

# From Theory to Practice: Exploring Sustainable Solutions to Africa's Developmental Challenges



F. Kwame Yeboah, Assistant Professor  
Thomas S. Jayne, University Foundation Professor  
Michigan State University

Keynote speech at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference of African Graduate Student Association  
Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI  
March 25, 2017

# Theories vs. Practice

- Theories are
  - a set of principles or accepted facts on which practices of an activity are based.
  - based on knowledge/assumptions of the theorist about the phenomenon.
  - revised when new information become available.
  - most successful when underlying assumptions are consistent with reality
- Development theories may not work if they are disconnected from Africa's realities
- Disconnection may come from
  - Theorist's limited understanding of Africa's context
  - Lack of feedback from recipients or provision of the wrong feedback for theory refinement.

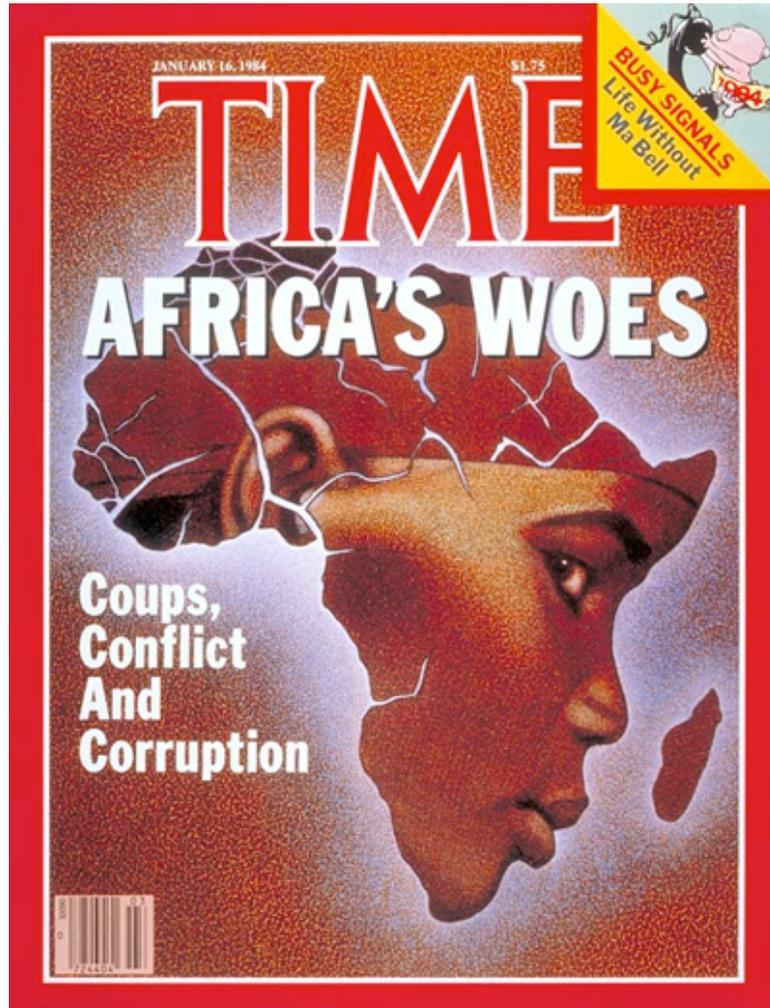
# Key message

- Sustainable solutions to African development challenges must recognize the changing economic landscape of Africa.
- Emerging mega-trends shaping Africa's development needs to be accounted for in our search for sustainable solutions
- Sustainable solutions needs to be Africa-led, people-centered and inclusive, build on Africa's strength, and environmentally friendly
- African scholars have a role to
  - Translate theories into Africa's development context
  - Provide feedback to strengthen the theory-practice nexus
  - Develop new models reflective of Africa's development context

