

**ASSURING FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN AFRICA BY 2020:
Prioritizing Action, Strengthening Actors, and Facilitating Partnerships**
April 1–3, 2004, Kampala, Uganda

SUMMARY NOTE

**FIGHTING HIV/AIDS THROUGH ATTITUDINAL CHANGES:
EXPERIENCES FROM UGANDA**

Keynote Speaker: *H.E. Mrs. Janet Museveni*, First Lady of the Republic of Uganda

Date: April 3, 2004

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me begin by welcoming all of you to Uganda, and hope that you are enjoying your short stay in Kampala.

I was delighted when I received an invitation to participate in this very important conference — important for Uganda and for the whole continent. I wish to thank Dr. von Braun for giving me this precious twenty minutes to share my experience and my thoughts with this body of very distinguished experts in the area of food security in our context here in Africa.

My own thoughts on the subject of food security are, really, from a layperson’s view point, and they are garnered from my life as an African woman and also as a person who has worked with grass root women in the rural areas of Uganda now for more than a decade.

But let me first address myself to the specific topic I was requested to talk about, and that is: “Fighting HIV/AIDS Through Attitudinal Changes”, and I will share our experience here in Uganda.

The world has been in the struggle against HIV/AIDS now for twenty years. We are told that over 60 million people worldwide are infected with the disease, and millions of them have died. Sub-Saharan Africa has been the worst affected region, with a current total of about 30 million infected people. The over-whelming majority of those infected are in the category of the young and able-bodied who should be producing food, providing labor for industries, manning public institutions such as the civil service, banks, schools and hospitals, and bringing up new generations of Africans.

We have no time, here, to describe the impact of HIV/AIDS on all the nations of Africa. In any case, the numerous demographic, social and economic effects of the epidemic are well documented and well known.

Demographically, here in Uganda, AIDS has erased decades of progress made in population issues. For example, the country’s life expectancy fell from 56 years in 1968 to 42 years in 1999.

The impact on the majority of households has been severe. AIDS has caused families to move from relative wealth to absolute poverty. In a developing country such as Uganda, whose economic backbone is agriculture, the effect of AIDS on rural household livelihoods is disastrous. Additional care-related expenses, the reduced ability of caregivers to work, and mounting medical and funeral expenses collectively push the affected households deeper into poverty. Falling food production, loss of family labor, and related factors translate into reduced household food security.

Of course, all the direct and indirect effects of HIV/AIDS translate into the macro-economic impact. By impacting on the labor force, and on households and enterprises, HIV/AIDS has acted as a significant brake on the economic growth and development of Uganda.

Within the larger context, there are sub-groups that require special message and social communication. In some cultures, for example, widows are usually inherited by the male next of kin; a dangerous practice that spreads HIV and wipes out entire families. This is a hard practice to break because it involves the sensitive issues of property and children. In other cultures, circumcision must be carried out in seasonal ceremonial rituals that involve the use of sharp instruments communally utilized; another sure way of transmitting HIV to entire groups of adolescent male members of society.

Attitudes also needed to be changed — and still need to change — regarding the way people treat the infected among them. Initial reactions to victims of AIDS were ruled by misinformation and fear, leading to stigmatization and sometimes condemnation of the infected, and even the affected, by the rest of society.

Messages have addressed the general public and specific messages have been developed for the more vulnerable or high-risk groups within the population. As a result of this intensive and persistent information campaign, general awareness of HIV/AIDS in Uganda is now rated at 99.7%.

But does awareness, or acquisition of mental knowledge, actually translate into behavior change? We believe that, in our case, it has.

Our strategy has been to mount an aggressive education, information and communication campaign, using not only the electronic and print media such as radio, television, billboards and print materials; but also devising other methods which have proved to be more effective in a basically rural and semi-literate population. Starting with the Head of State, whose leadership against this enemy of the people has been resolute, passionate, charismatic and consistent, and who has made it clear that fighting against AIDS is everyone's patriotic duty, the campaign has been characterized by its ability to transform and become "up close and personal" in the different contexts. Each player, at every level, has taken up the information and shaped it into a medium that is appropriate to the cultural context.

While information is guided and monitored, the central coordinating body has allowed different players at all levels to be innovative and imaginative as they bring the reality of the situation to their people.

An example of the success of this strategy is the behavior change that has taken place among the youth.

As a result of special interventions that have been channeled to young people in Uganda, youth between the ages of 14 to 25 years is the group that has contributed most to the country's declining infection trends. Independent studies and surveys by the Ministry of Health have established that the greatest reduction in the number of new infections has been registered in this age group because of behavior change brought by effective social communication.

