

Why cultivating agritourism in Africa is important

Food security, its opportunities and challenges were the main premise surrounding the recent Agritourism Africa Congress which recently took place in Bolzano, Italy.



Eddie Costhuizen via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

With reference to Dr. Brylyne Chitsunge, Africa's first Pan African Ambassador for Food Security thoughts that "the farmer driven by self-interest has a better chance of prosecuting the war against hunger than the state with all the resources and knowledge at its disposal. We simply need to find ways of identifying African champions who through demonstration on the ground can influence and inspire others to join the food supply train"; Agritourism Africa founder and managing director Jacqui Taylor cited **challenges constraining the growth of Agritourism both in the South African and African context:**

“ Access to farmers in terms of distances and infrastructural considerations are among key challenges impeding growth of the critical agritourism sector ”

Taylor added that when analysing factors influencing current and future agritourism initiatives, one needs to consider the proximity of farms to transport infrastructure as this tends to affect how long it will take a visitor to drive to an Agritourism destination when planning their travel itinerary.

"Language barriers, issues around safety and security, the impact of climate change, lack of signage and mobile device connectivity and available currency, rank equally, among challenges faced by existing and prospective stakeholders in the Agritourism sector."

Taylor added that all too often roads are not tarred in rural areas and that many Agritourism destinations are not mapped on the likes of Google Maps as there is a lack of mapping of Agritourism facilities.

Here, Taylor lists 10 best practices for agritourism farmers to work toward:

- It must generate employment in rural communities;

- It must generate additional income for those who work on farms;
- It must improve the living and working conditions for farm workers;
- It must prevent the migration of people to major cities;
- It must develop new skills in entrepreneurship and hospitality;
- It must help spread awareness of food security to all;
- It must enhance the community pride and rejuvenate regional culture;
- It must reduce the impact of seasonality on rural communities;
- It must support farmers and the Agricultural industry;
- Farmers must be provided with advice on diversification and income generation for the benefit of all.

Further to Chitsunge's thoughts during the 2011 Global Science Conference on Climate-Smart Agriculture, which took place in the Netherlands; she asked what the role of the African farmer is, if any, in shaping the African agenda for climate change and in establishing an agriculture work program that is informed by indigenous knowledge systems and science?

"The African farmer is marginalised not only in the domestic setting where government policies and programs are intellectually conceived and executed without the active participation of the farmer. The influence of foreign capital and ideas in shaping policies and the inability of the farmer to take ownership of the programs have to be part of our agenda for action. I have developed my farm with no state or external capital injection and yet the nature of agricultural investments require leverage but the bureaucracy associated with supply of financial products to the farmer is such that many are excluded and, therefore, it is difficult to energise the sector. We require new and creative financial instruments."

How can Africa achieve food sovereignty?

"The existing system is dominated by large-scale high input production with multiple retail subsistence farmers who have no input or say in how food is produced and distributed in many of the African states that are supplied by enterprise agriculture. We need to come up with clear food sovereignty approaches that seek to empower the farmer to step into the complex enterprise agriculture model that requires not just the skills and finance but the kind of attitude that is not prevalent in Africa.

"We need to emphasise the importance of reinforcing human and social dimensions of development in the process that assures food sovereignty and security. We can invest in new models of enterprise agriculture that seeks to leverage on the fact that sustainable agriculture will have to absorb the millions of Africans who are trapped in the rural economy as well as the multitudes of unemployed people in the urban and rural areas. Low input systems can be utilised for Africa. We need to

facilitate support structures that enhance the learning processes of farmers in study groups and networks."

Chitsunge sees **the path to future success in the agricultural and by extension agritourism sector**, as follows:

- Focus on timelines and deliverables
- Establish linkages with financial service providers
- Focus on building institutional and human capacity
- Establish linkages with markets
- Establish linkages with government departments and other development organisations
- Promote multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary programmes
- Invest in supply chain based intervention

In her words: "The future belongs to builders. We are ready to partner if only we can find partners that understand the challenges that we face. Considerable public and private finances will be needed to rapidly implement CSA programs yet the preparedness of African governments and role players to respond to the challenge worries me."

What does Africa have to offer as a destination?

- Unique foods;
- Rich biodiversity, pristine locations, and natural beauty;
- Farm stays and experiences which are combined with a rich cultural heritage;
- The continent is home to a variety of tourism offerings;
- Africa's indigenous crops offer unique food experiences;
- Educational experiences in crop and livestock farming, for example, game breeding;
- Experiential/cultural/heritage tourism;
- Environmental preservation which helps ensure that our natural heritage remains untampered;
- Rich diversity in terms of the continent's cultural and natural heritage;
- One of the world's fastest growing tourism region's, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO);
- Activities and attractions in agricultural regions are uniquely African;
- Opportunities abound for 'out the box' partnerships with rural communities, where poverty is the primary influencer. Scientists and international companies are already investing in this regard;
- The best way to empower smallholder farmers is to incorporate the farmers into an agritourism route, thereby opening doors to a potential tourism market which can help keep their farming sustainable. To a certain extent, agritourism allows

these farmers to diversity, mitigating the effects of climate change and other risk factors;

- Working together creates an opportunity to share information and strengthen communities so as to facilitate a sustainable future which allows for additional income sources for farmers.

According to Taylor there are six ways to transform African agriculture, namely:

- Provide the means to make small farmers more productive (yields in Africa are one third of those in the west). This can be achieved through seeds, fertilizer, and more efficient, holistic solutions-based farming practices, to name three examples;
- Get more land into cultivation, however, identify priority crops;
- Build value chains, for example, effective storage of harvested produce such that it does not go off before it reaches the marketplace;
- Subsistence agriculture requires government intervention, as farming in this manner involves high levels of unpredictability, for example drought;
- Infrastructural development: roads, railways, etcetera;
- Information-sharing through technology: disease outbreak communicated via cellphone, for example.

Taylor concludes: "Africa is one of the fastest growing tourism destinations, with significant opportunities in, particularly agritourism. The availability of Agritourism data is scarce and an opportunity exists in this regard for cross-country collaborations".

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