

Africa not for sissies, especially agriculture

"We sit with an ironic situation where Africa is the continent with 46% of the world's underutilised land, the bulk of the ground water resources and the best climate for agriculture production in the world - yet our farmers are the poorest and the smallest," said Dr. Theo De Jager, Chairman, Agri All Africa, president of the Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU) and President of the Pan African Farmers Organisation (PAFO).



Dr. Theo De Jager

"We lack the infrastructure, expertise, linkages to markets, mechanisation, modernisation, and the commercialisation to create wealth through agriculture. We have everything which money cannot buy and lack everything money can buy."

At the African Sustainable Agriculture Summit 2016, De Jager and other speakers discussed the African agricultural opportunities with people from all over the agricultural value chain and even outside of agriculture.

De Jager says that at this point in time if you want to grow in an industry, agriculture in Africa is the place to be. "It is an exploding industry. There is an estimation that in 30 years from now there will be two billion more people on this planet, yet we are filled to capacity in the world's farming industry. But it is in Africa where there is room for expansion and everybody is looking towards Africa to fill the gap. But we fear that it will be strangers who come to take the opportunities in the continent - not because we are scared of foreigners or foreign investors, but we want to ensure as African farmers that we utilise those opportunities. We want to make sure that Africa maintains the ownership of its own agriculture."

De Jager explains that Africa is not for sissies and if we can get over the fear of Africa, try to understand its soul and embrace its people, one can imagine how we can grow the economy of this continent.



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There is no land without people

"If you want to farm a land, you marry the people – the land is who they are. Even if that land is not actively farmed, there is somebody who views that land as part of his/her identity. And it is a long term relationship and partnership so you must be patient in making deals on how to utilise the land."

The value chain is pulled – not pushed

“The value chain is called a chain because it can only be pulled with the market as it’s only pulling force. So every bit of planning in the agriculture sector must start with the market – what do they want, where do they want it and how.”

Two ingredients to support finance in agriculture is patient, sympathetic capital

“Nowhere in the history of the world have we seen successful farming development without patient sympathetic capital. We need a fund that supports agricultural loans over a longer term than what the market average is, on softer interest rates than what the open market usually dictates – something to fill the gap between what is dictated by the market and what is needed by the farmers,” says De Jager.

“African farmers are hell-bent to slay the dragon of poverty and hunger in our lifetimes – and we firmly believe it is possible through the agriculture sector.”

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