Introduction: New Directions for African Agriculture (Abstract)

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The future of African agriculture is once again on the development agenda. But why is African agriculture (largely) stagnating and what can be done about it? This article introduces themes from the 23 contributions to this IDS Bulletin. The article questions past solutions based on either generic "technical fixes", "market and institutional fixes" or "policy fixes" and suggests new directions for African agriculture. Alternatives to the liberalisation approaches of the past are explored, and the dilemmas of post-reform agrarian politics are identified. Numerous examples show how social, cultural and political relations shape agricultural production, patterns of investment, the uptake of technologies and the functioning of agricultural markets. Taking these dynamics seriously is a key requirement if grand-sounding policies are to have an impact on the ground in diverse settings in Africa. The need for a more grounded, context-specific assessment of constraints and future scenarios is highlighted in conclusion.

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