# Africa's Changing Economic Landscape

# 1. Africa's Changing Economic Landscape

1984



1992



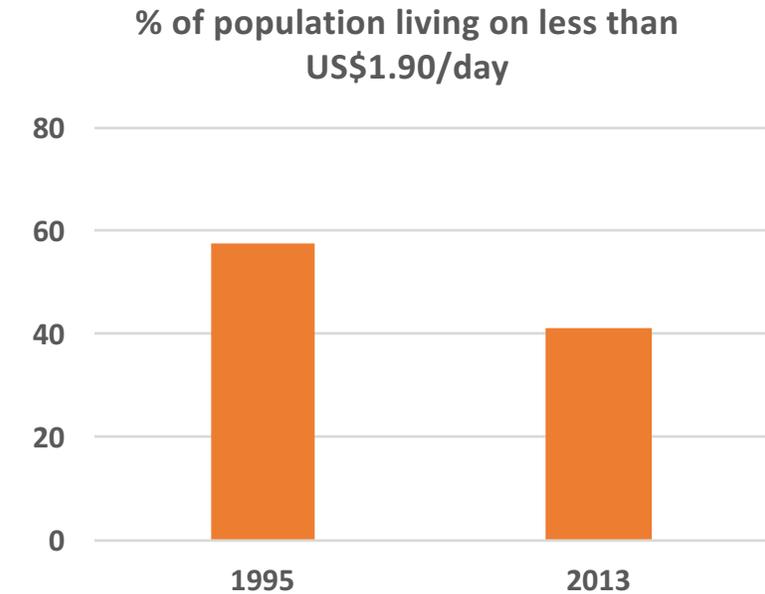
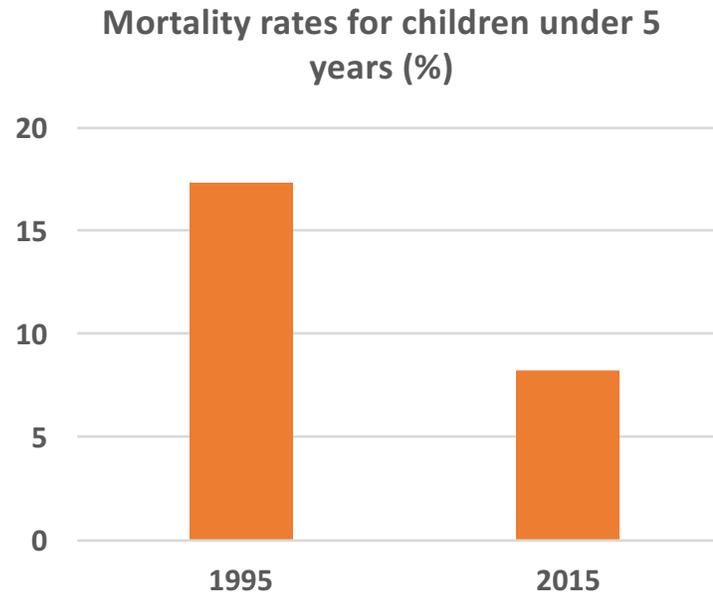
# 1. Africa's Changing Economic Landscape

