

“Africa producing more Fertilizer” (17)

This week The World and the [Center for Public Integrity](#) are looking at the impact of fertilizers use around the globe. We reported yesterday that there is growing concern about the nitrogen pollution that comes from fertilizers and its impact on climate change but the agriculture sector in Africa is focused on the opposite problem, getting more fertilizer to farmers to boost crop yields. The World's Rupa Shenoy reports on new efforts and challenges in doing that. For decades, fertilizer was too expensive for African farmers. It had to be imported, and transportation into the continent was expensive. Now, though, Africa is turning a corner toward producing fertilizer locally.

International companies and the African Development Bank are building or helping to build fertilizer plants in Ethiopia, the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#) and Nigeria that are already boosting farmers' yields.

And this summer in Ghana, vice president [Mahamudu Bawumia](#) stood proudly before the [largest](#) fertilizer plant ever built in the country.

“So this factory can meet all of Ghana's demand for fertilizer,”

The [ultramodern](#) facility, in the coastal town of Tema is the first in a national plan to build fertilizer plants in every district of the country.

“We therefore don't really have any reason to be furthermore importing more and more fertilizer and wasting our foreign exchange”

The wide acceptance of fertilizer in Africa has been a long time coming. Henk Breman was Africa director for [IFDC, the International Fertilizer Development Center](#).

“You had efforts to get fertilizer adopted in the '60s, the '70s, but it didn't become a success because the cost-benefit was not favorable at all” and Breman says there was resistance to fertilizer from some in Africa who — remembering the colonialism that dominated the continent — didn't want to be dependent on foreign corporations or they preferred more natural farming but he says those methods don't produce enough.

“That will not feed the African population at present”

There is growing concern among scientists internationally about the expanding role that nitrogen pollution from fertilizer is playing in climate change but the agricultural sector in Africa is focused on a different problem. Fertilizer production here has increased but distribution challenges remain, including increasing reports of fertilizer being stolen and smuggled.

The concerns of the farmers come after several reports of smuggled subsidized fertilizers from Ghana... This is a video shared by the peasant farmers association of Ghana. Farmers in it say they have not received their share of fertilizer, which is typically distributed by the government.

“For how long can we continue to eat”; “Everybody is aware of that, it is not easy for everybody”; “If you cannot get subsidized fertilizer, it frustrates you”.

Okyeame Ampadu is a farmer in the interior Volta Region of Ghana. 80 year old Okyeame Ampadu says there has not been a governmental agriculture agent here to distribute fertilizer in two years.

Ampadu raises citrus fruit and coconuts, and now he’s trying his hand with avocados because he hasn’t had much luck with any crops. In a dark shed, he keeps one last burlap bag of fertilizer, leaning up against a wall. The bag’s still mostly full; Ampadu says he’s saving it for when he really needs it although he knows one bag won’t make a big difference.

So, public-private partnerships have built fertilizer plants across Africa — like the one that just opened in Ghana but [Marie Claire Kalihangabo](#) says now they need to do more to make sure fertilizer actually reaches farmers.

Marie Claire Kalihangabo finances fertilizer projects for the African Development Bank Group. She spoke last year in an African fertilizer conference.

“The private sector has to play a key role in ensuring that quality fertilizer gets to the farmers at the right time, in the right moment”.

She says everyone realizes they need to work together to solve this last, stubborn problem.