

New initiative explores African opportunities for sustainable food systems

April 22 2015

Sustainable improvement of food and nutrition security and the livelihoods of African farmers are at issue when 23 African and European research partners collaborate on a long term research and innovation partnership. The focus is on sustainable intensification of the agro-food system in Africa.

What kind of consequences to the environment, economy and society does sustainable intensification of food production have?

Although the current food production systems have enabled a substantial increase in food production, the [farming practices](#) have also impacted the environment. In addition, many people still do not have enough to eat and cannot escape poverty.

These kinds of effects to the whole African Agro-food system will be included in the explorations as 23 research and innovation institutes from 21 countries collaborate in this new initiative, PROIntensAfrica.

"It is projected that the expected growth in the [world population](#) from 7 to 9 billion and the changing diets will require 70% more food by 2050. There is no single solution to production increase, so a diversity of pathways for sustainable intensification needs to be explored and exploited," explains Huub Löffler from Wageningen University and Research centre (WUR), the coordinator of the initiative.

Tailor-made routes to sustainability

The initiative starts off in a situation where many routes towards sustainable food systems have already been advocated in literature.

However, the difficulty of sustainable intensification lies in each food system's requirement to meet their specific supply and demand. As such, high input farming might be suitable for a specific region while organic farming is more suitable for another region.

"The PROIntensAfrica initiative will go beyond the debate of best systems for sustainable intensification in Africa. We will combine elements of different systems, yielding into innovative systems to optimally meet specific requirements," says Dr. Yemi Akinbamiyo, Executive Director of the from Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA).

Pooling resources

Pooling African and European research resources is perceived as the best way to align existing research and instigate new research initiatives. Also, joint programming is one of the main instruments of the European Commission to accomplish more synergy and increase the effectiveness of resources.

The ambition of PROIntensAfrica's is to formulate a universal research agenda and co-develop mechanisms for an effective long term partnership.

Therefore, pooling resources for ProintensAfrica is not only about science, but also about policy and funding. Subsequently, the following partnership proposal for IntensAfrica will need to meet the national and

international policies.

According to the philosophy of the future IntensAfrica programme, no one model is better than another.

"There are controversies and we will take them on board but our role will not be to act as a judge. However, the research questions and knowledge generated will serve as fuel to the debate," says Philippe Petithuguenin from Cirad.

Consultation, case studies and stakeholder panel workshops are a major part of the activities of ProIntensAfrica. A wide range of strategic stakeholders will be invited to contribute to the activities and the agenda. Communication is considered crucial to develop and enhance the interactive dialogue between all stakeholders.

The ProIntensAfrica project starts with a workshop in Accra, Ghana, in April 2015. The project will develop into the IntensAfrica programme within two years.

Provided by Natural Resources Institute Finland

Citation: New initiative explores African opportunities for sustainable food systems (2015, April 22) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-04-explores-african-opportunities-sustainable-food.html>

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