitioners, researchers and policy makers and make recommendation for follow up studies and policy interventions. AFJRD invites for other contributions especially those sharing experiences on fostering rural/agricultural transformation in Africa and elsewhere.

Keywords: African Agricultural Transformation, Breeding Strategies, Extension Services training needs, Gene Action, Informal Saving Groups, Retrenchment, Sphaceloma scab

RESUME

Ce numéro Vol 9 (4), de AFJRD, présente six articles de recherche qui examinent des questions liées à la promotion de la transformation agricole en Afrique, à la participation aux groupes d'épargne formels et informels, à la réduction des effectifs et à la sécurité de l'emploi, à l'amélioration des compétences en matière de technologie numérique pour la prestation de services de vulgarisation, et à l'utilisation des techniques d'amélioration des plantes et de la sélection végétale pour améliorer la productivité des cultures. Ces questions sont importantes pour l'amélioration de la performance des organisations, et pour améliorer la productivité et les moyens de subsistance de la plupart des ménages ruraux à travers l'Afrique. Les publications fournissent des informations utiles pour les praticiens du développement rural, les chercheurs et les décideurs politiques et font des recommandations pour les études de suivi et les interventions politiques. L'AFJRD invite à d'autres contributions, en particulier celles qui partagent des expériences sur la promotion de la transformation rurale/agricole en Afrique et ailleurs.

MOTS CLES : Transformation de l'agriculture africaine ; stratégies de sélection ; besoins de formation des services de vulgarisation ; action génétique ; groupes d'épargne informels ; repli sur soi ; gale du sphacérome

Most livelihoods in Africa are depended on agriculture, requiring that the sector is strengthened to meet not only livelihood needs, especially food and nutrition security, but plays a greater role in propelling economic development in the continent. Unfortunately, the productivity of the sector is very low resulting in widespread poverty and food and nutrition insecurity in the continent. Several initiatives are in place to reverse this trend, including several policy frameworks such as the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development

Program (CAADP) of the African Union Commission. The paper by [Woomer et al. \(2024\)](#) describes various strategies being employed by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) including case studies related to National Food and Agriculture Delivery Compacts implemented in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Burundi, Cameroon and Zimbabwe; strengthening digital capacities, and engaging key actors such as Innovative Youth in Agriculture in Nigeria. Certainly, related efforts are ongoing across Africa

but the critical issue is the need for political commitment to ensure scaling up of the various pilots. These issues are also examined in the papers by Mukasa *et al.* (2017), Addo (2018), Adesina (2019), and Jayne and Sanchez (2021).

Two papers examine the increasingly important role of providing funding to grassroots communities to enhance their productivity and engagement in economic activities through Saving and Credit Cooperative Societies and other informal mechanisms. The Paper by Alio (2024) presents a case study from Uganda documenting perspectives of borrowers on their participation and perceived benefit in engaging in Savings and Credit Cooperatives which generally reflected positive perception towards credit utilization by the borrowers. However, perceived behavioral control was influenced by credit terms, political and religious influence. The other related paper by Namaweje and Yawe (2024) explored issues which influence membership of Credit and Saving Societies, based on a case study also done in Uganda. Their findings suggest that targeting older individuals and promoting positive behaviour in terms of credit utilization by borrowers are key. Broadly, this calls for more sensitization on use of credit facilities and regular follow up to ensure proper use of the borrowed funds but recognizing that priorities change depending on the borrower's situation, i.e., immediate needs. Related issues are discussed in the papers by Annan *et al.* (2013), Abdullah and Bortei-Dokei (2021) and Gine and Townsend (2022).

Fostering agricultural transformation requires a multi-faceted approach. Amongst others, strengthening extension delivery is key. Accordingly, there are ongoing efforts to strengthen extension delivery capacity through the 'new norm' of harnessing use of digital technologies. This invariably requires strengthening digital skills of extension providers as highlighted in the paper by Asante (2024, this Volume) as well as for end users (see Abdulai, 2024). Relatedly, Nakimera *et al.* (2024) review paper examines the use of traditional and new genomic tools for cowpea breeding work, the case of breeding for resistance to Cowpea Scab caused by *Sphaceloma* sp. Overall, General Combining Ability effects are more important than Specific Combining Ability effects for developing cowpea lines/varieties resistant to scab. With advances in genomic technologies, plant breeding efforts will need to rely on these advances for fastening breeding processes. The earlier work by Nakawuka and Adipala (1997) provides a detail description on occurrence of scab disease on cowpea in Uganda while Bhat *et al.* (2016) indeed highlighted on use of genomic selection in the era of

next generation sequencing for complex traits in plant breeding.

The final paper in this Issue by Amoit and Asimwe (2024) presents a case study on achieving the delicate balance in terms of ensuring organisation efficiency vis a vis staff employment and retention. This will be increasing more important with the advent of Artificial Intelligence making some of the human job positions not essential. However, the critical issue is to have in place a caring and interactive strategy that engages employers and employees in dialogue about job performance and job security amidst the increasingly competitive market demands and high labour costs. The issue of retrenchment and employee morale is also discussed in the paper by Abdullah and Cummings (2016).

In my view the six papers presented in this Issue and others cited provide useful material for diverse actors to use in their interventions.

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