

AT ISSUE

What is the Matter with African Agriculture?

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Abstract: The views of forty veterans on sixty years of African agricultural development, published recently in book form, are analyzed against the background of René Dumont's epochal publication "*L'Afrique noire est mal partie*." Although some of Dumont's opinions and recommendations are no longer valid, it is striking how many of them are as relevant today as they were fifty years ago. This paper reviews the recent history of agricultural development comparing Dumont's visions and those of the veterans from a number of angles, viz. the all-important issue of the strengths and weaknesses of subsistence and family farming, the development pathways of the forest and savannah zones, and the disappointing adoption record of new technology during the past fifty years. Next, future prospects are reviewed, as well as the conditions for significant progress, in respect of land ownership, farmer organization, education in the widest sense, "chain development" and, perhaps most importantly, dedication, honesty and discipline at all levels. Finally, the often unfavorable role of international aid is reviewed and recent developments are highlighted, in particular the dangerous trend of massive land acquisition by "outside" parties.

Introduction

This paper was motivated by two seemingly disparate events, which turn out to be closely related: the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of René Dumont's 1962 *L'Afrique noire est mal partie* and the appearance of our collection of forty veterans' essays on the state of African agriculture (Mutsaers and Kleene 2012), in which they describe what they see as the causes and possible solutions for the apparent stagnation of smallholder and family farming. These two events respectively deal with the beginning and the end of an era, that of heavily western-dominated agricultural development approaches in Africa, the main roots of which extend into the end of the colonial and the beginning of the post-colonial eras.

The forty veteran authors in our collection, twenty-two anglophones and eighteen francophones, were asked to address three questions:

- Why have we not been more successful in our attempts to help agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa move forward?

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<http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v14/v14i1-2a6.pdf>

- What are essential social, economic, political, and technical changes needed for farmers to become more efficient and more prosperous producers?
- What kind of external assistance and changes in international policy could help?

In this paper we will show the many links between Dumont's early visions and the development approaches that the veterans, including ourselves, have been involved in during the past fifty years, as reflected in their answers to these questions. We will also examine whether their experiences can explain why so little of the grand visions of the 1950s and 1960s, of which Dumont was one of the most outspoken protagonists, has been realised, and to what extent these visions have weathered the storms and remain valid today, half a century later. We have concluded this paper with a quotation from each of the authors' contributions, to convey the flavor of their wide ranging views.

The Key Question: Does Family Farming Have a Future?

One of today's crucial dilemmas for African farming is whether the future will be with small and medium size (family) farms or rather with large scale farming enterprises. This dilemma has arisen (again) at the end of a fifty year process, during which practically all attention has gone to uplifting Africa's smallholder farming, with relatively poor results, as many of our authors show. Nevertheless, a majority of them still consider a vitalized and suitably enlarged family farm as the only real option, because of its accumulated experience, its resilience to the vagaries of the climate and the fragility of the soil, and the vast numbers of rural dwellers (and their town relatives) depending on it.

The only way to feed the ever growing urban populations, compete with cheap imports, penetrate regional and international markets, and, very importantly, retain young people on the land, will be for family farming to evolve into small and medium-scale suitably mechanized and diversified farming (if that happens, the fate of the remaining subsistence farmers will become a major concern, unless alternative employment becomes available). Land and labor productivity must increase steeply, while safeguarding the production base, by integrating trees and cover crops as well as livestock, efficient fertility management, and a host of other measures. This was Dumont's vision in the early sixties and it remains the unfulfilled ideal of most of the present authors. Some significant modernization has taken place in the savannah areas, driven by cotton and maize and in some irrigated rice/vegetable schemes, notably the Office du Niger in Mali. In the forest zone, however, smallholder farming has stagnated, in some areas to a near-comatose state, with the notable exception of cocoa farmers in Ivory Coast and to a lesser extent Ghana. Dumont thought that the opportunities were much better in the forest zone due of its potential for industrial crops such as cocoa, oil palm and rubber, but the opposite has happened. We will come back to that contrast later.

Meanwhile, recent developments seem to run counter to the strengthening of smallholder farming, viz. the acquisition of large stretches of African land by foreign and local investors (called land grabbers by some). for large-scale production of food and biofuel. Apart from the nefarious effect on land security of the African family farmer and other societal implications, the lessons from the bad experiences with large scale arable farms in the late colonial and early post-colonial days are being forgotten. They succumbed to a combination of poor agronomy, poor management, and above all unawareness of the

devastating effects of temperate zone farming methods, when applied on a large scale under African conditions.