2011



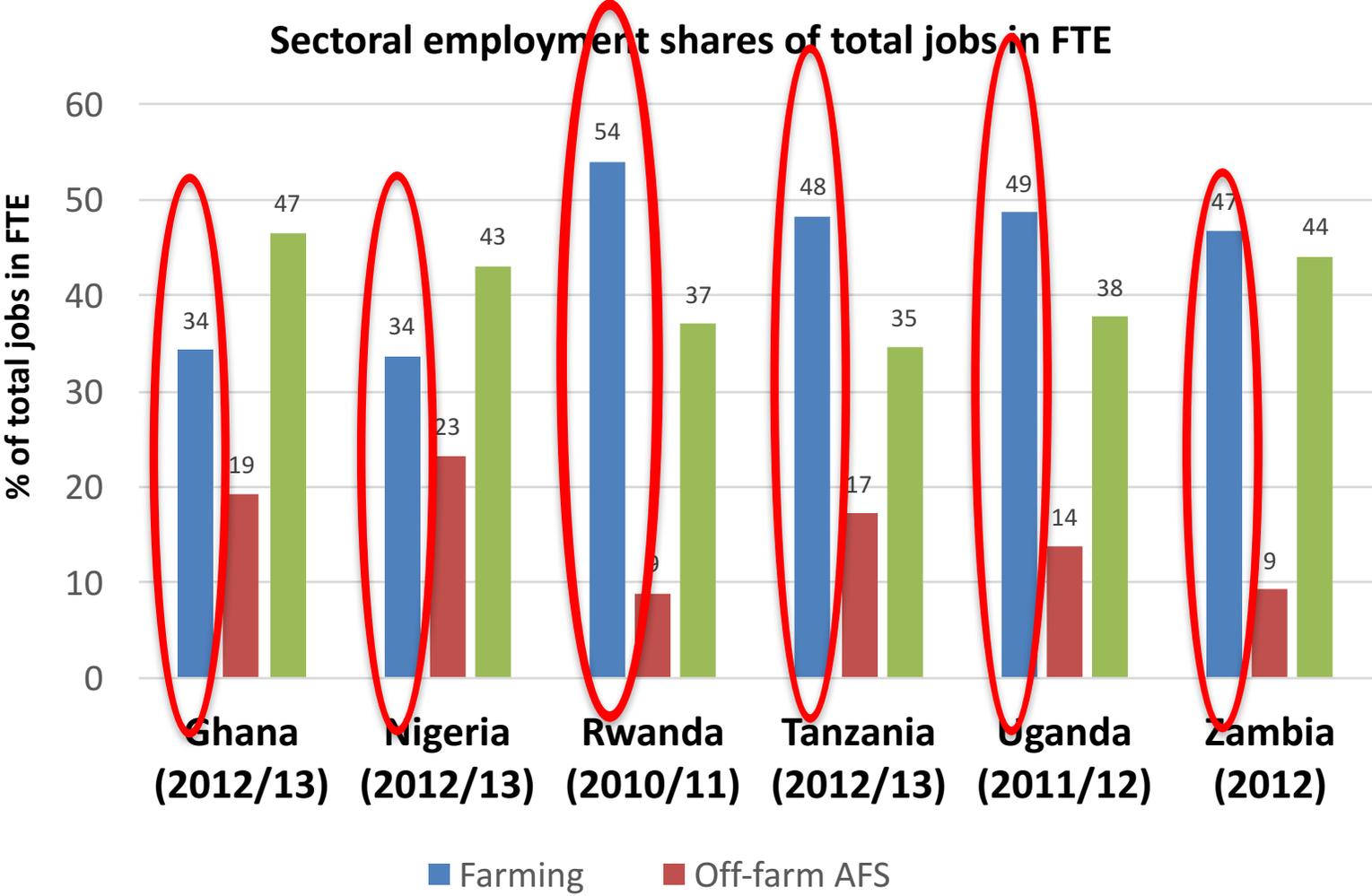
# 1. Africa's Changing Economic Landscape

