Book Review

African Smallholders, Food Crops, Markets and Policy. CABI Publishing 2011, 386 pages, ISBN 978-1-845-93-716-4

The book edited by Göran Djurfeldt, Ernest Aryeetey and Aida C. Isinika is an output of the Afrint II project, with the underlying field work carried out in 2008. It is structured into 14 chapters of which the first one is Introduction and the last one is Conclusions. It includes bibliography (at each chapter) and Terminology Index (15 pages). There are 22 contributors and some of them wrote several chapters. The Afrint project team and the editors especially acknowledge the Swedish Research Council and Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) which, together with the Lund University, financed the research. Their African partners are from universities, research institutes and research consortiums in several countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

The book covers important areas dealing with food production and consumption in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). They vary from impending apocalypse to new rather optimistic expectations. This is a result of recent poor performing agriculture in SSA area which is "*widely known as the only major region in the world that has failed to progress in terms of food security*". The present situation in the region is that the food production has more or less stagnant levels per capita (although with positive growth in overall production).

This book takes a middle ground between optimistic and pessimistic expectations as to the regional food security – this is less street-smart but closer to the reality and truer to smallholder chances of a better life.

With reference to the title, the book focuses on smallholders in sub-Saharan Africa – the major part of its population resides in urban areas, but the national economies are dependent on the agriculture which is practised under conditions of arid or semi-arid savannahs (or humid forests) because its dwellers are occupied in agriculture or in animal husbandry. Poverty in SSA is predominantly rural and agricultural phenomenon (small-scale farmers and herders). This is why the poverty alleviation remains an agricultural task.

The title contains other themes: *Food Crops, Markets and Policy*. Something which is strongly discussed in the book and seems to be a gluing component of all the above notions is *Technology*. Four main staples are discussed as pillars of the local food security: maize, sorghum, rice and cassava. Their performance is not assessed according to potential yields (reached by research stations) but judged by production actually obtained by farmers (95 percent of farmers). The book points out special effect of technology levels (mainly

on the side of technological inputs) and possibilities (rather limited) of extending improved technologies to smallholders although differences in soil quality and availability of water are also very important.

The smallholder's production, on one side, and his opportunity to access market for selling his production on the other hand are sometimes conflicting; this is also a question of infrastructure as the interest of the authors is stressing. The infrastructure including institutional prerequisites and potential of agrarian reform is markedly influenced by political settings that create economic-political environment in which markets develop and function. They work well if the above environment is sound and supports the status of laissez-fair. It is for sure that the markets cannot do their job on their own. However, it is obvious that the markets provide a feedback to adjust policy settings (tools) like customs barriers, subsidies and government interventions (warranty), loan and price policies, etc. In a powerful way they influence food security when balancing local (regional) harvests.

However, the authors conclude that actually markets cannot, on their own, do the job of alleviation poverty and reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It has been implanted (as government- and donor-backed initiative) into the African political setting as new Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD). It also includes the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP). The second summit of the CAADP (Maputo 2003) agreed to commit to allocating at least 10% of the national budgetary resources for the agricultural and rural development implementation. However, although 10% is quite high, in view of the gap from the past (the 1980s and 1990s), they are not sufficient.

The present book is a sequel to an earlier work by Djurfeldt which was oriented to the Asian Green Revolution and its relevance to Africa. It states that the future African Green Revolution must be state-driven, market-oriented and smallholder-based. Thus the African Green Revolution which is expected will be somewhat different from that in Asia (in the late 1960s). In the meantime the global food price crisis starting in 2008, and followed by financial crisis (in 2009) outburst with their long-term consequences (that can be discerned) which caused that subsidised food flow from (mostly) OECD countries has been stopped. At present, the African governments are more reluctant than they were before the crisis to buy subsidized food from the West and try to make small-farmers market-oriented (to feed

themselves and also the growing population in urban areas). It is also a result of the recent changes in food security policy approach as declared by NEPAD and its programme CAADP and enabled by improved infrastructure that has appeared in many areas.

The *Afrint II* project set out to investigate how the changed agricultural policy climate affected government policies in nine countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. The present book shows and discusses parts of results of the research which was conducted in 100 villages in 2002.

Due to many constraints proved and discussed in several chapters, the conclusions are rather pessimistic. It is because the agriculture in the SSA region has often performed less well than expected and the way forward was (even) never

known. It was also recognised that while many of the obstacles to progress in African agriculture were basically related to national policies and of structural nature, one could not ignore the international setting for trade in goods and services, the exchange of knowledge and how these impacted African agriculture. In light of the declining trend in production and productivity for all major food crops a number of challenging questions were posed for further reflection. The most pressing questions are: can sub-Saharan Africa handle agricultural development and export itself out of the agricultural crisis? These questions remain relevant today because they have still no clear answers.

Bohumil Havrland