

CAMPAIGN PROMISES

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I am at a campaign event for my election as President of my country, and the cheering is deafening. I am smiling, waving, and chanting with the crowd – until I spot a man gesticulating so wildly, trying to get my attention, that security men have restrained him. At my request, he is allowed onto the podium. With the dignity of the aged, he slowly approaches the stand, straightens his tattered shirt and proclaims, "I have some questions for you and they wouldn't let me ask. All anybody wants to do is sing!"

Amused, I tell him, "Ask your questions, sir. It is your right."

Reassured, he grabs a microphone and begins a diatribe. "I am a farmer. My father and grandfather were farmers. All of us have been poor. My son is in the university studying agriculture and I don't want his story to be like ours. In fact, I have tried to discourage him. I told him to study computer science so he can be a tech bro, but he insists that farming is the future of Africa."

I let out a laugh. "Your son is right, Baba. Africa currently has a population of over 1 billion people.¹ Who will feed those people? It is farmers! And you do not provide only for our stomachs, you are the fuel of industry. Don't forget, by 2016, Africa owned a whopping 60% of all arable land in the world.² In the words of Akinwumi Adesina, Africa's agricultural potential is massive."³

"Let me interrupt you there. Didn't the same man say that 'Africa cannot eat potential'? Talk is cheap. Where is this potential when we cannot transport our produce to markets even in neighbouring countries without spoilage?⁴ What can a poor farmer do when he struggles to produce, but the market is closed to him? Yes, we have potential, but Africa still has the lowest rate of intra-regional trade in the world with only 17% of total exports being intra-continental.⁵ So my question to you is: How will you unlock this agricultural potential you say we have when you become President?"

What he says is true, yet I know that where a problem exists, there must be a solution. How do I help the farmers in my country to expand their market into the continent and make agriculture a booming industry?

¹ World Bank. (n.d.). *Africa Overview*. Retrieved January 07, 2023 from Worldbank.org: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/overview>

² World Economic Forum. (2016, January 22). *2 truths about Africa's agriculture*. Retrieved January 02, 2023 from weforum.org: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/how-africa-can-feed-the-world/>

³ Adesina, A. A. (2019). Unlocking Africa's agricultural potential. *Sustaining global food security: The nexus of science and policy*, 446.

⁴ For an example, see Ecofin Agency. (2021, May 28). *Every year, Nigeria loses \$9 billion due to poor food storage*. Retrieved January 07, 2023 from ecofinagency.com: <https://www.ecofinagency.com/public-management/2805-42689-every-year-nigeria-loses-9-billion-due-to-poor-food-storage>

⁵ Africa Growth Initiative . (2019). *Foresight Africa Publication*. Brookings Institution, 98.

I blurt out my first idea, “Credit! About 60% of farmers in Africa are subsistence farmers who need money to scale operations.⁶ *Access to loans* to buy better equipment, fuel technological innovation, and purchase insurance against natural disasters will extend the farmer’s ability to grow crops on an international scale and become an exportation powerhouse.”

“Second, *infrastructure* is paramount. Agricultural goods must be transported cheaply and efficiently. Through public-private partnerships, I can facilitate the construction of roads, refrigerated warehouses, and better shipping facilities; perhaps even one or two ports dedicated to the export of agricultural goods.”

Before he can cut in, I continue.

“That covers production and distribution. But I haven’t discussed demand. *Government concessions* can create and sustain demand at the highest level. If national governments jointly support businesses through tax breaks, reduced tariffs and concessions, it will remove barriers to production and empower more industries that can make better use of your commercial produce. Once these relationships are created, the last step is *judicial protection* to provide trade protections through a robust and responsive justice system under the AfCFTA. This, of course, includes bi-lateral security arrangements to eliminate the theft and violence that lead to loss of productivity.”

By now, the old farmer is nodding. He adds, “I’m sure you know as well as I do that our biggest problem isn’t finding ideas. It is executing them.”

“Absolutely! That is the cornerstone of my campaign.”

He clears his throat and declares, “I had my doubts about voting for you, but not anymore.

My son was right. If we have leaders like you who can execute the right ideas, then the story of intra-Africa agricultural trade can finally change.”

And with that, he calmly descends the steps, leaving me with a smile on my face and a cheering crowd behind me.

⁶ McKinsey & Company. (2019, February 15). *Winning in Africa’s agricultural market*. Retrieved January 07, 2023 from McKinsey.com: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/agriculture/our-insights/winning-in-africas-agricultural-market>