That is not to say that none of our authors see a future role for large arable farms, in particular in the savannah zones. Even if they do, they stress the need for caution to avoid the considerable damage which will result from injudicious land use through massive erosion and soil degradation and from pest and disease outbreaks. Medium and large-scale farming must mimic the adaptation, resilience, and sustainability of small-scale farming, which is often less vulnerable to such calamities. That means, for example, that it should use effective means of soil conservation and improvement, with appropriate tools, equipment and soil amendments, including organic manure produced on the farm or obtained from elsewhere. Even though the principles are well-known, there is yet very little experience in their application on a larger scale.

Forest and Savannah Farming

Dumont's views on the state of African farming in the early sixties were highly relevant, his elements for a balanced development appropriate, but his blueprint for the 1980s ("twenty years from today") have turned out to be an illusion. Like many workers with him, he envisaged an ideal division of tasks between forest and savannah, each according to its ecological potential, whereby the forest zone would specialize in tree crops (cocoa, oil palm, rubber, bananas) while the savannah would produce food as well as arable cash crops such as cotton. He thought that it would be relatively straightforward to develop forest zone agriculture, while addressing the challenges of the savannah would need more time. The opposite has been the case. The few success stories are all from the wet savannah ("francophone" cotton, maize in West and East Africa, to some extent irrigated rice), while smallholder tree crops in the forest zone, with the exception of Ivory Coast, have at best remained where they were, with little effort to raise them to a higher level of organization and production. While the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) with its research centers on four continents has paid little or no attention to them, French research institutes in several countries have continued to work on the physiology, breeding, and agronomy of coffee, cocoa, rubber, and fruits. However, no tight organizations were set up around these crops, in support of the entire product chains, comparable to those for cotton. The semi-autonomous Marketing Boards, set up in the fifties and sixties in anglophone countries for several commercial crops (e.g. coffee, cocoa, cotton) could have played that role (they were much admired by Dumont), but eventually they succumbed to state intervention and usurpation after independence.

Generally, aid agencies have also shown little interest in forest-zone industrial crops, perhaps with the exception of coffee, which Dumont considered the least promising. Aid has been extremely skewed towards small subsistence food crop producers, perhaps due to ideologically motivated predilection for poverty alleviation, with severe neglect of the potential of cash earning crops for that same purpose. Another reason was probably the lack of expertise among western development workers, who would rather direct their attention to "easier" commodities.

The Wet Savannah and the Case of Cotton

If anywhere, then things have been happening in the wet savannah zone, exemplified by successful intensive smallholder cotton and maize and irrigated rice, especially in some of

the francophone countries, and more recently fruit and vegetable production for the local, regional, and international markets. Let us look at the cotton sector for clues about the factors which condition agricultural development, as several of our francophone authors have done.

Since Dumont's days, commercial cotton growing has been one of the showcases of economic development in francophone West Africa, which has contributed to the emergence of quite prosperous medium size farms. The successes have been conditioned by three factors: a complete set of services provided by a dedicated and uncorrupted organization, cost recovery through deduction on delivered cotton, and vertical integration, all the way from production, through processing to marketing by a French organization the *Compagnie Française pour le Développement des fibres Textiles* (CFDT) and its affiliates, such as the *Compagnie Malienne pour le Développement des Fibres Textiles* (CMDT) in Mali whose roots extend into the colonial era. In other words, it has resulted from solid chain management in today's parlance. This resulted in what Dumont called a "disciplined" crop sector, where everything was done more or less by the book, at the price of strong regimentation by a monopolistic CFDT. In the 1980s, the World Bank pushed some of these national cotton parastatals, such as the CMDT (one of the largest) to extend services to cover other commodities in the "cotton-based system" as well, in particular, maize and livestock. While this was perhaps an understandable move considering their success and the inefficiency of the state-run extension services, it was also bad policy because it burdened commercially successful organizations with unprofitable tasks. Before it could have destroyed them, the policy was reversed again in the present century, by the same World Bank, that master of grand but ill-conceived ideas carried out on a grandiose scale with other people's money.

The Cotton Marketing Boards of anglophone Africa, set up before independence as semi-autonomous bodies in support of the cotton sector, initially were also quite successful. After independence, however, they rapidly degenerated under state control into exploitation mechanisms, serving the interests of politicians rather than of the farmers, which eventually left them in a semi-comatose state.