- Significant improvement in monetary and non-monetary measure of poverty in SSA



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators

# Rapid percentage growth in non-farm employment but farming remains largest single employer



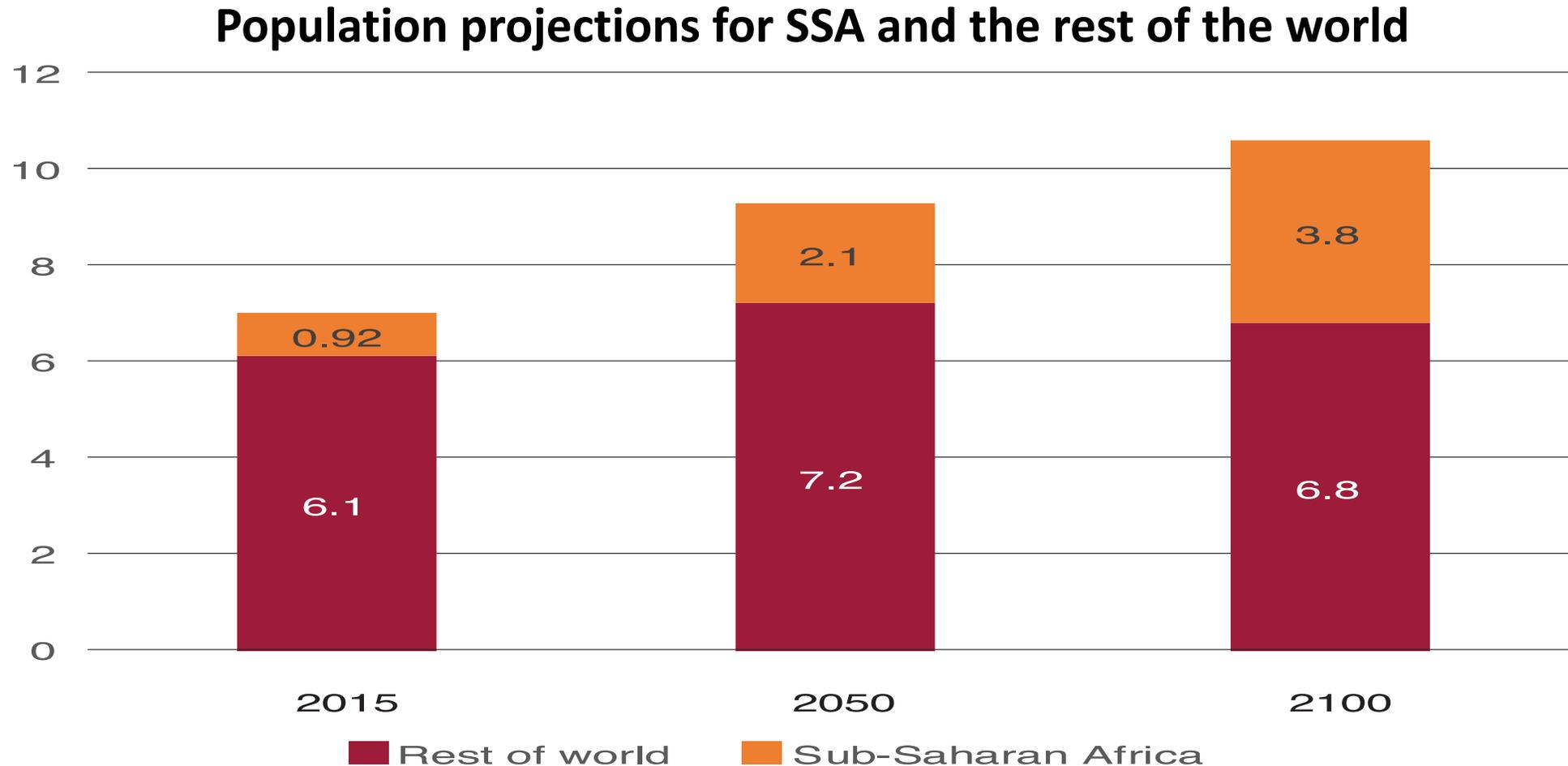
# Caveats

- Economic growth unevenly distributed across countries
- Significant challenges remain
  - Increases in absolute number of poor from 280m to 330m between 1995 and 2013
  - SSA lags behind other regions at all education levels and rising concerns about quality
  - 1 in 12 children dies before their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday

Changes demand critical review of the applicability of existing theories Africa's present realities.

(II) Emerging mega-trends shaping Africa's development needs to be accounted for in our search for sustainable solutions

