

Organic Agriculture in Africa ... the Reality and Development Horizons

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Introduction:



Organic agriculture is a biological system and a farming method that is taken from nature. It aims at producing clean food through safe methods without violating the environmental system. This system puts into consideration the natural ability of the soil and of the fauna and flora living creatures. It also depends on the inputs of the local production while it doesn't permit the usage of synthetic inputs or industrial fertilizers, pesticides, veterinary drugs, genetically modified strains, in addition to the preservatives, among others.

Any product that is marketed under the title "Organic Product" should be a product of a farm that is submitted to the supervision and inspection of one of the inspection and control centers. The qualifications of such produce should also cope with the fundamental criteria of those centers, upon which certificates are granted to such products as *Organic*.

Organic agriculture contributes to the sustainable development through increasing the production in the low-potential and the marginalized areas, preserving the biological diversity and the natural resources, in addition to increasing the income, producing miscellaneous secure foods and realizing long-term environmental, social and economic sustainable development.

Several developing countries are suffering from various fertilizer-related diseases. In this respect, some studies indicate that the population of the developing countries is the most exposed to such diseases.

According to the USAID, in 2008, 50% of the population in developing countries suffers from pesticide-related diseases. According to the ILO and the FAO, victims of pesticide poisoning ranged between 2-5 million individuals, including 40,000 fatal poisoning cases.

According to the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the agriculture sector (after excluding the electricity and fuel emissions) is responsible of 13.5% of the global warming cases (Greenhouse cases), in addition to

the emissions from the chemical fertilizers production and pesticides, especially the nitrate oxide. Studies show that the carbon dioxide emissions in the organic farms dropped by around 64%.

Agriculture by itself constitutes around 70% of the workforce in Africa and contributes by around 25% of the GDP. Despite the fact that Africa possesses vast fertile lands and huge humanitarian resources, yet it remains the region with the largest mal-nutrient population and the highest poverty rates in comparison with the other developing regions. During the period 1981-2005, the population who live on less than \$ 1.25 a day had been doubled in Africa south of the desert; from 212 million in 1981 to more than 338 million in 2005.

According to the (FAO), the population who suffer from malnutrition worldwide reached 842, including 98% in the developing countries.

The performance of the agriculture sector and the rural activity which most of the African population rely upon is closely related to the poverty rate. Within this framework, the greatest challenge that faces the developmental objectives of the millennium enables the transformation of the agricultural sector in African into a mechanism for economic development and for poverty

reduction.

In addition to the lagging agriculture development, there is an accelerating increase in the population growth which is expected to reach 2 billion by 2050. Thereupon, the high average of population growth along with the limited average of agricultural development can lead to devastating famines and severe poverty conditions.

The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), which is an international governmental process that is supported by more than 400 experts, in addition to various UN agencies had all reached a conclusion that the method of harvesting crops worldwide should radically change in order to address the needs of the poor, to accommodate the expected increase in population and to overcome the effects of the climate change and of the environmental collapse. This mostly applies on Africa where the problem of food insecurity is getting worse.

It is ripe time that the sustainable African Green revolution should lead to an increase in agricultural productivity through adopting sustainable agricultural practices that would minimize the environmental damage and enhance the fertility of the soil.

Researchers of the United Nations

Environment Program (UNEP) prove that organic agriculture is the best choice for realizing food security in Africa. Such a choice is more effective than most of the traditional systems and is expected to be implemented on the long run. Analyzing 114 cases in Africa had showed that transferring the farms towards the method of organic or semi-organic production had increased the agricultural productivity by 116%.

Furthermore, shifting towards the organic production system has a sustainable effect as it enhances the levels of natural, human, social, financial and physical capital in the agricultural societies.

Organic production is also suitable for the small farmers who represent the majority of Africa's poor people. In this respect, organic production farmers do not mainly depend on external resources, however, they receive higher amount of crops and more stable revenues, thus further enhancing food security.

Yet, before permitting their entrance to the markets of organic production, farmers should pass through a shifting phase where production costs increase as a result of using organic techniques.

Projects of the Food and Agriculture Organization in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal and Sera Lion had helped the small

farmers and exporters to successfully overcome such preliminary challenges and to benefit from the lucrative markets for organic products. Furthermore, through upgrading the technical skills and improving the quality of products, farmers can obtain the membership certificate of origin and can fulfill the documentation requirements for the commercial equity. Thanks to the structural improvements and the better organization, the majority of farmers became in a position that enables them to sign contracts and to negotiate with the export bodies.

Exports and Markets of the African Organic Agricultural Products:

The USA is the biggest market for organic agriculture worldwide. In this respect, the economic value of the current organic products reached Euro 17.8 billion, followed by Germany, France, UK and Italy with a value of Euro 5.8, 3.0, 2.1 and 1.5 billion respectively.

