

## Op/Ed: A New Day Dawning in Africa

By Marshall Matz

“It’s happening” according to Jennifer Mangu, the director of an agriculture dealership in Machakos, Kenya. The experts that I met with recently in Africa agree, an agriculture-based “Green Revolution” conceived of by Nobel Prize-winning agronomist Dr. Norman Borlaug is finally taking root in Sub-Saharan Africa.

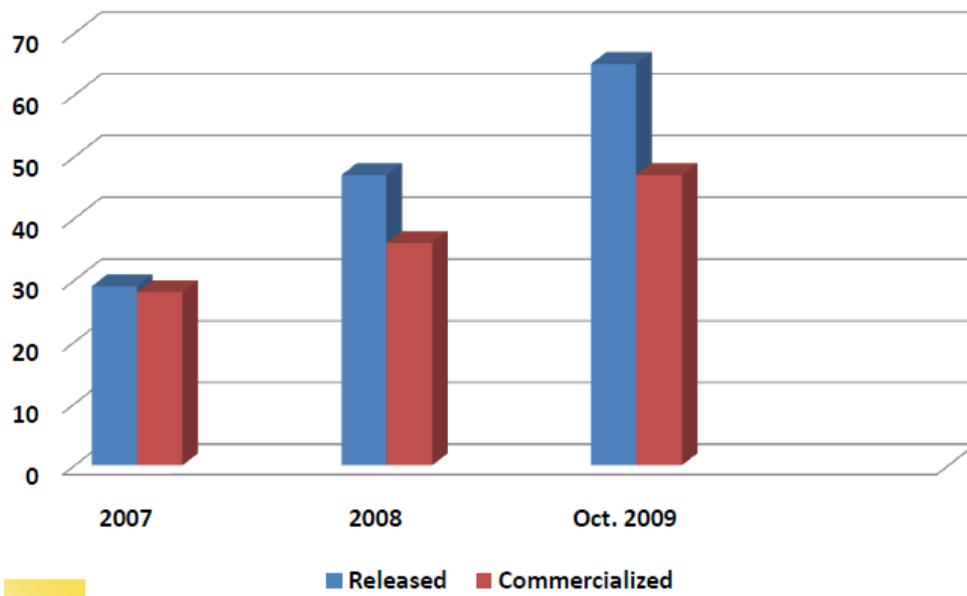
The challenge is clearly daunting. One third of Sub-Saharan Africa, 300 million people, is hungry. Half of Kenya lives on less than one dollar a day. Forty-two percent of the population barely survive on one meal a day, according to the World Food Program. Medical doctors who are the front line in the fight against AIDS are forced to farm if they want to provide their patients with the food needed to go with the AIDS medication. Crop yields are stuck at a fraction of worldwide norms. In the middle of all of this however--- somehow--- hope and optimism can be seen.



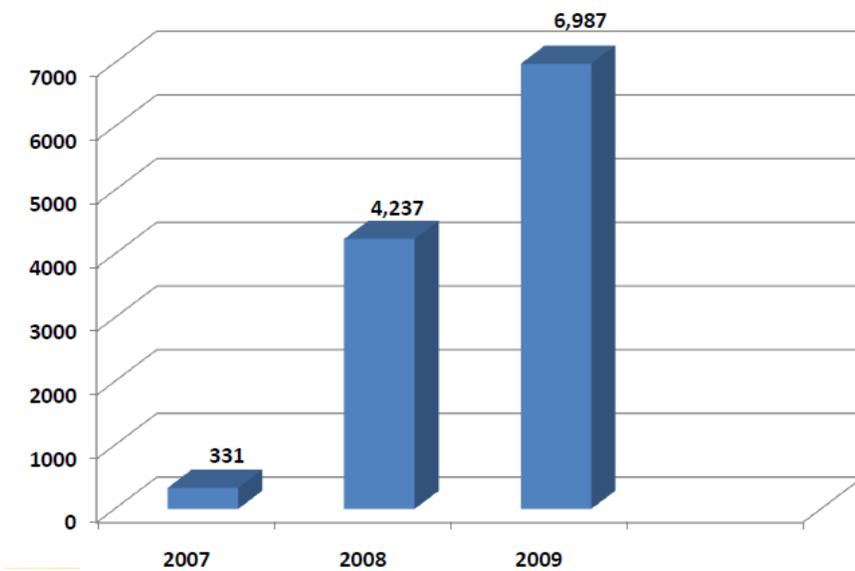
Photographed in her seed store, Jennifer Mangu, the director of an agriculture dealership in Machakos, Kenya says “it’s happening,” when asked about the prospects for a new green revolution taking root in Sub-Saharan Africa.