# a. Rapid Population Growth and Youth Bulge



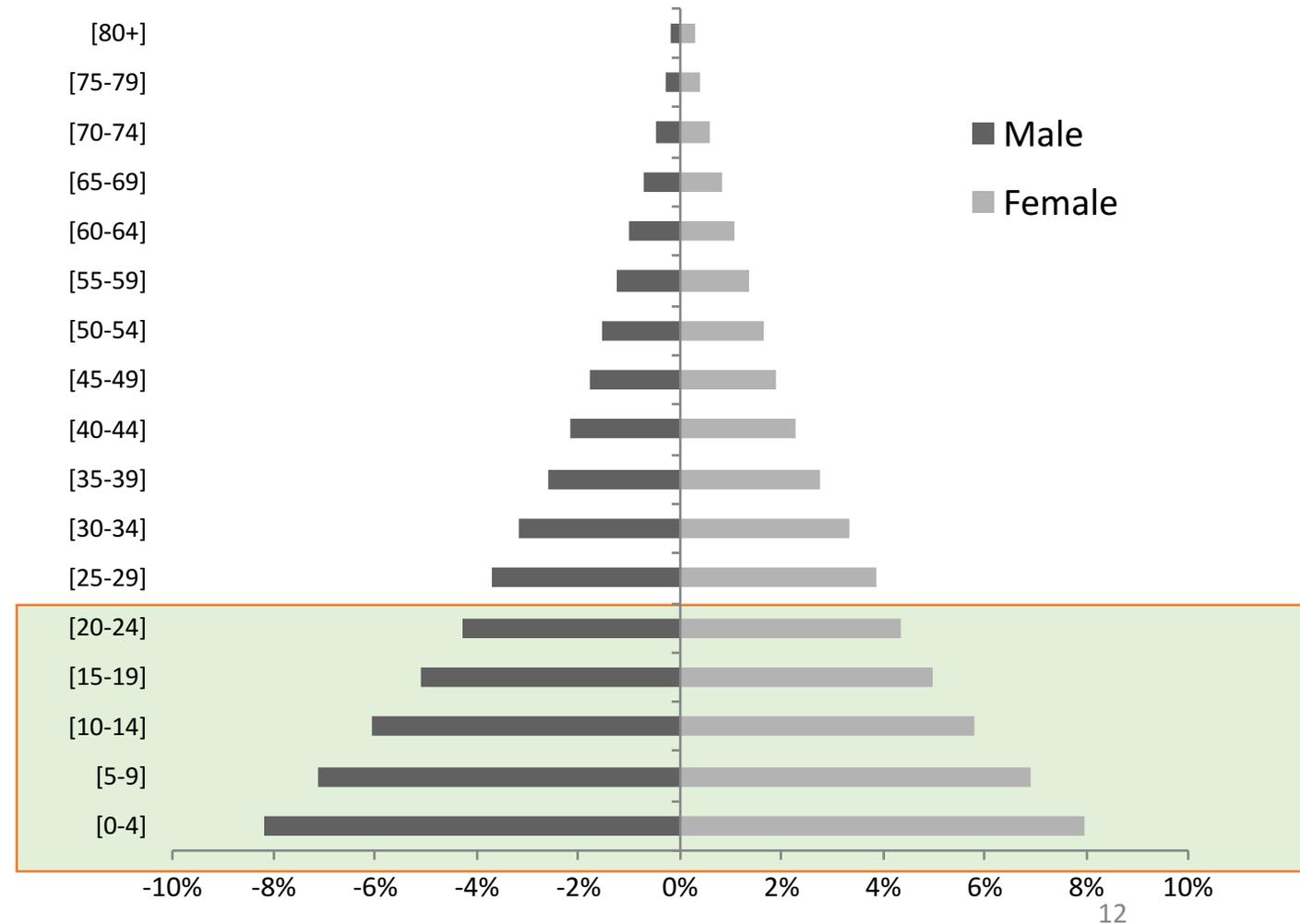
Source: *United Nations (2016)*

# Looming Employment Challenge

11 million people to enter labor market each year

Will Africa's youthful labor force yield a demographic "dividend" or "time bomb"?