During the period (1997-2008), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) financed the Export Promotion of Organic Products (EPOPA) Program, which had an effective role in improving the life of around 100,000 farmers in Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia. This Program had also contributed to making small farmers acquainted with the local and international organic markets in order to

obtain higher prices for their organic products through increasing the amount of crops.

Recently, exports of organic products from Africa witnessed a rapid increase, including those from Uganda that had increased five folds throughout five years; from \$ 4.6 billion in 2002/03 to \$ 22.8 billion in 2007/08, with coffee, cotton, fresh nuts and sesame seeds on top of its products. In this respect, the EU, USA and the Middle East are the most important markets for the African organic products.

As regards Tanzania, the value of exports – from nine organic products, reached around Euro 10 million, were mainly directed to the EU and the USA markets. On top of such products are the cocoa, cashew, and vanilla in addition to the tea which represents around 55% of the total amount of its products.

On the level of the Arab countries, Tunisia occupies the first rank as regards organic agriculture, with around 178.5 thousand hectares, thus constituting around 1.8% of the total area of arable land. Tunisia is the only Arab country that applied the Organic agriculture according to the scientific and legal principles of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM).

It is mainly interested in harvesting olives, almonds, palm trees,

fruits, vegetables and fodders and its exports are mainly directed to Western Europe.

As regards Egypt, the organic farming sector witnesses a noticeable growth; from 4.020 thousand hectares in 2003, then to 19.211 thousand hectares in 2008. Number of Organic farms had nearly doubled from 460 farms in 2006 to 1000 in 2007.

In this respect, the Ministry of Agriculture had adopted some procedures that foster the organic agriculture, including the establishment of the Central Laboratory for Analysis of Pesticide Residues in 1994 and the Central Laboratory for Organic Agriculture in 2002.

The Ministry had also issued a resolution to ban the usage of pesticides in the border areas such as Sinai, New Valley and Toshka. Nevertheless, the market of organic agriculture in Egypt is still limited due to the high prices of products in addition to exporting around 90% of the Egyptian organic products.

In Morocco, the organically cultivated area reaches 3200 hectares, in addition to more than 500,000 hectares of forests including the Maple trees and the aromatic and medicinal plants; most of which are being exported due to the lack of the local markets. Citrus fruits and vegetables represent around 95% of the

biological exports to Europe.

The Hurdles and Horizons of Development:

In early 2007, African exporters were worried when one of the biggest UK organic accreditation bodies cancelled the accreditation of the products shipped by air to their markets due to their high greenhouse gas emission rate; the matter which threatens their livelihoods.

Nevertheless, a study conducted by the International Trade Center (ITC) confirmed that the huge consumption of energy takes place inside the import markets, and that in many cases the products shipped by air are more energy efficient; thus contributing to providing an instant protection to the standard of livings of around 22,000 citizens.

The High cost of issuing the certificates represents a major hurdle, especially for the small farmers. In East Africa, each farm pays a range between \$ 500-3000 to get the Certificate of Organic Products. In Uganda, the fees of issuing the European Certificate reach GBP 200, not to mention the inspection costs which reach GBP 350 daily.

Furthermore, local organic products in some countries face a fierce competition with the imported products that are lower in cost due to the fact that their production is greatly financed from most of the advanced countries.

In Kenya, there is a retail outlet for organic products that do not include more than 1% of the Kenyan local products. However, the exported products can encourage the local demand through presenting the organic agriculture products in the market.

One of the major challenges that face this sector is that the organic agriculture, the same as the other forms of sustainable agriculture, do not receive sufficient governmental support. In this respect, some policies, such as the agricultural subsidies policy, are not in favor of the organic products procedures.

Even more, organic agriculture barely exist in the fields of agricultural education, guiding services and the development and research activities. Furthermore, misinformation is a huge barrier in this respect. This includes rendering the organic crops as less in quality than that of the traditional ones and that rendering some crops as organic just by not using any chemicals or by adopting the traditional cultivation.

Recommendations:

- Expanding the awareness campaigns on the importance of organic agriculture, including its economic outputs on the farmers and its health benefits on the consumers.
- Facilitating the application of a legal framework and the adop-

tion of policies for supporting and marketing organic products in Africa.

- Removing the agricultural inhibitors, including the subsidies related to using chemicals in cultivation and training employees in the field of evaluating the agricultural counseling services as regards the sustainable agricultural practices.
- Supporting the small farmers, especially throughout the transitional phase from the traditional to the agricultural farming.
- Reducing the accreditation and inspection fees and issuing the membership certificate from the specialized bureaus.
- Financing the researches related to organic agriculture between the farmers, manufacturers and agricultural counseling specialists, and the academics and supporting the local and regional markets of the organic products.
- Increasing the amount of finance offered to the international society for sustainable agriculture in Africa and eliminating the hurdles that impeded the African organic products from reaching the foreign markets.