Written by Kevin Wafula
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Babacar Ndiaye, former President of the African Development Bank and founder of the African Business Roundtable (ABR), said Monday that Africa's agricultural potential cannot induce people into a self-righteous optimism, but should instead incite a responsible and pro-active approach from the sector's various players because parallel to these important opportunities there exist inherent risks that can no longer be ignored.

Speaking ahead of the Africa's Agribusiness Forum set for Senegal, Ndiaye said without agricultural development African countries will not be able to alleviate poverty or increase income sufficiently.

"It is estimated that economic growth based on the agricultural sector is capable to reduce at least twice as much poverty as a growth based on the non-agricultural sectors," he said noting that there are many risks linked to agriculture, from climate change to the international financial crisis, but this in fact should be an impetus to act now and not wait till tomorrow.

"We need to focus on research and development and sustainable technological innovation. Without this and without real financial structural change which allows rural communities to access funds at reasonable interest rates, the sector cannot evolve." "The numbers are staggering - the proportion of arable lands still to be cultivated is around 60%. It is estimated that by 2025 around 330 million youth, of which two-thirds are from rural areas, will intergrate the job market," he says and calls on all actors to get to grips with the potential but also the enormity of the task ahead.