62% of people <25 years old

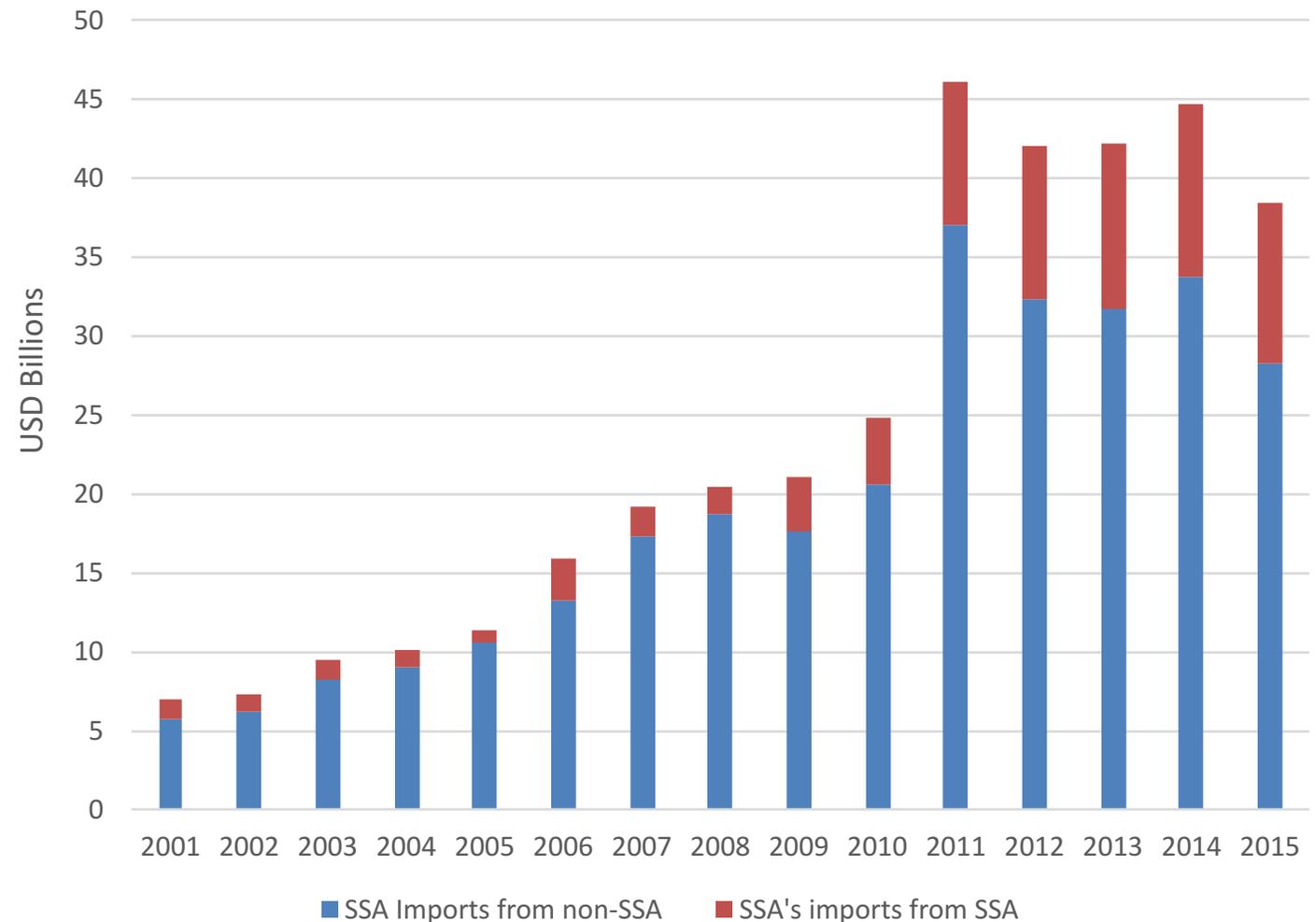


Source: UN Pop Council, 2013

# b. Rising Food Demand and Reliance on Food Imports

- Growing demand for food
  - Population growth and urbanization
  - Rising incomes and diet transformation (Tschirley et al., 2015; Hollinger and Staatz, 2015)
- Rising reliance on food import
  - SSA's food import bill ~ \$40 billion (AfDB, 2015)
- Great potential for multiplier effects and job creation if rising food consumption requirements can be satisfied by local production rather than imports.

