

Factsheet midterm findings Global Challenges Programme Call 2



Follow the Food – Dutch agribusiness and local food security in Africa

Summary

In response to the challenge of feeding a rapidly expanding world population, the past decades have witnessed a strong increase in cross-border agrofood investments, especially in the global South. Aiming to enhance the understanding of the local impact of these investments, the “Follow the food” project investigates how local food systems in Ethiopia, Kenya and Ghana are affected by foreign investments in agribusiness in these countries. The focus of the research is on the impact of companies on local food security, through production and employment, shifts in access to - and use of - natural resources, and changes in market conditions. How do these dynamics affect local development for those involved and others in their area of operations? Furthermore, which business models are best equipped to make a sustainable contribution to local inclusive development and food security? Answers to these questions are used to offer advice for investors, smallholders and policy makers on how to engage in inclusive agribusiness and enhance local food security. The project is conducted in collaboration with Solidaridad, Fair & Sustainable Advisory Services, and St. Mary’s University in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Interim Research Findings

- Inclusion in many situations is confused with “participation”. When scrutinizing the terms of engagement, in many cases the relation between business and farmers/ consumers is one of unequal power; the company sets the terms of trade. The only option for farmers or consumers is to accept or to opt-out. Involving producers in a value chain is considered as “inclusion”.
- Many of the inclusive business models are designed on a linear notion of: involving producers and consumers -> leads to improving income -> leads to improved livelihoods. However, the effects of an inclusive business reaches beyond direct impact. A good understanding of the potential side effects- such as farmer dependency on the buyer, decreasing crop diversity, or reproducing gender relations is absent in most business interventions. These side effects influence food security in the longer term.
- Many business interventions focus on improving productivity or product quality and income, assuming a positive impact on food security. Academic research however shows that there is no correlation between the first and the latter.

Intermediate (outcomes) achieved

In March 2017 the Follow the Food Consortium participated in the African Landscape Dialogue¹ in Addis Ababa. Invited by Solidaridad the consortium organized a workshop on “The role of agribusiness in the landscape”. Five companies from the network of Solidaridad and Fair & Sustainable participated. The direct lessons learned from this workshop include the following:

- This workshop taught the consortium partners how each company is unique in the challenges it faces. The broader context - the physical and institutional environment - is of much importance in this. The insights gained during the conference influenced the research framework and helped to move from a value-chain approach to a focus on systems, taking account of the wider landscape and political economy dynamics.

¹ Organized by HOAREC&N, the African Model Forest Network, EcoAgriculture Partners, NEPAD/TerrAfrica, Solidaridad Network, the Water and Land Resources Center (WLRC) and the World Resources Institute.

- The workshop of by the Follow the Food consortium was the only one in the conference that involved private sector parties. The consortium could therefore be instrumental in showing that prevailing perceptions of the private sector as 'bad guy' harming the environment and working against community and worker interests was one-sided. In the workshop it became clear that lack of governance and collaboration at the landscape level reduce the scope of agri-business to contribute to food security. The African Landscape Dialogue partners drafted the African Landscape Action Plan (ALAP) in which the consortium through Solidaridad is part of the active Business for Sustainable Landscapes work stream.

Messages to

A) Actors from private sector (entrepreneurs, traders, investors etc.):

- Your impact reaches beyond the farmers and consumers involved.

B) Civil society and practitioners organizations:

- Commercial agriculture is often directed towards markets outside the sourcing region, and therefore not contributing to, or even harming, local food availability.
- For competitiveness reasons, Inclusive Business in general are not able to engage the poorest community members. Focus is on (semi) commercial farmers. Inclusive business models risk to reproduce or strengthen local inequality.

C) Policy makers:

- Increase in agricultural productivity and quality might contribute to improved farmer income but does not automatically translate to improved local food security.
- Local food availability and accessibility are key for improving local food security; a profound understanding of the local food situation should be the starting point for any food security intervention.
- For long-term food security impact it is important to move from linear value chain interventions to systems approaches; to take into account the interaction effects with the local environment.

Knowledge products

- Background study Policy Brief AgriProFocus (2018): not yet public
- Sustainability journal article: Mangnus, E and van Westen, G (Oct. 2018): "[Roaming through the Maze of Maize in Northern Ghana. A Systems Approach to Explore the Long-Term Effects of a Food Security Intervention](#)"
- Opinion article Dutch newspaper (in Dutch) (Oct. 2018): "[Markt lost ondervoeding niet op](#)"
- Food Policy journal: Berger, M and Helvoirt, B (Aug. 2018): "[Ensuring food secure cities – Retail modernization and policy implications in Nairobi, Kenya](#)"
- Participation in public debate on Dutch companies in Ethiopia (in Dutch) (July 2018): "[Het groene goud](#)"
- Policy Note Solidaridad (partly based on insights Follow the Food – in Dutch) (June 2018): "[Voedselzekerheid vereist een systeemaanpak](#)"
- Lunch meeting on project interim findings with Inclusive Green Growth Department at Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Sep. 2017)
- Insights based on master thesis research (Sep. 2017): "[Inclusive agribusiness and food security. Suggestions to increase the positive impact of your business](#)"
- Report (April 2017): "[Follow the Food workshop at African Landscape Dialogue on Businesses in the Landscape](#)"
- Report (April 2017): "[Follow the Food participation in the African Landscape Dialogue](#)"
- Article NABC Magazine Edition 2016 "African innovation", p. 77 (2016) "[Follow the Food](#)"
- Research Uptake workshop (Nov. 2016): "[Towards Inclusive Business Models in the Context of Large-Scale Land Investments & Food Security](#)"
- News item (April 2016): "[Follow the Food: kick-off workshops](#)"

Knowledge networks

LANDac and [Future Food Utrecht](#)

Co-creation

- Since its inception, project partners Solidaridad and Fair & Sustainable Consulting have been closely involved in PhD and MSc research. They facilitated the fieldwork- case selection, logistics, supervision. The project PhD students regularly work from their offices in Nairobi and Addis Ababa.
- Coming year Fair & Sustainable consulting (both Netherlands and Ethiopia) and Solidaridad (Netherlands, East- and West Africa) will collaborate to develop, pilot and launch the business tool.
- There is close cooperation with the AgriProFocus office Netherlands. Together we are writing a policy brief on targeting farmers in food security interventions.

Consortium Partners

- [Fair & Sustainable Netherlands & Ethiopia](#)
- [Solidaridad Netherlands & East Africa & West Africa](#)
- [Utrecht University - Department of Earth Sciences](#)
- [St. Mary's University – Soil Science](#)

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Project websites

- [F&BKP Research Project page](#)