Are the farmers in the francophone countries better off then, because of the continuity provided by French-dominated parastatals? That remains to be seen. Several of our authors, some of them looking back with critical pride at a life-long career in cotton, express grave concern about the sector. Erstwhile successful parastatals, after having been drained of their resources by the politicians and further weakened by low cotton prices, are being dismantled in favor of yet hardly existing private enterprise, as stipulated by the same World Bank. It is hard to predict where this will take the sector in the next ten years and what structures will emerge in replacement of the moribund parastatals.

The Forest Zone and its Unfulfilled Promises

Around 1960 West African cocoa was booming and Ghana became independent with an impressive current account surplus thanks to its cocoa exports. Successes like this suggested to Dumont that progress in the forest zone would be easier than in the savannah, because of very well adapted perennial crops such as cocoa, oil palm, rubber, and bananas. He hoped that tree crops would become the engines of development in the forest zone, with the savannah supplying the food for the industrializing urban centers. It did not happen. Cocoa is still a major cash crop in the West African "cocoa belt," in particular in Ivory Coast and

Ghana, but it has declined in Cameroon, and especially in Nigeria, once the region's largest producer, to a pitiful level of yield and production volume. And even in Ivory Coast and Ghana it is far from the "disciplined" sector envisaged by Dumont, because of the absence of strong, uncorrupted, producer-oriented support organizations. Contrary to Dumont's expectations, coffee has continued to do fairly well as a smallholder crop in the highlands across the African continent, even without dedicated support structures or producer organizations, but other perennials (rubber, oil palm, sugar cane, bananas) have essentially remained plantation crops (oil palm is also an important smallholder crop in West Africa, with an elaborate village processing "industry," but it plays only a minor role in the palm oil trade). So, the promise of the forest zone has only been partly fulfilled, to say the least; and not for lack of potential.

Traditionally, bilateral aid has had little interest in export crops, for one thing because there were few experts around who could have staffed development projects dealing with commercial tree crops, and perhaps also because of some anti-capitalist tendencies in development circles. Contrary to cotton, there were no strong organizations with activities extending all the way from the production sites to the European trade and processing industry in support of these crops. It is telling that perennial crops are rarely mentioned by the veterans for their development potential. Some of them instead mention a recent shift away from industrial crops to food crops, because under the circumstances the latter are more profitable. Cassava for example has become a major traded commodity in Nigeria, with a fairly efficient indigenous processing industry developed around it, and good potential for further development.

Production Systems, Production Technology, and Processing

There has been a steady flow of new varieties of the major (arable) crops coming out of international and to a lesser extent national research institutes, and the adoption of several of them are counted among the scarce successes by many of our authors. Otherwise, the take-up of new production technology (fertilizer, pest control, animal traction) has largely been limited to cotton and (intensive) maize-based systems. The highly regimented cotton schemes in some francophone countries also stand out because of the diversified farming systems, which have evolved around them, including (beef) cattle, grain-legumes, and various crops besides cotton and maize.

In the early sixties, Dumont was lyrical about potential new crops for the savannah like *Jatropha* (an industrial oil producing crop of the Euphorbiaceae family, supposedly suitable for marginal soils) fodder species, and jute-like fiber crops. He also had high hopes for a host of new technology which was already available or being elaborated and which would be needed for peasants to become efficient middle-class farmers. In fact, he predicted an agricultural revolution, which eventually did happen, in Asia that is, but not in Africa, unless you want to see the advances of intensive maize production (in systems with or without cotton). in the West African savannah as a mini-revolution.

It is amazing how much of the Dumont's 1960s technological wish list is repeated by our authors fifty years on: "integrated" management of the fragile soil resources; abolition, replacement or improvement of the fallow; integration of crop growing and livestock, light mechanization, efficient use of scarce water; and introduction of new crops. *Jatropha* also features in both lists, which may be an example of what Richard Lowe (see Appendix) said about failed development approaches: "if their logic is appealing, [they] tend to be repeated

after 25 years.” It is not as if no innovation had been happening, though. It has, for instance in some cotton growing areas as already mentioned, and in intensive and innovative small scale vegetable gardens and poultry farms that have sprung up around and within several urban areas for decades, albeit largely unaided. The concern is about the traditional smallholder “subsistence” sector where innovation has not occurred at the scale and the rate we would like to see. The bulk of aid has gone to that sector, which is lacking in dynamism and has progressed but little and in many cases not at all. Finding out why that is so and why so little of the shopping lists of agricultural development has materialized was one of our motivations to solicit the views of forty veterans on the matter.