“Africa has the capacity to feed itself, and beyond,” says Dr. Gebisa Ejeta of Ethiopia, a recipient of this year’s World Food Prize. Increasing the food supply and building a stable food-production system is not only the key to addressing hunger but is an absolute precondition to economic development. In the past two years, a new, coordinated effort has produced 34 new business enterprises producing over 13,000 metric tons of improved crop seeds, trained some 7,000 agriculture dealers in business management, and sponsored 80 new Ph.D.s in agricultural science. (See charts below from AGRA.)

**Number of Varieties Released / Commercialized**



**No. of Agrodealers Trained in Business Management**



**What will it take to fully realize the dream of an African Green Revolution?**

- First and foremost, agriculture education, or capacity building, must be the priority. From the major public and private agricultural institutions around the world to all concerned governments, there must be a focus on agricultural sciences in Africa.

- “Seed development is the key element to eliminating hunger in Africa; it is also critical to long-term economic development. Africa needs seed varieties that are suitable for local growing conditions. Green Revolutions around the world have essentially followed the introduction of better seeds,” according to Dr. Joe DeVries, the Director of the Program for Africa’s Seed Systems (PASS) in Nairobi. Sorghum is by origin a drought tolerant African food crop which has been taken all over the world. In nearly all cases, it is produced from hybrid seed using fertilizer to give yields of 7 or 8 MT per hectare. In Africa, it has remained under-developed, and farmers generally harvest less than 1 MT per hectare.
- There must be a commitment to sound science, including the use of biotechnology. Biotech seeds are improving yields and reducing pesticide use; new seeds will soon require less water.
- Water management, irrigation and infrastructure development is critical. Many counties, like Zambia, have fresh water, but the farmers live from rain to rain because there are no irrigation systems. A simply bicycle-type pump can dramatically increase yields. A small dam can revolutionize a village.
- The United States Agency for International Development (AID) must increase its emphasis on agriculture by increasing the percentage of its budget devoted to agriculture. Extension services, capacity building and seed development should all be a priority.
- Finally, the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa must provide leadership by establishing policies that support agriculture and private investment. *The Daily Nation*, a Nairobi newspaper, made this point in a recent editorial: “Developing counties like Kenya will eternally face food, water and power shortages unless their governments institute long-term and practical interventions.”



AGRA is developing high-yielding sorghum varieties and delivering seed so that African farmers can benefit from its drought tolerance and high yield potential.

