



THE AFRICA WE WANT

BY FANTO FODAY

Agriculture has never been an interest of mine. As a child, we always had small gardens at our backyard and I distasted watering the plants every morning before school. However, in 2014, I had an encounter that change my mindset. I was opportune to visit the Lindt chocolate Factory in Cologne, Germany on a school excursion.

When I asked the tour guide where the factory got their supply of cocoa from, He showed us a big map of all the countries that supplied the chocolate factory with cocoa. Majority of the countries were from Africa. As the tour guide listed the countries on the map and mentioned my country, Sierra Leone, I was a bit startled. I had never imagined that cocoa was an exported commodity from my country- Sierra Leone to Europe. I could not connect this information with the reality on ground.

Like most African Nations, my country is challenged with an alarming high rate of poverty. I had questions in my mind, what was been done with all the money the farmers earn? Why don't we have our own chocolate factories? Why can't we invent our own cocoa products? If the farmers could export large tons of chocolate, why were they still poor? As a woman who lives and dreams in the continent of Africa, and as an individual who has tied her future to same, this experience was deeply troubling for me.

In a bid to find answers, I went for a vacation to Sierra Leone in 2017. While I was on vacation in my country, I visited my home town where I noticed that only few things had changed. I decided to meet with some farmers to get answers as to what had been done with the money they made from exporting. 40% of them farmers were cocoa farmers. Their challenges were numerous, ranging from lack of agricultural information, uncertain policy environment and poor infrastructural development that limit market access, increase post-harvest losses, climate events to mention but a few. I followed up in with reading articles about the challenges other African Countries faced in regards to Agriculture. The challenges were similar and mostly the same. However, I observed a major challenge -The agricultural potential of Africa remains largely untapped. I also conducted a research to know more about chocolate production in Europe and the results were quiet alarming.

Germany is one of the top four countries responsible for the production of chocolate in Europe. According to Statista, Western Europe accounts for approximately 35% of total world chocolate production. Interestingly, none of the major producers of chocolate are major sources of cocoa, and none of the major cocoa-producing countries are major chocolate manufacturing centers. Talk about an irony.

To some parts of the world, Africa must appear like a retrogressing continent infested with diseases and war; and a people who cannot champion their own causes. I would not be surprised, if we have been reduced to a continent that depends on charity aid to get by day to day. But this, is far from the truth. Africa is receiving a tremendous amount of the world's attention right now. Africa is rising. This year's African Economic Outlook from the African Development Bank projected Africa's GDP growth to accelerate to 4.0 percent in 2019 and 4.1 percent in 2020. African countries are looking for new opportunities for growth to move beyond the norm. With a young and striving population, progressively growing economies, and pro-innovation investments and improvement, Africans from all works of life are contributing into their communities to affect change and inspire others. There are young entrepreneurs who are producing new lines of business and employment opportunities in Africa's fast-growing digital marketplace and forefront health care workers who are organizing sophisticated quality services and outreach to the most vulnerable populations.

The African Union has developed 'Agenda 2063' its 50-year Vision and Action Plan for the Africa that Africans want. Agenda 2063 calls for action by all segments of society to work together and build a prosperous and united Africa based on shared values and a common destiny. Through this vision, sound policies and greater infrastructure will push Africa's transformation by enhancing the conditions for private sector development and by heightening investment, entrepreneurship, and micro, small and medium enterprises. Nevertheless, the risks are high for the realization of this vision. Several economies on the continent remain fragile, and infrastructure remains underdeveloped. Many African economies still rely on raw materials, with a limited diversification of their productive structures.

The continent holds a lot of young people who are creating solutions for farmers in their local communities. A good example is that of Oneyeka Akumah from Nigeria, who founded Farm Crowd, an aggrotech company that connects investors to farmers. Another great example is Jamila Abass from Kenya, who founded a company, M-Farm that gives small subsistence farmers vital market information via SMS on their mobile phones and helps them reach buyers. These are young Africans creating value and solving Agricultural problems across Africa. Africa needs more of these people to drive change.

I propose to create an innovative show, 'AGRIC CONNECT' that focuses on solving Agricultural problems in communities, town, and cities across the African continent. Using the Aspirations of the Agenda 2063 as the focal point, the show will seek not just to address these challenges, but provide sustainable solutions and implement these solutions where they are needed across the African continent. Recent global food crises and continuing struggles with hunger in some parts of Africa, particularly in the Horn, stress the need for greater food security. The potential contribution of the agricultural sector to poverty reduction, improved livelihoods of rural households and greater food security.

The show will take a format of identifying common Agricultural issues affecting our communities in Africa, providing solutions and acting together as a team with the support of the African Union to implement these solutions. After a solution is implemented in one community successfully, it

will be transferred to other parts of Africa. When you think about this generation of Africans, the first things that come to mind are purpose, passion, and drive.

The show will consist of young vibrant youths from different countries across Africa with talent, creative abilities and passion for Africa's development with the aim of promoting the AU Agenda 2063. The panelist will be made up of these youths. Together they will form a network of innovative, change makers and positive role models, who will be well prepared to create Sustainable solutions to the biggest challenges in the Agricultural sector in the African continent.

It will be an informative platform for Africans to know about Agenda 2063 but most importantly, to see its impact in the African continent. With one of the major aspiration of Agenda 2063 aiming at 'An Africa whose development is people driven, relying on the potential offered by people, especially its women and youth and caring for children', the show will promote youth leadership and development in Africa.

This initiative will require resources such as a talk show studio, where I will host the show with other young bright Africans. It will require an online community where we engage Africans from across the globe. When Solutions are created, the viewers will have to vote for the best solutions. It will also require Volunteers from all over the continent, who will majorly responsible for sourcing out problems and looking for innovators with solutions to these problem. The show will illustrate that even though we face a big problems in Africa, we can start fixing them through a lot of small actions. It will showcase that we can champion African solutions to African problems if we use our creative energy in the right way. If we leverage on our status as the last frontier. The solutions that will derived from the show will help Africa with tech transfer, capacity building, partnership, access to the market, and involving the communities we want to serve in these solutions. This show will create opportunities for Africans to work together in Address changes in their communities.

I strongly believe my generation of African youth can drive the changes to get the Africa we want. However, none of one of us can be efficient as all of us. It is important that we make a joint decision to play various roles in effecting a social and economic revolution in the African Continent. Definitely, not everyone will be at the forefront but every single piece is required to complete the puzzle. As Edward Everett Hale puts it "Coming together is the Beginning, Staying Together is progress, and Working together is Success".

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