A remarkable favorable development has been the emergence of small and medium scale agricultural processing, mostly autonomous and unburdened by development aid, as observed by several authors and fully in line with Dumont’s recommendations. In part they evolved from traditional village processing, like gari production in Nigeria and oil extraction from a range of crops in several countries. Others have risen from the ashes of large state-run enterprises (tomato paste and fruit juice factories, rice mills, cashew processing plants, and many others), which collapsed due to illusory expectations or mismanagement, and usually both. The urban demand for convenience food is stimulating the development of small production units for dry “instant” foodstuffs derived from local products (cassava, sorghum and millet flours, dried fruits and nuts, etc.). However, the traditional export crops coffee, cocoa, timber, cotton, and more recently mangoes continue to be exported in unprocessed form, just as they were in Dumont’s days, to his annoyance.

What Future for Family Farming?

Generally, the veterans hardly venture into speculation about what the future will have in store, as Dumont would probably have done, but they do point out some elements that a viable smallholder agriculture would need. Many are disappointed about the lack of progress and the poor adoption of innovations, while at the same time realizing that widespread innovation is unlikely unless profound changes take place in the farming “environment” first: appropriate land laws, strong farmer organizations, quality agricultural education, effective linkages along the entire production chains and a profound change in mentality. Again, it is a list that is remarkably similar to Dumont’s.

The Land Rights Dilemma

The importance of the land rights issue has recently come to a head with the appearance on scene of the “land grabbers,” while a reform of land ownership laws, now more urgently needed than ever, has kept receding. Dumont stressed that land laws should ensure that farmers begin to see investment in the land as a profitable option and feel confident that the land will not revert back to the common pool after a few years, as was the case in most traditional societies, especially in the savannah. He is very critical, however, about undiluted private ownership, based on what he calls “Roman” land laws, because it would involve the owner’s practically unlimited *jus utendi et abutendi*, that is the right to use or abuse the land. The argument of its advocates, which include a minority among our authors, is that full ownership will allow farmers to “convert a rock into a garden,” as Dumont quoted from the 1793 tract *The Example of France a Warning to England* by Arthur Young, the influential English writer on agriculture, economics, and social statistics. The full quotation is: “Give a man the secure possession of a bleak rock, and he will turn it into a garden; give him a nine

years' lease of a garden, and he will convert it into a desert." While it is true that no farmer, whether in Africa or elsewhere, will invest in genuine land improvement unless he is convinced that the gains will not be taken away from him or his children, things are not so straightforward in Africa.

Dumont saw two dangers facing agricultural land use in Africa, which turned out to be only too real by 2012. The first, already apparent in the sixties and more so today, is over-exploitation of the land in many areas, by smallholder farmers who do not invest in land improvement and fail to transform into efficient market producers. In fact, the common attitude of farmers in many areas is still one of exploiting natural fertility and leaving its restoration to nature. This will not change easily, even with better land laws.

The second danger is appropriation and abuse of land by powerful parties which may result from full liberalization. This started to happen as early as the sixties, subsided for a few decades and recently has again picked up serious momentum. Under the easily corruptible circumstances found in many African countries the people who will gain most from freely tradable land rights may be powerful parties intent on appropriating large tracts of land for productive or speculative purposes. The stagnation of smallholder farming may even be serving as an argument in favor of land acquisition by indigenous and foreign investors as the road to modernization.

Farmer Organization

The cooperative movement in Africa of the early post-independence period quickly lost its credibility as it degenerated into a tool for governments to control and extract wealth from the rural populace. Dumont's high expectations of the catalytic role of the state in the early stages of Africa's agricultural development has turned out to be an illusion.

In spite of the tarnished image of the cooperative concept, many of the authors have come to the conclusion that without strong self-governed farmer organizations significant progress will not be possible. Weak governments have turned out to be incapable to provide essential services such as input supply, meaningful extension, credit, vocational training, etc., in spite of massive external aid with which many veterans have been associated. Farmer organizations are now looked to as potential future providers or contractors of farm services, as well as powerhouses to advocate for farmers' rights and interests, much like they did in Europe in the twentieth century. Although many farmer organizations have emerged in recent times, most of them have very limited capabilities, but hopes are for them to rise to the challenge of playing such roles as the state withdraws from service provision.

