

African adoption of no-till ag and drought-tolerant crops could triple yields by 2050

Escaping the poverty trap begins with having enough food on your table and enough money in your pocket. For more than 500 million smallholder farmers all over the world, this means producing enough on two hectares (or less) of land to eat, and also having surplus to sell.

According to the World Bank, investment in agriculture is about twice as effective for poverty reduction as investment in any other sector. This is why, if Western donors want to make the most impact on the ground, they must put their money into agricultural innovations.

An online tool developed by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and launched earlier this year, allows policymakers to identify which technologies or practices (out of 10 that were modelled) will do most to improve yields in their region, taking predicted climate change conditions into account. The results for sub-Saharan Africa were striking. For instance, the joint adoption of no-till agriculture and drought-tolerant crops could as much as triple yields by 2050.

According to IFPRI's model, if precision agriculture techniques were to be widely adopted, by 2050, sub-Saharan Africa could benefit from 42 per cent increases in wheat yield. Individual countries could see even better results, with yields of rain-fed wheat in Angola rocketing by 168 per cent and in Botswana, Madagascar and South Africa by around 75 per cent by 2050.

If European donors want the funds they donate to count, these innovations must also be combined with extension services, finance and working markets – so that African farmers are better equipped and investments have the most impact.

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