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## Setting a New Agricultural Roadmap—Nourishing the Planet

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**By Danielle Nierenberg**



Agricultural development has come to a crossroads. Nearly a half-century after the Green Revolution—the first systematic, large-scale attempt to reduce poverty and hunger throughout the world—a large share of the human family is still chronically hungry. At the same time, investments in agricultural development by governments, international lenders, and foundations are at historic lows.

The timing couldn't be worse, as a complexity of demographic, economic, and natural forces all conspire to make the challenge of reducing hunger that much more difficult. These include soaring petroleum and food prices as well as climate change and persistent unfair trade agreements. Still, the current crisis offers a window of opportunity for refocusing the world's attention on food, agriculture, and rural areas and for reestablishing food security as a global priority. As more decision makers and funders shift resources back toward agricultural development in coming years, they have a gaping need for guidance.

"Across Nigeria, and everywhere I've traveled in Africa, I am seeing examples of Africa-led innovations working in sustainable ways to alleviate hunger and poverty. With that said, oftentimes donors and foundations, have a difficult time connecting with these types of organizations," said Danielle Nierenberg, a senior researcher with the Worldwatch Institute, an environmental think-tank based in Washington DC. Nierenberg is conducting research in more than 25 sub-Saharan African countries (the tour will culminate in the spring in Lagos), as part of the Nourishing the Planet [[www.NourishingthePlanet.org](http://www.NourishingthePlanet.org)], looking for agricultural innovations that can be easily scaled up or replicated.

In recent decades, a new generation of innovative approaches to hunger alleviation has emerged from farmers groups, private voluntary organizations, universities, and agribusiness companies. Many of these approaches offer useful models for larger-scale efforts.

"One of the goals of the project is to create a roadmap for the funding and donor community to ensure

that the increasing amount of agricultural funding in Africa goes to projects that really work. In addition, a local innovation working in Abuja might be something that could also work in Lusaka, Zambia. We hope to connect projects together, and help improve knowledge sharing."

There is growing evidence that combinations of approaches (such as conventional practices paired with agroecological approaches or input-driven methods that also protect natural resources) are often more effective in terms of productivity, income generation, and resilience.

"We are also attempting to assess the state of agricultural innovations from cropping methods to irrigation technology to agricultural policy with an emphasis on sustainability, diversity, and ecosystem health, as well as productivity," said Nierenberg

The project aims to both inform global efforts to eradicate hunger and raise the profile of these efforts.

"The news media in the West tends to be very negative in their coverage about Africa. Sometimes it seems that all you hear are stories about conflict, HIV/AIDS, famine, and disease. While these problems need to be covered, the real news tends to be missed -- stories of hope and success providing a path for communities to lift themselves out of poverty."

The project will culminate in the release of State of the World 2011, a comprehensive report that will focus on agriculture and will be accompanied by derivative briefing documents, summaries, videos, and podcasts. This volume will be a roadmap for foundations and international donors interested in supporting the most effective agricultural development interventions in various agroecological and socioeconomic contexts. The project's findings will be disseminated to a wide range of influential agricultural stakeholders, including government ministries, agricultural policymakers, farmer and community networks, and the increasingly influential non-governmental environmental and development communities.

"As I plan our visit to Nigeria, I am hoping that readers might help direct me to important projects to visit and to introduce us to local innovators," said Nierenberg.

Danielle Nierenberg is writing everyday from Africa at [www.NourishingthePlanet.org](http://www.NourishingthePlanet.org) and can be contacted at [dnierenberg@worldwatch.org](mailto:dnierenberg@worldwatch.org). You can also follow her on twitter @WorldWatchAg.