Studies have shown that adolescents in Uganda are now delaying sexual activity until they are older. Given that about 60% of Uganda's population is less than 20 years old, this change alone prevents thousands of new infections every year. With messages of abstinence, cultures are slowly moving away from early sexual activity.

Traditionally, women are expected to be faithful to their partners in the context of marriage, but men are encouraged to have multiple partners as a sign of wealth and strength. By many accounts, this behavior in men is changing today; this is partly attributed to the message of faithfulness to one sexual partner.

Grass root communication has also brought about empowerment of women, enabling them to be in a position to make informed choices.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, what the example of Uganda has taught us is that it is possible to fight HIV/AIDS through behavior change; basically by presenting information to the people in the way they understand and, as much as possible, face to face with them, at their level. Of course, it takes serious commitment at the highest political level in order to be effective. It also takes involvement

and participation by everybody, in an environment conducive to involvement by civil society. I believe we have now in Uganda as many as 700 civil society organizations dealing with HIV/AIDS, many of them community-based organizations.

Therefore, we can say that the success of Uganda in the struggle against AIDS really belongs to the people. The Head of State sounded the alarm, and everybody rose to the occasion.

As I conclude, I want to submit that what we have managed to do with regard to HIV/AIDS, we can also do in our struggle against poverty and lack of food security. When people are empowered with information and knowledge about how to think and innovate and find solutions from within, they can succeed at whatever goal they set for themselves.

In my work with orphans in the last decade and a half, I have interacted with many women in the poverty-stricken rural areas of Uganda. Many of them head households and care for many children. Through training and a little economic empowerment, these women are being transformed. Through a micro-finance intervention, the women have acquired a culture of saving, and have even been introduced to formal banking operations.

If our governments in Africa could train such women — and they are everywhere in Africa — and make them the extension agents in their own villages, facilitate them with bicycles and gum boots and other necessities, I want to assure you that every farmer in the country would be reached and served faithfully. Train the women, and then men, to help themselves in the areas of food production, food preservation, storage and good nutrition, just as we have trained and entrusted them with the care of HIV victims and orphans.

Let this be the century that ushers in the empowerment of the peoples of Africa, so that they can determine their own destiny and stop being the victims. Africa is the richest continent on Planet Earth. The populations of Africa, empowered with knowledge, are the ones who will find the key to unlock this wealth.

I thank you for listening to me.

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SUMMARY NOTE

**CHANGING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS:
THE ROLE OF AFRICA’S CULTURAL LEADERS**

Keynote Speaker: *Wole Soyinka*, Professor Emeritus, Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria; Director of Literary Arts, International Institute of Modern Letters, University of Nevada; and Nobel Prize Laureate in Literature

Title: “We Make Our World”

Date: April 3, 2004

Let me begin by establishing the credentials of a literary mind for intervening on the subject of that basic, but sometimes mysterious world of food. I assume that those who invite me here did so because they were aware of my qualifications on the subject. My audience may not be so well informed, and even the organizers themselves may be unaware of some secret testimonials that I can boast of, right from childhood. Also, it is conveniently the case that the credential I shall now present enables me to advance from the socio-cultural and economic lessons of a remarkable member of the family of tubers, a food crop known as the yam, to proposals for a re-integration of food consciousness, not only within the mythological base of Culture, but in science and technology. In numerous West African cultures — the Igbo, the Yoruba, the Igbira, and Idoma among others — the yam aspires to a quasi-mystical status and is celebrated as such. However, just to bring us down to earth, or more accurately in this case, simply to ensure that we have our feet firmly planted in earth, let us first deal with the gastronomic versatility of this crop.

As a matter of fact, the yam is not that unique in this respect — that it, in its versatility. Like most tubers, including the sweet potato, it can be eaten boiled, roasted, fried, chipped, reduced to powder, and transformed into a glutinous paste, etc. etc. It is, however, exceptional in the sense that it is the one tuber, to our knowledge, that is also pounded. I do not say mashed, like that bland pretender the potato, but pounded in a dug-out wooden mortar whose origin is definitely lost in the mists of antiquity. Of the various methods of consuming the yam however, none appears to have attained both the gastronomic and ceremonial status as the pounded form. In Yoruba society, this form is known as *iyán*.

