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# Introduction to the Special Issue: Challenges and Opportunities for African Agriculture and Food Systems

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The past decade has witnessed a shift in how African countries go about the business of development, moving from a public-sector intensive approach to embracing the private sector as a potential development partner. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has aligned with this approach, using private sector engagement as a strategic approach to improve aid effectiveness and sustain development outcomes. USAID's Bureau for Resilience and Food Security has funded the studies in this special issue with the objective of better understanding how public investment and policy can best leverage private sector resources and energy for collaborative achievement of development outcomes. The articles in this issue grapple with the outstanding challenges of this new approach of engaging with the private sector as a development partner.

In *Private Agricultural R&D: Do the Poor Benefit?*, Anderson et al. examine the impact of private agricultural research on poverty. For most of the twentieth century, public funds were the primary source of investment in agricultural research. However, by the end of the twentieth century, the majority of the global investment funding had shifted to the private sector, especially in areas such as mechanization and biotechnology. This leads to the question of whether impoverished smallholders in developing countries benefit from this private sector investment. Anderson et al. examine when smallholders benefit, when they do not benefit, and the resulting policy implications.

Moss and Schmitz explore the policy consequences of emphasizing smallholder welfare in *Distributional Weights in Benefit-Cost Analysis: Examples from Rwanda and Uganda*. Agricultural productivity growth has traditionally led to successful development in large part by lowering the cost of food to domestic consumers, with producers reaping a much smaller share of the benefits. As always, there are exceptions. For example, in the case of export crops,

such as Rwandan coffee, it becomes important to successful development that Rwandan smallholder producers benefit significantly. Moss and Schmitz use the lens of welfare weights to examine how emphasizing the welfare of poor smallholders would influence policy and investment decisions.

Post et al. examine the policy-enabling environment for private sector engagement in *Enabling the Environment for Private Sector Investment: Impact on Food Security and Poverty*. This article reviews the evidence on a variety of enabling policies—from trade and innovation to gender-sensitive land tenure and ecosystems valuation—and their impacts on poverty and food insecurity. The optimal policy combination for private sector engagement that reduces poverty and food insecurity is very country and context specific, but some common themes emerge.

In *Building Public Will for Climate-Smart Agriculture in Uganda: Prescriptions for Industry and Policy*, Raile et al. look specifically at whether there is the public will for widespread and meaningful adoption and use of climate-smart agricultural practices. The article identifies (lack of) extension, agricultural, and communications infrastructure and incentives as key obstacles, and diagnoses the public and political pathway to create a policy-enabling environment for climate-smart agriculture. The authors draw policy implications for the private sector, government, and donors.

Weatherspoon et al. grapple with the market access challenges that arise as countries develop from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture with smallholders increasingly reliant on food markets for nutritious food options, with specific application to Rwanda's Crop Intensification Program in *Rwanda's Commercialization of Smallholder Agriculture: Implications for Rural Food Production and Household Food Choices*. A complex set of policies with competing objectives provides both incentives and disincentives to smallholder participation in commercial agricultural markets. In the absence of greater policy coherence that enables market access, the determinants of smallholder participation in commercial markets are wealth and access to land.

In *Land Policy and Food Prices: Evidence from a Land Consolidation Program in Rwanda*, Nsabimana et al.

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examine the other side of the food market: consumer access to diverse and nutritious foods. Examining areas that are switching to commercial agriculture under the government's Crop Intensification Program, they find that food markets are emerging to provide a wider variety of foods to rural consumers in these areas. Increased productivity and income in commercial agriculture, coupled with improving access to diverse and nutritious foods through food markets, is likely to improve the dietary outcomes of these newly commercial farmers over time.

In total, this special issue provides significant and novel contributions to our understanding of how to create a policy-enabling environment for greater private sector engagement in agricultural and food-systems development processes. From technological opportunity to public and political will, the resulting policy recommendations for private sector engagement establish a blueprint for accelerating inclusive, food-systems driven growth that contributes to poverty reduction, inclusive income growth, food security, and improved dietary outcomes.