

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

OPENING REMARKS

ASSURING FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY IN AFRICA BY 2020

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Excellencies, honored guests, and distinguished participants; it is my privilege to join with Drs. Ahluwalia and Otim in welcoming you to this Conference on Assuring Food and Nutrition Security in Africa by 2020.

IFPRI's 2020 Vision Initiative for Food, Agriculture, and the Environment is facilitating the conference in partnership with the government of Uganda and with the strong support of H.E. President Museveni, who is also the Chairman of the IFPRI 2020 Vision International Advisory Council. We very much appreciate as well the support of our generous co-sponsors from around the world.

The goals of this gathering are already clearly defined and do not need new debate. These are the goals: (i) *assuring food security*, with availability and access to food; and (ii) *assuring nutrition security*, where secure access to food is coupled with adequate health.

Later this morning, we will hear more detail about the current food and nutrition situation, the future prospects, and how we arrived where we are today. For now, let me stress that during the past three decades, the number of food-insecure people in Sub-Saharan Africa more than doubled. Africa has experienced declining food production per capita, growing marginalization within the global economy, serious degradation of its natural resources, epidemics of HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and violent conflict that has uprooted large populations in most of its subregions. And, currently, global cereal stocks are down and prices are rising.

Let us be frank when looking at causes of food and nutrition insecurity. Failures of governance are one reason for this bleak picture. And let us remain frank throughout this Conference. The blame for Africa's plight must also partly be placed outside Africa, for instance on developed countries' protectionist trade policies that prevent markets from flourishing and contributing to economic growth.

Today, there is ample reason for cautious hope with regard to food and nutrition security in Africa. At last year's African Union Summit, the Heads of State pledged to increase the level of public expenditure on agriculture dramatically. Agriculture is critical to poverty reduction and overall economic growth in Africa, given the concentration of the population and poverty in rural areas and agriculture's large share of most African economies. Peace is essential to sustain food and nutrition security, and happily, no new conflicts broke out in Africa in 2003, whereas long-standing wars ended in Angola, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Along with peace, democracy and the rule of law are steadily spreading, giving more voice to poor people.

We can also point to many successes in food and agriculture in Africa. Farmers and researchers around the continent have undertaken impressive and varied innovative efforts to sustain soil fertility and water resources in response to increasingly degraded natural environments. Agricultural scientists have made a number of important breakthroughs that are relevant to resource-poor African farmers,

notably with respect to cassava, as well as for bananas and rice. Modern science can make a difference to the African poor, be they productivity-constrained farmers lacking good seeds, be they nutritionally deficient lacking a healthy diet, or be they HIV/AIDS positive lacking access to health care, or all three of these in a terrible combination.

Ironically, globalization is marginalizing Africa mainly because the continent relies so heavily on bulk exports of unprocessed agricultural commodities, such as cotton, coffee, and cocoa. Yet African agriculture is among the world's most globalized at the same time that it is the world's most subsistence-oriented, with low levels of productivity, a sign of malfunctioning markets. Experience shows that innovative farming and effective, self-governing farmers associations can allow African smallholders to compete successfully and benefit from national, regional, and global markets for cotton, horticulture products, dairy products, and maize.

Pan-African cooperation on trade in food products and agricultural research offers great promise, and NEPAD and the AU are key vehicles for such cooperation.

But the challenge of spreading and scaling up successful local and national experiences in food and agriculture is substantial, and we need to recognize that one size does not fit all, that a model appropriate in one place may not work well elsewhere.

We at the International Food Policy Research Institute believe that the next three days offer a new and exciting approach to food and nutrition security in Africa, because this Conference is knowledge-based, and involves all key decision making groups. We will focus on putting good ideas into practice, on implementation, and not just on devising elegant plans that are doomed to gather dust on the shelf.

The priority actions should focus on raising agricultural productivity; fostering pro-poor economic growth through improved markets, better infrastructure, and greater trade competitiveness; building institutional and human capacity; improving health with due attention to HIV/AIDS; and strengthening governance. All of these require added resources, but the benefits of food and nutrition security outweigh the resource needs.

The key question is whether African policymakers and external development assistance donors and investors will back their words up with the necessary resources and actions. We have with us today representatives of governments, parliaments, nongovernmental and community-based organizations from Africa and elsewhere, farmers, business and industry, and research, media, and donor institutions. We may not arrive at consensus on each and every question, and that is fine, because putting all the issues on the table is crucial. And, this Conference takes an all-Africa approach to those issues. We believe that such a perspective is likewise crucial if we are to make progress, because it facilitates learning from experiences across Africa.

The Conference will devote one day each to three major areas: (i) taking stock and responding to driving forces; (ii) identifying technical, institutional, and political solutions for bringing about change and action in priority areas of intervention; and (iii) examining how key actors can be strengthened and partnerships among them facilitated for influencing change and catalyzing action.

Let me emphasize that the process and substance of the Conference are African-owned and African driven. The Conference Advisory Committee, chaired so ably by Dr. J. J. Otim, with leading experts from Africa, has played the central role in shaping the design and content.

What does IFPRI bring to the table? For nearly 30 years, we have provided policy-relevant research results, policy communication, capacity strengthening, and collaboration aimed at reducing hunger and malnutrition in developing countries. H.E. President Museveni, H.E. President Obasanjo, and Honorable Minister Kisamba-Mugerwa are among our long-term, valued collaborators in Africa. More recently, H.E. President Wade has joined the IFPRI 2020 Vision International Advisory Council. It was 10 years ago that IFPRI held the first meeting of this distinguished Council in Entebbe under the Chairmanship of H.E. President Museveni. We have come a long way since then, with the food problem now squarely on Africa's policy agenda. My predecessor as IFPRI Director General, Per Pinstrup-Andersen, and others in the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research, made key

contributions to that process, and we are very pleased that they are here with us today, together with leaders in the fight against hunger, such as Norman Borlaug.

What do we want you take away from this conference? We need strategies for food and nutrition security that can be implemented. If strategies cannot be implemented, they are not any good. But implementation without a sound strategy is also no good. Strengthening education and universities in Africa are central to building that capacity for sound strategies and strong implementation. Partnerships on higher education and research on agriculture and nutrition within Africa and with international partnerships is a promising area.

Successful implementation must happen at local level. Communities are key to achieving food and nutrition security in Africa, and we need more decentralized management of public investment, with the engagement of civil society, including business and industry. But we also need sound public administration, wise public investment, and adequate resource allocation from central governments. All actors need to shoulder their responsibilities and collaborate effectively.

Ending hunger is not just a complex technical or political matter, which this Conference is ready to address. It is deeper; it includes the question of motivation for action, which must be addressed as well. Therefore, the cultural and spiritual leaders of Africa have to play key roles.

Can we end hunger in Africa by the year 2020? Yes, if we focus on change and action. Thank you so much, and I look forward to our three days together and strong and focused follow up.

Note: This note has not been edited. The views expressed in this summary note are those of the author and are not necessarily endorsed by or representative of IFPRI or of the cosponsoring or supporting organizations.