The foregoing, which is common knowledge, is not however the credential that I wish to present as conferring on me the authority to speak on this subject. Be it known then that, sometime around the age of four or five, I fought my best friend over a bowl of this very food item — *iyán*, the pounded yam. It was an episode, I believe, that I subconsciously left out in my childhood memoirs — *AKE*. Osiki, the best friend in question, was much older and somewhat bigger than I, but not so big as to justify the size of his morsels which, at that miniaturized age of a four-year old, seemed at least the size of a grape fruit. The speed at which these morsels also vanished down his throat — at least three times the speed of light — struck a negative chord in my rudimentary sense of justice. I objected, we parted company, but it did

not take very long for friendship to be resumed. From then on, however, my mother ensured that we ate from separate bowls.

At some stage or the other, I do not recall exactly how, I did lose my passion for *iyán*, which I find rather strange, in retrospect, since the pounded yam is a food to whose glory much praise is lavished in the poetry of the Yoruba, a tradition that I acknowledged through my own translation, and in an essay on Yoruba attitude to food titled: SALUTATION TO THE GUT. Another source for this lyrical enthusiasm can be found in the play THE IMPRISONMENT OF OBATALA, by Obotunde Ijimere, an exegetical play on the travails and the moral compass of that god of purity, Obatala. Rarely do we find an item of food that attains such rapturous liturgical association with the gods, and one to which is credited even an ethical symbolism — purity of mind. Yet another deity is intimately associated with the pounded yam, this being Sango, the god of lightning. Indeed, Shango's ritualistic seat is the wooden mortar turned upside down.

I may have lost that early ardour for *iyán*, but that food item unwittingly imparted some sociological lessons that do not appear to have faded with time. Osiki and I attended the same primary school. His school uniform was threadbare, and his books appeared to be in the same condition. My parents absorbed him into our household, with other stray waifs, and only gradually did I realize how much Osiki depended on those occasional meals in our home for his very sustenance.

It was a sobering, social datum that sank deeply into my subconscious. Mine was by no means a family that rolled in opulence, but a schoolteacher's income, reinforced by small-time trading of a wife could sustain the household and also provide for the familiar 'extended family,' which included members who had no blood connection of any sort. I believe however that today, compared to millions of Osiki's age in the world we now inhabit, Osiki would swear that his was also a privileged childhood, even without his watching contemporary footage of children from the hunger zones of the continent, their stomachs bloated in malnourishments, victims of perennial drought and of war displacements year after year, but also victims of the improvident attitude of African leadership. Today, Osiki would stare, unbelieving, at the images of homesteads where the only evidence of abundance would be swarms of flies in competition for the least moisture on the eyes, lips, and nostrils of human beings sunk in lassitude. He would shudder at the attenuation of limbs of soon-to-be mortal statistics that continue to rebuke a continent of such diverse, and abundant material resources. He would recoil at the portent of once thriving farming villages, whose productive routine has been drastically attenuated by HIV/AIDS, the surviving inhabitants being wide-eyed orphaned children, looking lost, uncertain of the source of their next meal.

Food is allied to culture, in the most organic, interactive way, and one may be brought to the aid of, in enhancement of, or celebration of the other. We observe this, not only in the already mentioned lyricism it invokes in some societies, but in the sheer weight of multiple creative arts that are dedicated to the planting season and harvesting, elaborate performance gatherings that also serve the purpose of cohering the community. Most of us, however, would prefer such collaboration to avoid the external dependency mode, such as once occurred in one of the critical periods of food shortage, when a helpless visage of the continent came to be stamped, some years ago, on global consciousness. I readily admit that I am not a fan of pop music, but at least I had kept my dislike for that frequent travesty of the musical art away from the actual creators — that is, until I heard the name of a certain Bob Geldoff!

The cause of my dislike was quite perverse. Bob Geldoff was guilty of performing a duty that I considered mine, ours, the duty of that extended family that was the ethos of the upbringing, I am certain, of most of us here. Bob Geldoff was the name that became identified — need I remind you? — as the main initiator of a music concert whose centerpiece was the famous 'We Are the World.' My dislike of Bob Geldoff, in other words, had nothing to do with music, but with pride, racial pride. Who was this man, this foreigner who took it on himself to fill in a space of disregard, of indifference to the plight of a people by their own leaders? There was, without question, also a sense of frustration, even envy. Only two years, before that world music concert, I was editor of the African journal

TRANSITION, later to be renamed *CH'INDABA*. We warned of the crisis of drought and famine in parts of Ethiopia, based on first-hand reports. We attempted to dramatize the beginnings of another round of famine-induced migrations of Ethiopian villages, while the Emperor Haile Selassie wined and dined foreign dignitaries in the splendor of his palace. To drive the point home, we published a facsimile of the menu of a typical banquet that took place in the imperial palace, side by side with images of starving families in makeshift camps.

