

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

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

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Your Excellency Yoweri Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda; Your Excellency, Maitre Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal; Dr. Joachim von Braun, Director General of the International Food Policy Research Institute; Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Participants; Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed a pleasure to, once again, be in this great city of Kampala to discuss a topic that is very dear to our hearts. As developing nations, food and nutrition security should be one of the most important goals of our national development. It is generally estimated that some 800 million people in developing countries constituting about 20 percent of their total population are undernourished. This situation will worsen unless drastic and well-targeted actions are taken to stem the tide.

The real question is: How did the situation arise in Africa? How come, with our very hardworking population, fertile soil, and with over 70 percent of our people involved in agriculture, we still suffer deficits in the areas of food and nutrition? We must admit that the reasons are internal and external. The truth is that no matter how we stretch the statistics, Africa since independence has not done well in agriculture, food production, and food security.

I am not oblivious of the historical experiences of Africa that distorted our agriculture, complicated relations between the rural and urban, imposed mono-culture production systems, marginalized the local farmers, and instituted a regime of internal colonization and exploitation through all sorts of bureaucratic structures such as the marketing boards. What is amazing is that, in most of Africa, this situation inherited from the colonial governments that were more interested in feeding European factories with raw materials have not changed much today.

At the external level, the international regimes of trade and tariffs have never favored Africa. True, there have been a few positive epochs, but these have been few and far between. Let me illustrate the almost perpetual unfavorable conditions of global economic arrangements to Africa's agriculture.

First, the regime of subsidies put in place by the developed world that makes their agricultural products much cheaper and thus dampening the market for our exports.

In the OECD countries, the subsidies stand at about US\$1 billion per day. We are all familiar with the cliché about Africans living on less than US\$1 per day. Yet, a cow in Europe is subsidized at over US\$2 per day. With this sort of subsidy, African agriculture cannot attain the competitive edge

required to make it buoyant, be it in the area of foreign exchange earning or precipitating necessary incentives to increase production. Through disincentive and inability to compete, Western markets are thus directly and indirectly shut against Africa. This practice by the developed nations remains in place as we speak here today.

Second, the very high tariff put in place by the developed nations as barriers against our agricultural products. Where the barriers are not formal, they have been placed as non-tariff barriers with exactly the same effects. Let me illustrate with a story told to me by our late respected brother President Houphouet Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire. He took loans from the West to establish two sugar complexes. His grand idea to satisfy his national need was subverted by European countries that decided to produce sugar from sugar beets rather than from sugar cane, which is more economical.

The European sugar, cheaper (though not better) was then dumped in the Ivorian market. Within a few years, the two complexes had to shut down. The painful part of the story can be found in the implications: first, the debt remained and at high interest rates, of course; second, farmers in Côte d'Ivoire lost revenues; third, the internal market became depressed; fourth, people began to develop a taste for imported or dumped sugar as against the products of local factories; and finally, poverty was intensified due to general loss of revenue to local cane producers and the government.

After political independence, Africa's trade relations with the outside world actually took a turn for the worse. As the prices of our agricultural products decreased, the prices of goods from the industrialized world increased. They invested heavily in stockpiling and synthetic alternatives while actually manipulating the prices of our exports. Their technological policies equally ensured that we had no capacity to engage in limited processing of our products thus further complicating our ability to access their markets.

This illustrates what African nations are experiencing at the hands of developed nations and it is not providing the foundation for sustainable agricultural development and fair competition at the market place.

The third external factor that I will like to mention is the strategy of the developed world to introduce and nurture by every means possible a craving in Africa for what we do not produce or need. This struggle to cultivate a taste for foreign products and imports has far-reaching detrimental effect on our agricultural and food production strategy.

A famous case is in wheat where through the PL-180 strategy, a "wheat trap" was set and Africa fell into it. Today, the continent is heavily reliant on bread produced largely from imported wheat to the advantage of western, especially American farmers, and to the detriment of our local substitutes such as potato, yam, cassava, rice, plantain, sorghum, and maize.

Some of us have abandoned research into the use of these products of bread making and we have developed a taste for wheat-based bread even with all its negative health implications. Any research that may lead to less dependence on importation of wheat or soya beans will not be supported, indeed will be positively discouraged by our development partners who are major exporters of these commodities into our countries.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the internal constraints to agricultural production, food, and nutrition issues in Africa are legion. We have failed to restructure what we inherited from the colonialists in a fundamental way. We have neglected in large measure the rural

areas and the small farmers. We have focused on producing, in the same way in most instances, exactly the same products that were imposed on us by the colonial authorities.

We have not been very creative at introducing new technologies just as we have generally mismanaged cooperatives and policies that would boost output, increase incomes, and promote better nutritional practices. Perhaps more importantly, we have dampened creativity and confidence in our people, and decreased investment in agriculture through wrong policies, inconsistency, and political conflicts.

Hence, farms and farmers have been ruined by war. Women and children have been displaced, water systems destroyed, while the young and healthy are either forced into war or forced to emigrate to foreign lands to the detriment of our nations.

In whichever way we look at it, these all come together to put a negative stamp on our agricultural and food systems, deprive us of foreign exchange to promote growth and development, discourage investors, close foreign markets to our products, cast aspersions on the quality of our products, and strengthen the hands of the West in imposing non-tariff barriers against our exports.

Finally, until very recently, and we are all still working hard on this front, the suffocation of civil society, closure of democratic spaces, and the preponderance of bad governance did not generally augur well for agriculture and food production.