The relative success of semi-commercial farming in the "disciplined" environment created by parastatals around cotton and other crops testifies to the potential for progress of the African family farm. It is to be expected that effective farmer organizations will also have the best chance when associated with marketable commodities such as cotton, cocoa, coffee, oil palm, fruit crops, dairy, vegetables and cut flowers (for the European market), etc., much like their counterparts in Europe. Broad, general purpose cooperatives are unlikely to be viable in the near future.

One essential ingredient needed for a successful farmer organization movement will be education. Since strong farmer organizations need well-educated farmers (or at least farmer leaders), good primary and vocational schooling is a crucial requirement. Several of the veterans make a strong plea for good vocational education, whereas surprisingly few of them have been actually involved in such education.

Education, Training, and Extension

A large part of the agricultural development effort of the last 50 years can be labeled as capacity building: training and coaching of farmers, extension workers, ministry staff, and more recently NGO staff, traders, and would-be entrepreneurs. Much of that has been done through large state-run dinosaurs, in which massive amounts of aid money were idly invested, and which have since collapsed or are on the verge of collapse. The exception are the strong organizations around successful crops like cotton mentioned earlier, with extension embedded in a “disciplined” environment, as Dumont called it. These parastatals are now also in danger of disintegration with national governments and donors distancing themselves from the kind of “services” they used to provide.

In spite of the overall dismal record of state-run capacity building, many of the authors remain strong believers in the power of education and good vocational training. Successful entrepreneurship requires a literate, numerate, hardworking, and honest workforce. Effective farmer organizations need young well-educated leaders, and future extension personnel must be oriented to the realities of the existing, not an imaginary, farm and taught respect for local farmers.

Several authors also argue that agricultural training institutions should associate themselves with research and extension to form an integrated training/extension/research system in order to mend the present weak linkages among the three, improve the often very poor knowledge of extension personnel, and reorient the entire research, extension and education system to address the real development challenges.

This is all easier said than done. The traditional state-run extension services are a lost cause, vocational training has degenerated into a theoretical textbook affair (usually without the textbook), and research pursues academic rather than development targets. And, with the bankruptcy of Training and Visit Extension (T&V) and the decline of Farming Systems Research (FSR) the links between the three have again been broken. A thorough shake-up and new thinking at all levels will therefore be needed.

Chain Development

“Chain development,” a relatively new basket term in development speak, is rarely used by the veterans. They still use the old sub-categories, subsumed under chain development: input supply, credit, processing, quality control, marketing, etc. But the term is indeed useful as shorthand for the idea that one cannot stop at one element of the production chain in isolation if progress is to be made. Many of the veterans are of course keenly aware of this, as was Dumont, but few can claim to have successfully used an integrated production chain approach. What conditions need to be satisfied for chain development to stand a chance of success? It is clear that the best chances are for programs set up around a major commercial commodity, with a strong “disciplined” and non-corrupted organization and a reliable mechanism to recover credit and costs, as testified by the few success stories: cotton and irrigated rice and vegetables in Mali, small scale dairy farming in several countries, and perhaps vegetable production under contract for the international market, where the contractor intervenes in (or controls) all stages of the production, conservation, transport and marketing process (and perhaps smallholder coffee in Eastern Africa, although none of the authors mention this).

Smallholder commodities which could benefit from the approach are, for example, cocoa, coffee, oil palm, and export fruit, but also cassava for industrial flour production as

some of the authors describe. Nor does the organization necessarily have to be a parastatal or a foreign company. The cocoa and cotton Marketing Boards set up as semi-autonomous bodies after the war in most anglophone countries played that role effectively, until politicians pillaged them. Well-organized farmer organizations or cooperatives around specific commodities could in the future play that role, but hardly any are in sight yet which possess the necessary capacities.

Societal Values and Governance

At a higher level of abstraction, agriculture as much as with any other productive activity can only flourish in an environment where all actors play their roles more or less effectively and with dedication, not just to their own personal interest, but also to their organization's goals, or those of their societies at large. In the final accounting, as some of our authors argue, real development needs good governance, eradication of state corruption and reliance on local initiative and leadership and on people's own dynamism. This requires strengthening of moral and civil values, which René Dumont and several of the veterans have variously called dedication, entrepreneurial drive, perseverance, work ethics, political will, and assertiveness of local farmers and their leaders. These are more important than external assistance and can only be brought about by a new breed of African leaders at all levels.