Two or three years later, under the so-called people's revolutionary regime of Mariam Mengistu, we were obliged to return to the same scenario of leadership planlessness, only it had worsened beyond imagining. Once again, millions of humanity were on the move, in flight from certain starvation. The lessons of the previous years, in Tigre and other provinces, had not been absorbed. African humanity, it seems, has always been expendable to most leaders. Human skeletons, both of adults and children, denoted trails that were reminiscent of the routes of the trans-Saharan slave routes that many, incidentally, like to pretend never did exist. The continent was absorbing the bleak lesson that, in the critical fulfillment of the primary mission of feeding its people, there was hardly any difference between neglect of the feudal kind and the myopia of revolutionary messianism.

What was singularly aggravating about the new famine in Ethiopia was that the increase in human suffering had been caused by an ill-digested notion of the production strategies of collectivization. The ruling Dergue, stuffed full of textbook notions for the transformation of the means of production through centralism, commenced a policy of deliberate displacements, uprooted and dispersed entire peoples to artificial villages that took no note of their traditions. Of course, those traditions had proved inadequate, but the inhuman revolutionary zeal of The Dergue only made matters worse. The death toll mounted. The conscience of the world could stand it no longer. The pen may be mightier than the sword, but music proved more efficacious than both. Revolutionary slogans gave way for the lyrics of the pop musician, reminding the affluent that indifference to material deficiency in one part of the world merely underlined the moral deficiency of the rest. I felt this rebuke personally and took a violent dislike to this man of conscience called Bob Geldoff.

Many here will recall Chinua Achebe's *ARROW OF GOD*, a work that offers itself so readily today as parable of social responsibilities and the consequences of their betrayal. The conduct of a central character in that novel, Ezeulu, the priest and spiritual guardian of the deity, Ulu, in an Igbo community, is a cautionary tale for the contemporary leadership of our continent. Of Ezeulu's priestly duties, none was more crucial to the survival of the community than his role as the sign reader and transmitting medium of the planting season for the new yam. If the harvest failed, and that meant, if it was not planted at the right moment — for instance, before a seasonal change burnt the yam seedlings in the earth — starvation was guaranteed for the ensuing year. The manner in which this authorization was provided goes to the very heart of an integrated community existence on many levels, and indeed goes to the heart of what I have described as the quasi-mystical status of the yam, underlining the cyclic nature of earth's renewal.

In Chinua Achebe's narrative, that signal is withheld by Ezeulu. The entire village waits on their priest, but he has a bone to pick with his people. He is smarting from a humiliation meted out to him by the colonial authority in the person of a Captain Winterbottom and, additionally, from a political slight he has received from his community. And so, Ezeulu refuses to 'see' the new moon, whose appearance communicates to him the moment that he must eat the final, symbolic tuber from the harvest of the previous year. He remains deaf to the pleas of the elders, and turns a purely ritualistic procedure into a literal one. The welfare of the community is imperiled, but Ezeulu is unmoved. The priest, rather than make his world with his spiritual will and authority, was unmaking it, content to watch community unravel at the seams.

Let me insert here the contemporary parallel that the conduct of Ezeulu evokes: it is the spiteful policies of some of our politicians who, because a constituency or the other cast their votes for the opposition, or have shown opposition to their political agenda, proceed to impoverish that region, withholding public facilities — health, education, roads, water supply including rudimentary boreholes,

farming equipment, fertilizers, etc. etc. Their language is: *you withheld your votes, now go and eat your ballot.*

Chinua Achebe, when he embarked on that work, may have been unaware that he was setting down a contemporary morality tale that is so applicable to the plight of the continent, and the betrayal of natural expectations and confidence that a people have a right to demand of their leaders. For one thing, when he wrote that novel, the notion of famine on the scale of the last two decades was unheard of on the continent, not even in the Sahelian regions, or indeed in former colonies such as the Congo where traditional food production systems had been subverted by colonial policies that forced their subjects to substitute cash crops for food crops. I refer here to that period when thriving societies were turned into mere production appendages of King Leopold's commercial empire, a period of enforced quota systems, failure to attain which was punished by the slicing of ears, slitting of nostrils, and amputation of limbs.

In the colonial period narrated in that work, the oil book had not yet arrived to displace food as the primary preoccupation of peoples, resulting in once self-sustaining communities, now amalgamated into independent nations, finding themselves compelled to import even basic foods of which they were once, in some cases, exporters of surplus.

When *Arrow of God* was written, neither the author nor anyone else had ever heard of a devastating affliction called HIV/AIDS.

