

Driving Africa's food trade in a changing climate

The threats of climate change to Africa's already fragile food systems, compounded by the continent's low adaptive capacity, are well rehearsed. A projected 20-30 per cent fall in crop yields by 2050, with more severe losses in some regions, will deepen existing problems of erratic food shortages and volatile prices.

Maize production, for example, is projected to experience a sharp decline in Kenya and northern Ethiopia, but in the United Republic of Tanzania yields are expected to increase by up to 40 per cent. Maize is one of the priority crops identified by African leaders to drive agriculture-led economic growth, eliminate hunger and reduce poverty. Yet yields of these staple crops vary dramatically across Africa's agro-ecological zones and are projected to differ further under the impacts of climate change.

By examining these shifts in productivity, patterns of potential crop excesses and shortages are emerging; matching areas of high productivity to where yields are low and demand is high can forge new trade corridors across the continent.

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Aligning production to market needs

Aligning changing crop yields with evolving market needs opens up myriad opportunities to boost trade at both the interregional and global level. Orientated by demand as shaped by climate change, the market acts as a pull factor for agricultural commodities, driving healthy investment, profitable trade and distributing food in line with demand. This in turn can bolster economic growth, tackle recurrent volatility in food prices and enhance food security.

The Economic Commission for Africa's African Climate Policy Centre, in collaboration with partners including the African Trade Policy Centre, is examining the interactions between climate change, agricultural trade and food security across Africa. A study is planned that will evaluate the performance of major staple crops in the light of the changing climate and explore how changes triggered by climate change can drive agricultural commodities along Africa's regional trade corridors.

Droughts, floods, heat stress and other extreme weather events have devastating effects on food production, while more subtle changes such as sporadic hot and cold spells or incremental temperature increases can be equally detrimental to the quality and quantity of yields.

However, less well documented and scarcely explored by African countries is the fact that climate variability and change have varying effects on crop production; crops that have traditionally performed very well in a specific region may decline while other crops may thrive. Likewise, areas that have seen historically poor yields may become more productive with changes in temperature and rainfall.

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By assessing prospects for harnessing opportunities for food production under climate change, the study will support growing political will and determination among African leaders to open up new trading blocks and trade corridors between countries.

A shift in approach: from risk to opportunity

By capitalizing on opportunities in this way, the study will challenge the risk-based approaches which have hitherto dominated Africa's response to climate change. Efforts to manage risks and address the so-called gaps created by climate change have confined attempts to achieve food security to the realms of subsistence. However, gaps in any market bring corresponding windows of opportunity. Identifying the linkages



'Gaps' created by climate bring corresponding windows of opportunity.

between climate change and food trade moves the focus away from mere production systems towards a vibrant marketplace driven by shifts in supply and demand.

The study proposed by the African Climate Policy Centre and partners seeks to embrace this new approach, highlighting the vast potential for demand-driven interregional and global trade. The work aims to demonstrate how robust business models built around priority agricultural crops can drive economic growth, turn farming practices into rewarding enterprises and tackle the recurrent volatility in the price and availability of food across Africa.

About ClimDev-Africa

The ClimDev-Africa Programme is an initiative of the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB). It is mandated at the highest level by African leaders (AU Summit of Heads of State and Government). The Programme was established to create a solid foundation for Africa's response to climate change and works closely with other African and non-African institutions and partners specialized in climate and development.



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