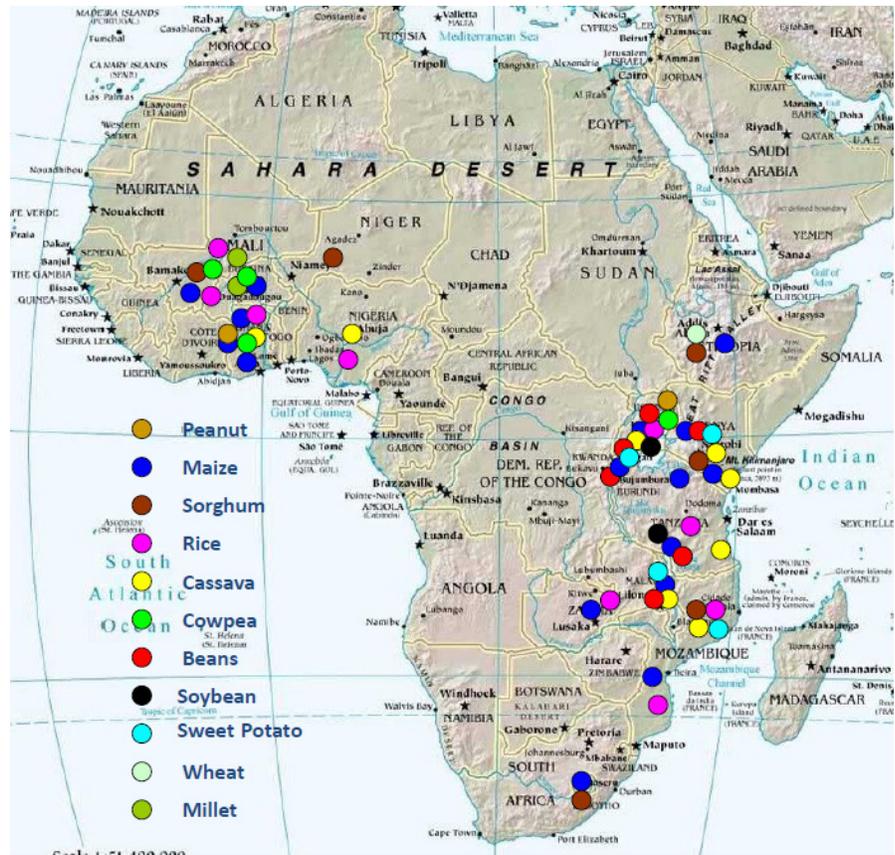
The organization bringing all of this together is the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), chaired by Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations, with backing from the Gates and Rockefeller Foundations. AGRA’s goal, according to its dynamic President, Dr. Namanga Ngong’i, is “to provide an African-led, comprehensive approach to agriculture development for smallholder farmers, mostly women, and thereby lift Africa out of poverty.”

The Obama Administration, fully appreciating the moral imperative of eliminating hunger, as well as the risks of not doing so, has initiated a Global Food Security Initiative. It is in the self-interest of the United States to have a special focus on Africa. Countries that are hungry are less stable.

Sub-Saharan Africa is the last reservoir of agricultural land available in the world; it is also an area that has much in common with America. We share a history of British colonization with many of the countries in the Sub-Sahara and the bond of language. Our food aid and AIDS initiative is making a significant difference to millions of people. The election of President Obama has, of course, only highlighted the connection between the United States and Africa.

Yet, we face competition for the hearts and minds of Africa. China is investing a significant amount in Africa, and they are providing full scholarships to 3,000 Ph.D. candidates. On the highway from Nairobi to the airport there is an arch dedicated to the friendship between China and Kenya. Japan is providing humanitarian assistance and is investing in rice research. Persian Gulf countries are buying up some of the most productive land in Africa. There are 47 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, 25% of all the votes in the UN General Assembly. Supporting them in their effort to complete the Green

Revolution can turn a dependant continent into a trading partner with strong links to the United States. Sub-Saharan Africa is still young. Many countries are only fifty years old. Let's remember, we fought our American Civil War eighty years after our Revolution. There is a new day dawning in Africa. It is in our self interest to help.



### Program for Africa's Seed Systems (PASS) Highlights

Major focus on seed production: the promise of better seed continues to inspire and motivate farmers, governments, private sector, NGO's around Africa.

**•Keys to success:**

- Find good entrepreneurs; back them with good business development services
- Agro-dealers are a big part of the equation.
- Breeding is likewise.
- Farmer awareness must accompany distribution.

**•Grant-making:**

- \$90 m committed thru 138 grants (2009: \$17 m, 45 grants)
- \$43.5 m disbursed

**•Bamako Conference -300+ participants**

- WASA Partnership formed w/ USAID, ECOWAS
- African Seed Company Tool Box published, PASS becoming go-to player
- 92,000 demonstrations, 900 farmer field days

Mr. Matz, formerly Counsel to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, is the Founding Chairman of Friends of the World Food Program in the United States and practices law in Washington, DC.