Chinua Achebe's community of the deity, Ulu, is the paradigm of our continent — a continent awaiting the signal that would inaugurate a comprehensive 'planting' that will sustain its people, that is, the annunciation of a creative, sustainable strategy that is attuned to the realities of uneven industrialization, new national entities, calling up a remedial response to the breakup of the organic productive systems of pre-colonial society, its demographic shifts and the consequences of our brutal civil wars. Could it be that IFPRI aspires to be the resurrected spirit of Ezeulu? But with the admonition that a community cannot wait on the voice of one individual alone but must act collectively and methodically! IFPRI — well, not as euphonious a name as Ezeulu and hardly what one would deem a wholly indigenous initiative but, as we say in my part of the world, if the man sees the poisonous snake, but it takes a woman to kill it, all that matters to the homestead is that the snake is dead. Let Hunger writhe, and die!

When ARROW OF GOD was written, in the early sixties, the oil palm industry of Southern Nigeria was still flourishing. The landscape of the Northern parts was adorned with groundnut pyramids, attaining such an iconographic status that they were used on the national postage stamps. It was not mere nostalgia, but the necessity for our self-indictment, a bitter stock-taking that wrung the following lines out of me, lines from the poem *Elegy for a Nation*, in the collection, *SAMARKAND and Other Markets I have Known*:

We grew filament eyes
As heads of millet, as flakes of cotton responsive
To brittle breezes, wraith-like in the haze of Harmattan
Green of the cornfields of Oyo, ochre of groundnut pyramids
Of Kano, indigo in the ancient dye-pots of Abeokuta
We were the cattle nomads, silent threads through
Forestries and cities, coastland and savannah
Wafting Maiduguri to the sea, ocean mists to sand dunes

Alas for lost idyll ...

... Ghosts are sole inheritors.
Silos fake rotundity — these are kwashi-akor blights
Upon the landscape, depleted at source. Even
The harvest seeds were long devoured. Empty hands
Scrape the millennial soil at planting.

‘Even the harvest seeds were long devoured.’ Yes, both figuratively out of greed and by incontinent leadership, but sometimes also from necessity, as happened in Igboland during the Civil War, a condition that must be recognized as the continuing fate of many African zones of civil war today, where anti-personnel mines reduce the yield potential of land even further, and finish off what HIV/AIDS has begun. In *SAMARKAND*, I was indeed evoking the nation that we once knew, but Nigeria was only one of many such travesties. At least, there had been war in Nigeria, with the attendant distortion of productive priorities. The ascendancy of a war industry that resulted in the abandonment of multiple economic devices, but agriculture most especially, was a phenomenon that simply transferred itself to the oil industry once oil was discovered. Not even successive attempts at mobilization under slogans such as *OPERATION FEED YOURSELF*, *OPERATION FEED THE NATION*, *OPERATION THIS AND WHATEVER ELSE* have succeeded in resuscitation of the farm as primary source for a people’s food security. Often, the main target of these endeavors was youth, how to turn the sights of youth away from the glitzy attractions of urban living and challenge them with the vital contributions that can be extracted from that basic resources — land!

Nigeria is only an illustration. No one requires to be told that that this anomaly is spread all over the continent, and even in nations, like Ghana, that did not undergo the production distortions of civil war or an oil boom. I was sojourning in that nation when the markets dried up, the staple food *kenke*, made from fermented corn, shrank until it virtually vanished into its leaf wrap, while the supermarkets display cases had nothing in them but shelled coconuts. That was a paradox. There was no shortage of food in the land but there was starvation. Food crops simply rotted away on the farms for lack of transportation, thanks to the incontinent conduct, indifference and neglect by the ruling military.

We cannot exactly return to that integrated phase of communal life where the very process of cultivation — like other forms of life preserving labor — was related to the overall cultural being of the community, but we can, come reasonably close. We can re-invent the gods, exploiting their timeless functionalism. I propose this dimension, not merely because I am a compulsive mythologist, but because I would like to see, when the new sign-reader and interactive medium — Ezeulu-IFPRI — next sounds the gong for planting, that it is not merely ‘experts’ who are summoned, but a fair representation of the small-scale, even subsistence farmers who have remained faithful to their vocation, are also closer to earth than most of us here and are sometimes unconscious researchers into the science of food. It helps, of course, if we can link them, through familiar cultural symbols, to the world of modernity and constant technological innovations.

The two relevant deities here are, firstly — none other than that confessed favorite of mine, Ogun, in all his myriad transformations, the god of metallurgy and the patron deity of agriculture, a role that he shares with that of another deity — Orisa-oko. Orisa-oko is the very spirit of leaves, the farm and the moist elements, while Ogun is the technological impulse that transforms Nature — from the most rudimentary hoe and machete, to the complex combine harvester, the churning mills and transportation conveyances.