In Nigeria, we have come to recognize our weaknesses, strengths, and opportunities. We have no illusions as to the challenges posed by policies initiated and operated by the developed nations and their impacts on our agricultural and food production systems. Our approach has been to adopt a multi-pronged approach to reversing the situation we met in 1999. Hence, agriculture which contributes 39 percent of the GDP, about three percent of total foreign exchange earnings, and accounts for over 80 percent of the non-oil export employing about 70 percent of the nation's active labor force is today a priority sector.

From a food-deficit situation of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the country's agriculture has recorded significant improvements in production in the last four years.

Today, we have attained substantial self-sufficiency in the production of major staples such as maize, sorghum, cassava, and millet. Nigeria is currently the largest producer of cassava, yams, and cocoyam in the world.

Substantial growth has also occurred in the output of some other major cereals and roots and tubers. We are near self-sufficiency in beef and poultry products. Last year, our success in agriculture was recognized with a Gold Medal from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). These achievements in domestic availability of foods have increased the average national daily supply of calories above the minimum per capita energy requirements.

We are not resting on our oars. Nigeria continues to intensify measures aimed at redressing the adverse conditions that militate against availability of quality food on a sustainable basis through physical, social, and economic infrastructure in the rural areas; improving marketing infrastructures and access to markets for agricultural products; enhancing coordination and collaboration between various actors in the downstream agricultural sector; and closing the gaps between food production and nutrition issues.

Nigeria's holistic agricultural and food self-sufficiency strategy is anchored on a strategy captured under the Presidential Initiatives on increased production, processing, marketing, and export of major agricultural commodities. Presidential Initiatives are product-specific stakeholders consultative meetings under my chairmanship, where participants, in participatory and parliament-like atmosphere, discuss the opportunities and constraints of self-sufficiency in particular food item or commodity. They set targets, strategies, and timeframes for the achievement of national self-sufficiency to be followed by export program and promotion.

It has become an important and successful policy formulation and implementation strategy of our nascent democracy. Then there is the periodic progress report and assessment of each commodity program.

The approach has ensured broad participation of the citizenry in issues that are critical to their everyday life, making them part and parcel of the implementation process, and sensitizing them to the importance of the citizens' role in nation building. Of course, the support of the President, both at the level of policy formulation and at each stage of the implementation, not only emphasize the importance of the issue being addressed, it ensures that immediate corrective measures are taken within the implementation process and substantially guarantees success. I undertake field visits to see things on the ground throughout the country and follow-up actions are carried out. I must hasten to add that our National Food Security Program jointly carried out with the FAO is subsumed under the Presidential Initiative and it is part of our success story. To this must be added a South-South partnership program with China.

To sustain production without discouraging farmers, government remains buyer of last resort. With a sense of humility, allow me to recommend this strategy where it is not already in place.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the solutions to our agricultural and food crises are within our reach. However, we must get a few things right.

First, we must put our own house in order. We must commit to giving agriculture priority of place in our planning processes. We must be consistent and predictable. We must exploit our comparative advantage and develop those products that will help our populations in achieving the highest points of their creative and productive abilities while at the same time improving their conditions of living. In line with this, we must adopt the strategy of going commodity-by-commodity. This has worked well for us in Nigeria and has enabled us to achieve the 7 percent growth rate in agriculture in 2003.

Second, we must develop and sustain a strategy for managing soil and water. For most of Africa, this is still in a haphazard stage. The truth is that relying on rainfed agriculture alone will simply not do for the continent.

Third, we must bring in appropriate technology including biotechnology — improved seeds, chemicals, mechanical, even electronic inputs into the management of farms especially on weather prediction, pest control, flood control, processing, preservation, packaging, storage, and marketing.

We are still weak in these areas and through cooperation, exchange of ideas, and research we can all do much better. We must insist on market access of the industrialized nations to our agricultural products just as they have market access of our countries for their highly industrial products. Paralyzing subsidies must be discouraged.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the time has come when we must be the architects of our own fortunes.

To be sure, we live in a largely interdependent world and must seek support and rely on others for help. There must, however, be some division of labor. Let us concentrate on and produce for the world those products that we are good at and for which we have comparative advantage.

Let us restructure and reposition our economies for growth, stability, development, and democracy. Let us treat the small-, medium-, and large-scale farmers with dignity and encourage them to reach higher levels of innovation and productivity. In Africa, let us cooperate and integrate and learn from each other's best practice for sustained success. Let us adapt and adopt new ideas, new technologies, new practices for land and water management, post-harvest processing, and storage as well as marketing.

Let no one put restrictions on our way as we produce for ourselves and the rest of the world. Let others produce what they have comparative advantage in. For instance, no matter how attractive the production of caviar is, we must leave it for the Caspian Sea region, which has comparative advantage.

But Green Houses in Europe to produce banana, plantain, and cassava cannot be regarded as the most efficient way of producing these commodities. It is against the plan of nature and certainly not cost effective.

Finally, we must reduce waste, take economic and political reform seriously, provide the required leadership for our people, and encourage the youth to return to the land to develop new and modern farmers as well as improve the living conditions in the rural areas.

We must begin to work and speak together, adopt common positions in engaging the restrictions and obstacles prevalent in the global system, and create an enabling environment that would enhance the efficacy of policies and programs in agriculture and food production.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies, and Gentlemen, I believe that, with commitment, unity, focus, and dedication to improving the lot of our people, we can overcome all our current problems and move towards a glorious future.

I thank you and God Bless You.

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.