Dumont was particularly exasperated by the decline in moral values, the increase in alcoholism in the coastal states, and the corruption and selfishness of politicians and civil servants at all levels so early after independence. Many of the veterans point to the same problems, but less forcefully than did Dumont. One wonders to what extent that is due to their perception of actual improvement, false hope, or politeness and political correctness. The former can hardly be the case, since the scale of corruption and other abuses now exceeds the value of all development funds taken together many times.

Has Aid Helped?

Many of the authors are extremely critical of bilateral and international aid, the fickleness of aid policies, and the frequent incompetence of aid administrations and personnel. They also point out that donors vainly tend to counter the corrupt practices of often dictatorial regimes by complex bureaucratic control mechanisms. Apart from this, many interventions in agriculture are considered failures for a range of other reasons and the relatively small successes as not commensurate with the sums spent. It is sobering to look at the list of complaints:

- unrealistic timeframes, with the time estimated by politicians almost always being far shorter than what field workers consider feasible
- development trends and fashions reflecting the donors' home politics rather than the interests of the aid country that disrupt momentum in the field
- short memories (or no memory at all) leading to a replay of the same mistakes
- lack of continuity, with each administrator wanting to plant his own flag rather than strengthen existing projects
- rigidity and therefore poor adaptation to changing conditions

- poor judgment and inability to distinguish the good from the poorly performing projects
- loss of donor interest in agriculture around 2000 and sudden discontinuation of projects
- unilateralism of donor policies, and absence of a real development debate and policy formulation in the recipient countries
- lack of professionalism of donor personnel and field staff
- poor donor coordination
- prejudiced or ill-informed attitudes towards farmers and failure to involve them in policy debate on matters that affect them
- favoring cronies, who know how to manipulate donors

There are also concerns that aid has perpetuated the “dependency” syndrome; interfered with the development of national capacities by enticing the best people to come and work for them; hindered market and enterprise development, private initiatives, and farmer organization; and allowed local elites to dodge their responsibilities.

In spite of all this, only a minority reject the idea of aid entirely, while a surprising number still see a potential role, although there is no clear consensus about the fields where aid would be most needed. The ideas range widely, from functional and integrated research, extension, training and agricultural education, through rural infrastructure, including irrigation works, dams, and reservoirs, to affordable credit for farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs. If aid is provided there should be real long-term commitment (fifteen to twenty years or even longer is mentioned), agreed between well-coordinated donors and local institutions, with budgets allocated for the whole life span of the collaboration, funds spent flexibly at the right time, and knowledgeable staff kept on the job for many years, while avoiding the pitfalls of the past.

Two recent trends in international aid are worth mentioning, the first one unfavorable in our opinion, while the second potentially favorable. The former is the choice which bilateral donors are increasingly making for international aid delivery channels such as the World Bank. This seems to be motivated more by convenience than by the proven competence of international organizations. In fact, their record has been even more dismal than that of bilateral donors. A (potentially) more favorable trend is the growing aid flow through NGOs, western farmer unions, charities, immigrants (the African diaspora) and western private citizens and some of the direct investments made by commercial parties. Such “community-to-community” flow may eventually help build more equal relations, because it involves a *rapprochement* between cultures. It is, however, also not free of the paternalism and cultural arrogance that has characterized conventional aid.

Conclusion

Sixty years ago African agriculture had two faces. One was essentially that of peasant or subsistence farming, which in some cases included commercial crops like cocoa or coffee in the wet zones and groundnuts and cotton in the drier zones. The other sector was highly successful European plantation agriculture, with oil palm, rubber, tea, and sugarcane. The hopes which most of us shared with Dumont were for the subsistence sector to evolve towards middle class commercialized and semi-mechanized farming, which would ensure Africa’s food supply, while gradually taking over the cash crop sectors as well. The stories told by many of the veterans are an illustration of the failure of development aid to help this

come about. It is obvious that the failure cannot really be explained from technological shortcomings. As Felix Nweke remarked, sweepingly, in his contribution: "The question why African agriculture remains undeveloped . . . is part of a bigger question namely why is Africa undeveloped . . ." He and many other contributors preferred not to deal with this bigger question but rather with the phenomenology of the underdevelopment of agriculture. This of course does not make the bigger question go away, but elaborating on it exceeds the boundaries which most contributors have set for themselves.