There are several models on whose scaffolding such basic, life-affirming strategies, the antithesis of hunger and starvation, can be mounted. I see no reason why a day cannot be dedicated annually to the culture of food renewal, its science and technology, utilizing the seasonal festivals of Orisa-oko and Ogun, or their equivalents in other African cultures. Regional or continent-wide, it does not matter, its goal being to marry the cultural wealth and celebration of relevant mythologies to a forward focus on modernization through recall and innovation. Let it never be forgotten that, in the liturgies of worship, traditional songs and rituals are lodged much knowledge concerning not merely the science of crops for food but for the pharmacology of healing. From the spirit of that past, new songs will emerge attuned to the present, abandoning the charity propelled ‘*We are the world*,’ that song of dependency, for the self-affirmation of ‘*We make our world*.’

I envision, in short, a working Festival that recovers the ethos of farming integration with life sustaining processes, encounters that anticipate, not simply respond to devastating vagaries of Nature. Technical expositions, contests, with awards, that will stimulate inventiveness in food preservation

techniques, pest control, experimentation in the cultivation of new varieties, disease resisting strains, high yield varieties, promotion of organic fertilizers that do away with controversial chemicals — in short, an entire revolution in our approach to the food sciences that were developed for other climates, other soils, and other industrial cultures, giving primacy of place to our own authoritative voices — not simply the politicians' — over the merits or demerits of genetically altered crops. The past has much to teach, even if the present rides on the engines of the future.

The trajectory of surplus and scarcity would be plotted in scientific caucuses that would be part of such a Fiesta, with also of course a gallery of negativities as correctives, those hideous scars on the African conscience that watched millions perish from neglect. Culture and Cultivation are deeply entrenched in traditional society. The younger generation — that is, the future, is primary target, those who are more at home with Nintendo Games than with a creative engagement with the soil that has nourished their ancestors from pre-history, and sustains their very existence. If we can appeal to a youthful sense of imagination and excitement at the potential of this neglected field of resources, I believe that half the battle against hunger would be no battle at all, but a celebration of Nature in transformation, stimulated by our home evolved ingenuities.

Yes, culture and the arts can prove handmaidens of cultivation. We have a choice however — either to create our own cultural incentives that motivate productivity and lead to self-reliance, or await the handouts from the charity of the world. We must remember, however, that there is a condiment that must be swallowed with the food of charity, a chastening ingredient that is known as — Pride. The choice is therefore no choice at all. We owe it to the future that those same fly-infested mouths of want, that presently occupy the gallery of a failed past, are filled with a self-empowerment that will launch a new chant from the Sahel to the Cape: ***We Make our World!***

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**ASSURRING FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN AFRICA:
PERSPECTIVE OF THE AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK**

Keynote Speaker: *Theodore Nkodo*, Vice President of Operations, North, East, and South, African Development Bank, Tunisia

Date: April 3, 2004

Issues and Constraints in African Agriculture and Food Security

Food security, broadly defined, is access by all people at all times to enough food for active and healthy lives and involves not only the availability of food but also the means to acquire the food (in other words adequate income). We recognize that overall the food security problem is complex and multidimensional encompassing policy, institutional, and production features.

Food insecurity has been engendered by the traditional constraints of weather (rainfed agriculture), high post-harvest losses, and poor access to markets due to poor rural and marketing infrastructure; and weak rural financial intermediation and inadequate working capital for smallholder agriculture.

High producer taxes, weak access to foreign markets due to high tariff and quota restrictions, all contribute to poor supply response, unstable and low household incomes. These factors all contribute to making agriculture a non-profitable venture in most African countries.

Furthermore, the pursuit of adverse domestic policies such as high interest rates fueled by high inflation coupled with unreasonable producer taxes tend to shift the tide (terms of trade) against agriculture, exacerbating the low profitability problem of the sector.

Combined with certain exogenous shocks like the HIV pandemic, socio-political unrest, internal and cross-border conflicts leading to massive displacements of the rural folk, have led to a serious erosion of Africa's competitiveness in the agriculture sector on the domestic as well as the global markets. As we are also beginning to find out, since the September 11 events of 2001, extreme poverty, if not checked, can lead Africa's poor to despair and predispose them to terrorist networks.

Poor agricultural growth engendered by low rural labor productivity and low profitability tends to fuel rural-urban migration and adds to the socio-political tensions that continue to destabilize the urban centers of Africa.

What Should We Be Doing to Help Overcome the Above Challenges?