SSA **Total Food Imports** from 7 to 40 billion USD (2001-2015)  
(intra SSA trade from 1 to 10 billion USD)

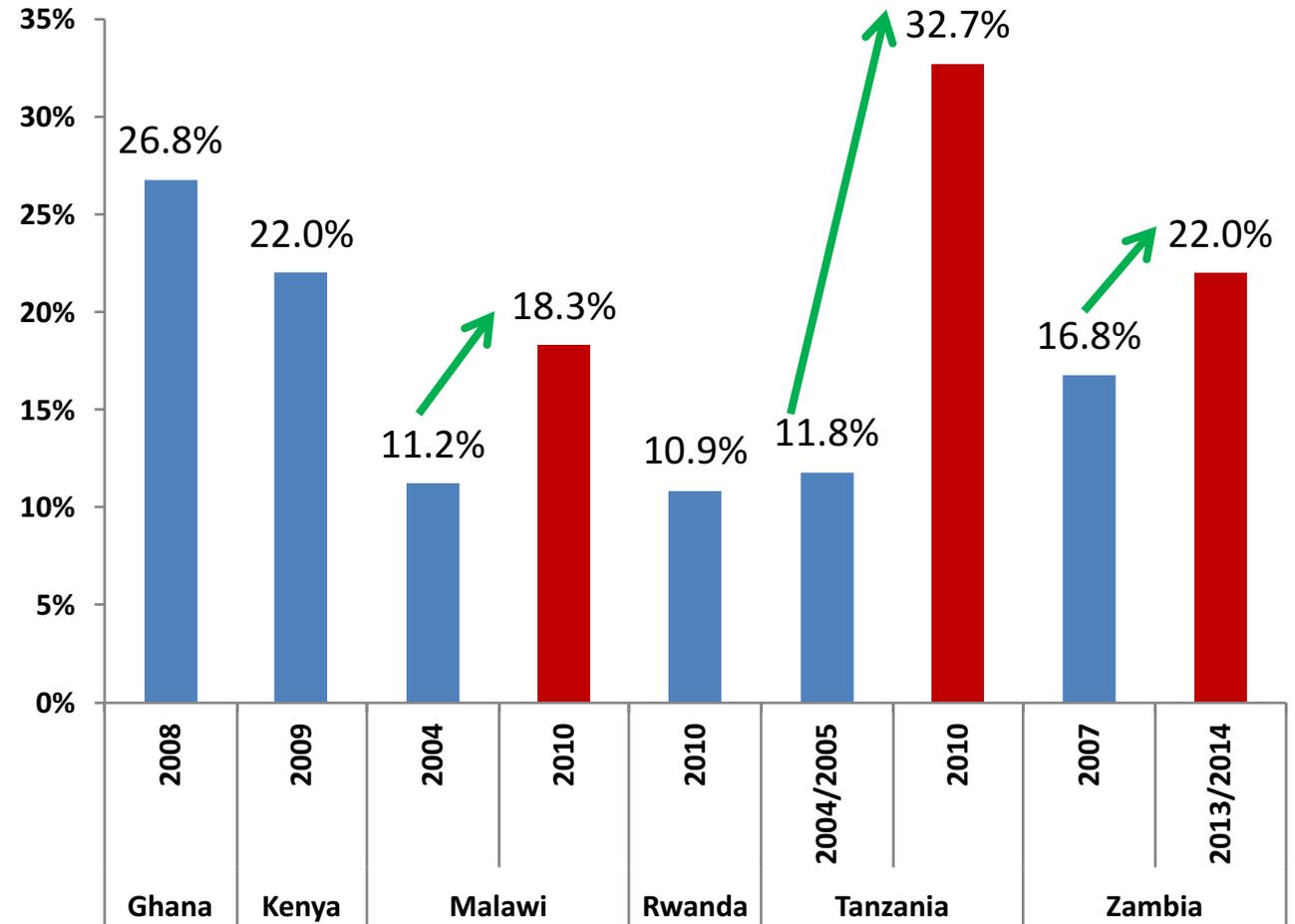


Will Africa be able to feed itself? How?

# c. Land Scarcity and Changing Farm Structure

- Rising interest in Africa's arable land
  - Meteoric rise of medium-scale farms (5-20 ha)
  - Urban-based HHs own between 10-30% of national agricultural landholdings (DHS data)
- Rising land prices and increasing land scarcity
- Will land scarcity foreclose smallholder agriculture?

