

African nations have the will to adapt agriculture to climate change

By [Elwyn Grainger-Jones](#)

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Ask an African farmer how climate change is affecting the community, and the response will be unequivocal. "It cut off my means of survival," 66-year-old Zimbabwean farmer Amon Makonese told us just last month, referring to the El Niño-induced drought which struck last year. "It was one of the worst droughts we have ever seen," he added. "I planted three hectares of maize, but it all wilted".



Oxfam East Africa via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

This story of failed harvest, hunger and hopelessness as temperatures rise are common across the continent. In fact, it is estimated that 65 percent of Africa's population is affected by climate change. The need for agriculture, which feeds the chronically food insecure region and forms the backbone of its economy, to adapt to these extreme weather events is becoming urgent.

Yet disappointingly, here at COP22 in Marrakech, dubbed both "The African COP" and "The COP of Action," talks to include agriculture in the climate change negotiations have once again collapsed. Disputes on how to integrate adaptation and mitigation efforts have led to any further discussions being postponed until June 2017 at the next meeting of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) in Bonn.

Lack of progress at a global level makes regional action all the more critical. That is why the Moroccan government is championing the adaptation of African agriculture (AAA), through the launch of the ambitious AAA initiative.

At an event held in Marrakech, scientists and policymakers from all over Africa came together to determine an action plan for implementing this initiative, based on a rich body of evidence generated by the global research network CGIAR and its many partners. Taken together with the clear desire for action by African countries that prioritised agriculture in their national climate plans, there is significant potential to transform food and farming under climate change.

A number of actions were identified at the event as being the most crucial for accelerating action on the adaptation of African agriculture.

Mobilising investment

Recent analysis has proven that investing in climate-sensitive practices makes both environmental and economic sense. According to a report launched by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and CGIAR last week, for each dollar invested through IFAD's Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme, farmers could earn a return of up to \$2.60 over a 20 year period by applying climate change adaptation practices.

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Despite this compelling evidence, investments are limited by availability and access to finance. Africa's annual need for investment in adaptation has been estimated to be between \$7-15 billion per year by 2020, across all sectors. But only around \$1-2 billion per year is available now from public sources, and Africa receives just five percent of international public climate funding. Assisting African countries to prepare economic and financial analyses of costs and returns to farmers of various adaptation actions, for example, will help countries access sorely needed finance from climate funds.

Knowledge exchange

As greater amounts of investments are mobilised into the sector, we need to ensure it is used effectively. By fostering partnerships that share knowledge, at a regional and transnational level, Africa farmers can be equipped with cost-effective and impactful approaches for adaptation.

A recent knowledge exchange between Senegal and Colombia is a fine example of this. Work has been underway in Senegal to involve farmers in a new initiative for farmer-oriented climate information and weather forecasting services. This has involved marrying traditional knowledge with advanced scientific approaches, which are then disseminated in local languages via community radio.

Colombian farmers have visited Kaffrine in Senegal to learn from this experience, and taking back lessons for implementing a similar project in their region benefiting 1,500 farmers.

Monitoring and measuring

Measuring progress is going to be a great challenge as the Paris Agreement moves forward, and should not be underestimated. Countries will be required to report on their emissions using an enhanced transparency and accountability framework put together as part of the Paris Agreement.

There is an important role here for the science community to facilitate and support this process. The CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) has developed a Climate-Smart Agriculture programming and indicator tool, which brings together and builds upon approaches used by major development agencies in monitoring projects. The tool helps measure outcomes related to increased productivity, food security, adaptation, resilience, and mitigation, and could be key to helping countries measure progress towards established targets.

Farmers like Amon have no time to lose - they are relying on leaders and experts to take action now. Using the momentum created by the Moroccan government, Africa must move forward on adaptation for agriculture, even while global progress stalls.

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