In the current euphoria about what is seen as Africa's final take-off, especially among economists, the continuing dismal state of Africa's agriculture is usually ignored, and so is the almost complete absence of non-extractive industrial development. It is beyond the scope of this paper and the skills of its authors to analyze this situation adequately, but we do wish to make a few cautionary remarks on the matter, which reflect the concerns of several of the veteran authors. The first is that without solid industrial development the current and future outflow of people from the rural areas cannot be absorbed and will lead to further swelling of the ranks of unemployed urban youths, with all its concomitant dangers. The second is that the new national and international actors who are after Africa's (mineral) riches will also want to penetrate the agricultural sectors and try to industrialize agriculture on a large scale. The industrial exploitation of mineral resources may not be much affected by the physical conditions in Africa (it is by societal conditions, though, see for example the French concern about the safety of West African uranium mining). But attempts at the transformation of farming into large-scale production have left a legacy of costly failures that are financial, ecological, and social. It is clear that African family-based agriculture has not been and will not be developed through a succession of fads, fashions, and miraculous innovations. Nor will rapid industrial development of agriculture be the panacea in which many politicians seem to put their hopes.

What stands out in many of the veterans' views is the conviction that the development of African agriculture will have to pass through the emergence of suitably commercialized small and medium scale family farming rather than a quantum jump into big industrialized farms. Bringing about a balanced development based on dynamic family farms requires the vision, self-criticism, and skills on the part of Africa's own leadership, which have been severely lacking. The picture is not entirely bleak, though. There are examples of successful development, in particular in the wetter parts of the savannah. The forest zone has clearly lagged behind, contrary to Dumont's expectation that development would be easier there because of the potential for smallholder tree crops like cocoa, rubber and oil palm. In fact these crops have been shamefully neglected, a situation that calls for vigorous catch-up programs.

Strong farmer organizations, considered essential by many, stand the best chances when built around marketable crops, as exemplified by cotton. They should also play a key role in "product chain development" and extension. Quality vocational training, oriented towards the real, instead of an imaginary "modern" farm, has too long been neglected by governments and donors alike. It will be an essential ingredient for future development.

Several authors are hopeful that modern communication technology will bring a new dynamism to agriculture. It may, however, also discourage the younger generation, when they compare their conditions with those in the outside world, and reinforce their drive to escape. This will be unstoppable unless really significant improvement is made in economic and living conditions in the rural areas, which can only come about if African leaders start to

take a genuine interest in the advancement of their communities, rather than just pursuing their own narrow interests.

Perhaps René Dumont would turn in his grave if he found out what little has been achieved. Should we perhaps admit that he may have to rest for another fifty years before Africa and its agriculture really take off?

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APPENDIX

Quotations from the Veterans' Essays

The following are quotations are from the contributions to a collection of essays by forty authors on which the present paper is based (Mutsaers and Kleene, 2012). The page numbers given with the authors' names refer to this collection.

"What has happened now that we should sit back and expect our District Officer to create [the things we need] for us by magic?" (Godfrey Allen on Community Development, quoting a local leader, p. 39).

"Eventually private agricultural R&D will come to play a strong role in SSA but meantime countries must rely primarily on public agencies" (Jock Anderson, p. 318).

"Instead of using the money from oil exports to purchase weapons or having it disappear due to corruption, a significant portion should go to agricultural and social development, thus preventing its misuse" (Facho Balaam, p. 265).

"How can we explain [those disastrous results], in spite of the billions of CFA francs spent, of all the economic theories tried out, of the countless development projects undertaken?" (Hervé Bichat, p. 98).

"Considerable amounts of development money end up in tax havens, due to illicit manipulation and common accounting practices used in the world of large companies" (René Billaz, 324).

"Market opportunities should have predominance over supply factors" (Dirk Bol, p. 73).

"African farming would have been better off without the aid monies and endless waves of foreign experts persistently identifying the wrong causes for their problems" (Peter Bolt, p. 207).

"Too little attention was paid to indigenous learning systems based on farmer to farmer exchange of experience and experiments" (Alain Bonnassieux, p. 290).

"Agricultural development should not focus on the poorest of the poor, one does not win the war with disabled troops" (Henk Breman, p. 185).