% of National Landholdings held by Urban Households



Source: Demographic and Health Surveys, various years between 2004-2014.

# d. Climate Change

- SSA projected to suffer greater effects from climate change
  - Reductions in annual rainfall and higher temperature in arid regions (IPCC, 2007)
- Impact on agriculture uncertain
  - Greater variability in agricultural production
  - Possible decline in crop productivity (Schlenker and Lobell, 2010)
- How will Africa's agricultural systems adapt to CC?



# Upshot

- Megatrends may be are not inevitable but subject to public action challenging are by no means inevitable.
- Success of future development efforts depends on how well the solutions respond to mega-trends

### 3. Sustainable solutions to Africa's development effort needs to be

- Africa-led
- people-centered and inclusive,
- build on Africa's strength, and
- environmentally friendly

## a. Africa-led and Africans-driven

- Solution sustainable require Africans to take greater ownership in the development of the solutions
- Shift in development assistance from direct service provision to capacity building of African institutions to generate solutions
- Emerging trend of greater local expertise, and insistence on Africa-led development (e.g. CAADP and Agenda 2063)
  - Africa's economic resurgent linked to improvement in governance and macro-economic management primarily from a new generation of relatively skilled African leaders and policymakers

## b. People-Centered and Inclusive

- Solutions must invest in people and offer equal opportunity for all to share in the gains
  - Inequality breeds chaos in the long term
- Investment in high pay-off sectors
  - Quality education to equip citizenry of subject matter knowledge, socio-behavioral and entrepreneurial skills needed to succeed in today's world, and become citizens who will act responsibly and demand accountability from their leaders.
  - Investment in broad-based agricultural growth with greater income and employment multipliers
  - Investment in informal sector

## c. Build on Africa's strengths and resources

- Development is about making an incremental improvement in your way of life and not an abandonment of one lifestyle for another
  - Use technology to making cooking of African foods less strenuous
  - Transform traditional games and market them for olympics
- Take stock of available resources (natural resources, large labor force, and rich cultural heritage) and finding ways to use them find ways to use them to improve lives, build capacity, and accumulate capital for further investment
  - Investing to harness the energy of the sun
- Africa will forever “play catch up” if it fails to build on its strength

## d. Environmentally Friendly

- Solutions need to be environmentally friendly so we do not deplete our resource-base and life-sustaining services they provide
- Current trends of over-exploitation and depletion of resources
  - Loss of 53 million hectares of forest between 1990 and 2000
  - Oil spills and gas flares in Nigeria
- Environmental degradation and loss of ecosystem services
  - Lake Chad supporting 30m people now 1/5 of it size
  - Surface and ground water pollution from abandoned mine sites
- Demands a concerted effort at all levels to balance economic development with environmental protection to forestall depletion of life-sustaining services

# 4. Role of African Scholars

- African scholars have
  - In-depth understanding of the theories and assumptions underlying them
  - Relatively superior socio-cultural What is role of the graduate student in bridging the theory-practice divide
- Translate existing development theories into Africa's development context
- Provide critical feedback for theory refinement
- Develop new and innovative Africa-specific development theories
  - A new vision of development from an African lens

# Recap

- Sustainable solutions to African development challenges must recognize the changing economic landscape of Africa.
- Emerging mega-trends shaping Africa's development needs to be accounted for in our search for sustainable solutions
- Sustainable solutions needs to be Africa-led, people-centered and inclusive, build on Africa's strength, and environmentally friendly
- African scholars have a role to
  - Translate theories into Africa's development context
  - Provide feedback to strengthen the theory-practice nexus
  - Develop new models reflective of Africa's development context

# 1. Africa's Changing Economic Landscape

- Impressive economic growth since 2000
  - Six of 10 fastest growing economies in Africa (Kearney, 2014)
  - Several countries with GDP growth above 5% (IMF, 2013)
- Growth prospects remain favorable despite changes in external environment
  - Commodity price slump
  - Slow down in world's economy (China)
  - Rise of US interest rates