The African Development Bank firmly believes that a market-oriented and profitable agriculture remains the cornerstone to effective poverty reduction in a sustainable manner. With this in mind, our vision for African agriculture is to assume a leading catalytic role, within the next decade, in supporting the technological, institutional and policy changes that will trigger a lasting transformation of the rural economies of African countries, by empowering their rural populations to improve their productivity and real incomes in an equitable and environmentally sustainable manner.

Given that the vast majority of the poor in Africa make their livelihoods in the rural sector, we complement our assistance to agriculture and rural development with investments in the social sectors such as education and health. During the past decade when ODA flows to the sector declined, agriculture continued to dominate our investment lending to Africa, averaging roughly 20 percent of Bank Group lending via our concessional resources window.

We Believe We Must Each Play Our Part

Our strategies and interventions in addressing the food insecurity problem must continue to be multi-dimensional, and our programs multi-sectoral, aiming simultaneously at the policy, institutional, infrastructural and production factors. In the coming years, we will need to work more closely together to build synergy in our development efforts, because in an increasingly globalized world market, rural incomes will continue to depend more on the extent to which domestic and

international markets are integrated and complement each other. However, this international partnership will not yield lasting results if stakeholders and development partners do not play their respective roles as expected of them.

Following are the respective actions that need to be taken first, by the African countries themselves, then the donor community at large (including the MDBs), and finally by the developed countries.

At the domestic level, the African countries need to focus on the policy changes and institutional arrangements that can turn the “tide” (terms of trade) in favor of agriculture. This means that price controls and price distortions need to be minimized; government imposed taxes on agricultural produce must be reduced to competitive levels that can make agriculture attractive to both domestic and international private capital.

African countries also need to place more emphasis on post-harvest technology, marketing and rural infrastructure to engender strong linkages with agro-industry in order to add value to farm produce and enhance access to local and international markets. African countries need to adopt innovative land tenure policies that can strike an appropriate balance between smallholder and commercial agriculture and also promote increased access of women to agricultural land.

For the most vulnerable groups of society as well as for emergency situations, African Governments also need to put in place mechanisms through which they can effectively and timely manage emergency food purchase funds or physical food stocks for distribution to needy populations, with accurate targeting of the poorest groups to ensure minimum nutritional standards.

The developed economies also have a critical role to play. They cannot advocate for removal of distortions on Africa’s domestic front to free up their markets, while at the same time they spend billions of dollars to protect their markets from outside competition. The bulk of the global distortions in agriculture derive mainly from protectionist policies of the developed countries in denying fair access of Africa’s produce to their markets.

Various forms of trade barriers (tariff, quota and phytosanitary restrictions) constrain access of African produce to developed country markets. These barriers have to be removed to give African farmers a more equal access to the markets of the developed countries. The initial results from the AGOA initiative are quite encouraging and confirm that given a fair chance, African produce can compete on the world market.

The African Development Bank. Among the MDBs, and as the key development finance institution in Africa, we invest the most in agriculture and rural development, with regards to the share of concessional resources we allocate to the sector.

The Bank Group considers smallholder farmers as the dominant private sector group in the rural economy. We back our interventions in agriculture with complimentary investments in rural infrastructure such as roads, including feeder roads, market centers and storage facilities, rural water supply, and rural electrification.

The Bank will continue to support long-term investments in Africa countries to help create labor-intensive, nonfarm rural employment opportunities. We also intend to deepen our assistance to governments to build their capacity in establishing and maintaining early warning systems for food crops and more broad-based agricultural market information systems for effective decisionmaking.

The Bank adopts participatory approaches, both in the design and implementation of its projects and programs, to ensure that its interventions are sustained in the long run. And as part of this process, the Bank continues to support the decentralization of decisionmaking processes to enable rural communities have a real say in matters that affect their livelihoods. This approach has stimulated rural communities to set up their own development initiatives.

The Bank Group believes that, its future efforts should put more emphasis on three important areas: namely managing water for agriculture; building adequate institutional capacity; and scaling up the financial resources for agriculture.

Water management is one of the most important strategic entry points for achieving food security goal in Africa. We already know, from recent research results, of many low-cost innovative technologies and intervention packages that can make a difference.

On building adequate Institutional capacity, our efforts should not be tailored only to government institutions, but should address the needs of the local community organizations including farmers’ organizations as well as the private sector.

With respect to scaling up financing to agriculture, we feel that opportunities in the areas of microfinance and debt relief-related funds should be fully exploited.