"Agriculture is not only the business of farmers and agronomists!" (Dominique de la Croix, p. 245).

"I think the real question is: why have achievements been erased so quickly, why there is this socio-economic stagnation, even worse, this decline?" (Jean-Pierre Derlon, p. 247).

"Let other organisations do what they are good at" (Peter van Doren, p. 220).

"I have seen many smallholders individually or collectively making the most of the resources and opportunities in their environment" (Adri van den Dries, p.227).

"With the steeply rising cost of chemical inputs in recent years, increasing the farmers' access to organic manure is an issue of paramount importance" (Marc Dufumier, p. 112).

"A real change in mentality takes a couple of generations" (Harry Franssen, p. 179).

"Africa is littered with failed model farms" (David Gibbon, p. 303).

"[Due to factors external to the farm] agricultural extension professionals, in spite of their closeness to researchers and technicians, have rarely succeeded in their own personal projects of intensification of livestock production" (Hubert Guerin, p. 271).

"Summarizing African agriculture as stagnant and backward is encouraging the alienation of large stretches of African land to foreign owners, under the rubric of 'foreign investment'" (Jane Guyer, p. 189).

"We have been slow to realise that development is far more complex and insensitive to our methods of technical and socio-economic engineering" (Paul Kleene, p. 204).

"Regarding the extension approach, we must recognize that a farm has to be considered as a whole" (Youba Koné, p. 257).

"The notion of sustainability of "mixed systems" combining livestock and crop production continues to be at the forefront today and my interest in this area is unabated" (Philippe Lhoste, p. 283).

"Failed development approaches such as the farm settlements remain un-publicised (nobody wants to publicise their mistakes), and, if their logic is appealing, tend to be repeated after 25 years" (Richard Lowe, from an e-mail commenting on farm settlements in Nigeria).

"Farmer organisations in Tanzania should be encouraged to emerge with little state interventions" (Sizya Lugeye, p. 137).

"Donor assistance has perpetuated the dependency syndrome" (Dejene Makkonen, p. 151).

"Small farmers are nearly always competitive when given equal access to resources and markets" (Peter Matlon, p. 122).

"The traditional subsistence agriculture that is widespread in much of sub-Saharan Africa cannot feed present, let alone future, generations" (Fred Muchena, p. 84).

"Cultural change can only be brought about by local people and their leaders, who find gratification in the progress of their own communities" (Henk Mutsaers, p. 94).

"Export of honey from Africa is being promoted among honey packers, driven by the ambition to join the world market, while there is a shortage of honey in Africa itself" (Marieke Mutsaers, p. 280).

“Large-scale agriculture may increase agricultural production but it will not contribute greatly to development” (David Norman, p. 145).

“The question why African agriculture remains undeveloped [...] is part of a bigger question why is Africa undeveloped” (Felix Nweke, p. 152).

“High and increasing rates of rural to urban migration with farming being left to aging men and women is an increasing problem in agricultural development” (Bede Okigbo, p. 297).

“The introduction and the widespread use of animal traction have increased cultivated area, yields, and incomes” (Amadou Sow and Abdoulaye Traoré, p. 233).

“There will everywhere be changes in African agriculture, but often not in the form or the speed that Western aid workers would have planned for” (Willem Stoop, p. 333).

“I have not been ‘fabricated’ by any NGO or organisation, so they cannot lecture me or force me to say what they want” (François Traoré, p. 161).

“Many projects are based on solutions looking for problems—not the other way around” (Brian Van Arkadie, p. 67).

“One simple question which was not addressed was why the land chosen was uncultivated—evidently African farmers knew something the scheme planners didn’t” (Brian Van Arkadie on the Tanganyika Groundnuts Scheme, p. 48).

“I would propose to spend at least 2% of any project budget for cultural purposes” (Jos Verdurmen, p. 107).

“It was a serious mistake to deploy so much scarce manpower in extension, instead of allocating most resources to training rural youth” (Ed Verheij, p. 310).

“For me, agricultural development only starts once farmers have means of transportation, which often coincides with some cattle ownership” (Frits Wegerif, p. 170).

“Farmers should consider the ‘land factor’ as of crucial importance: land is valuable and scarce” (Jan de Wolff, p. 197).

“Only where work ethics plays a preponderant role will knowledge, practice, supporting services and even co-operations bloom” (Dirk Zoebel, p. 79).