We recognize that we have now more environmental and resource problems, more health crisis, more government and civil conflicts, which all pose serious risks on food security. These constraints or problems are not however, beyond the resource capacity and power of the international community at large. The call is therefore for a continued and revitalized joint fight against the challenges of food and nutrition insecurity, which need more focused, well coordinated, rightly directed, consistent, and adequately financed programs.

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**ASSURING FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN AFRICA BY 2020:
Prioritizing Action, Strengthening Actors, and Facilitating Partnerships**
April 1–3, 2004, Kampala, Uganda

SUMMARY NOTE

Parallel Session: **Strengthening Actors and Facilitating Partnerships: Nongovernmental Organizations, Farmers Organizations, and Media Forum**

Co-Chair: *Ayo Abifarin*, Director, Food Security Program, Africa Region, World Vision, Ghana

Title: Opening Statement: NGO/Farmers/Media Forum

Date: April 3, 2004

Food and Nutrition Security

Food security concept was first advanced in 1974 at the World Food Conference in Rome in response to the number of people affected by hunger in the early 1970s.¹ In 1986 the World Bank defined food security as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life.”² In 1992, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) defined food security as “when all people at all times have both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life.”³ As we might have heard various definitions the past two days, food nutrition is within the concept of food. In WVI, Africa Region we recognize four food security components, which we use to program FS interventions. The components are: food availability, food use, food access and asset creation. Nutrition is addressed under food use component. Although nutrition deals in general with the quality and quantity of the food consumed, it emphasizes more on the balance among carbohydrates, proteins, minerals and vitamins intake. In this forum I hope that we will come out with ways the three stakeholders can promote the achievement of food and nutrition security by 2020 through working together.

Present Position

Presently we are not meaningfully integrated in our approach to contribute towards the goal of achieving food and nutrition security by 2020. Although most NGOs work with farmers most of the time, often not at the project designing stage. NGOs often react to the donors’ wish and bring the farmers onboard after the proposals have been granted. The relationship between the media and NGOs is even worse. Most of the time the media are excluded in the design and even in the execution of food and nutrition projects. In some cases at the end of the projects NGOs may invite one or two media personnel to cover the closing ceremonies. They are usually not involved in mid-term or end of project evaluations. Granted, there are pockets of acceptable level of collaborations between NGOs and the media, often, the opposite is the case. This leads to the media seeing nothing good in NGOs’ work and the NGOs complaining of negative coverage of their efforts. On the part of the media, unless there is a disaster in a given community they would wait to be invited before they publicize a need

¹ United Nations, “Assessment of World Food Situation, Present and Future,” World Food Conference Document E/CONF.65/3 (New York: United Nations, 1974).

² World Bank, *Poverty and Hunger: Issues and Options for Food Security in Developing Countries* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1986).

³ USAID, “Food Aid and Food Security: USAID Policy Paper,” unpublished report, (February 1995); and USAID, “U.S. International Food Assistance Report, 1998” (January 1999).

for or an ongoing project on food and nutrition security or the dissemination of their good results. There are many reasons for doing what the three of us are doing working in parallel and not integrated. I hope that this forum will discuss and suggest how to improve the situation as we all have significant roles to play to achieve our goal by 2020. Among what others would present I would like to include a few suggestions that may assist us to be more effective, collaborate better and produce positive impacts.

Way Forward

Knowledge of Causes of Food and Nutrition Insecurity. There should be regional, sub-regional and national forums in which the three stakeholders discuss key factors that are responsible for the insecurity. Having this knowledge, the media will continue to keep it alive with the policy makers, donors, farmers and NGOs.

Joint Design of Projects. Farmers, NGOs and media should participate in the design of projects that would enhance food and nutrition security. Joint base line surveys or participatory rapid assessments should take place for good project design.

Joint Advocacy on a Long-term Basis. Media has very important roles in advocating for desirable policies on F&N security. The media, NGOs and farmers should both agree on the policies and continue to push them at all levels of government institutions. Africa has long list of bad policies and habits on food production and food consumption that we need to advocate for against. Trade, agricultural subsidies, extension, land tenure system, prevention of some items of food to be eaten by women and children are some of those that need to be changed.

Multiple Partners. Future efforts should not only be integrated among the three stakeholders but should involve multiple partners. For example WVI could work with CRS or CARE in a given community, two media houses could champion together a cause of change or promotion of useful technologies.

Joint Contact with Donors. As much as feasible, the three stakeholders should contact donors together. A joint concept paper of 2-3 pages may even be useful at the initial stage of project designing. A donor would be sympathetic to a funding request if representatives from one or two NGOs, farmer associations, and media houses present their joint request to the donor.

Project Impact. In the project design, stakeholders should include expected positive impacts and measurable indicators in their joint projects.

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