

**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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April 1, 2004

Dear distinguished delegates, on behalf of the Conference Advisory Committee, the National Organization Committee, the Conference Management Consultant, and the Speke Country Resort Munyonyo Management, it is my great pleasure and honor to welcome you all to the Pan-African Conference on Assuring Food and Nutrition Security in Africa by 2020.

The Conference Advisory Committee pays tribute to H.E. President Y. K. Museveni in his capacity as the Chairman of the International Advisory Council of IFPRI's 2020 Vision Initiative, whose distinguished members include H.E. President Obasanjo of Nigeria and H.E. President Wade of Senegal, who are here with us, for the support his government has given to co-host this historic Pan-African Conference.

Special warm welcome is extended to the visiting Heads of State, H.E. President Obasanjo of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and H.E. President Wade of the Republic of Senegal. Your Excellencies, your presence at this Conference is a clear testimony of your support and commitment to the processes that will enable Africa to achieve sustainable food and nutrition security for all in this generation.

We also recognize the presence of the First Ladies, Graça Machel Mandela, Janet Museveni. We salute you for your dedication to the cause of humanity.

To the International Food Policy Research Institute, we express our deep gratitude to Dr. Joachim von Braun, the Director General, and his predecessor, Professor Per Pinstrup-Andersen, the 2001 World Food Prize Laureate, for their farsighted leadership in spearheading policy research focus on Africa's food and nutrition security. This Conference is indeed a follow-up on the successful International Conference on Sustainable Food Security for All, organized by IFPRI and held in Bonn, Germany, in September 2001.

Last but not least, the Conference Advisory Committee wishes to recognize and appreciate all the cosponsors of the Conference and proudly welcome all the distinguished visitors and participants who have taken their valuable time to come and be a part of this gathering.

This Conference has been, from its inception, owned and driven by Africans, who have participated actively in the distinguished Conference Advisory Committee Meetings. The superb

Conference program was developed by IFPRI after wide consultations, under the guidance of the Committee.

As lead-in events to the Conference, we held two extremely successful workshops elsewhere in Africa, one on “Successes in African Agriculture” in Pretoria, South Africa, last December and one on “Food and Nutrition Security Policies for West Africa” in Bamako, Mali, in January 2004. These meetings focused on scaling up and replicating successes as well as on implementation of food and nutrition security plans, policies, and programs. We will continue to take such a focus over the next three days.

The Conference is timely, because Africa is a continent that is reshaping itself. With new political and socioeconomic milestone initiatives gaining momentum both inside and outside Africa, this Conference provides an excellent opportunity to move forward decisively to combat hunger, malnutrition, poverty, and to improve on the management of HIV/AIDS. Indeed, African governments are increasingly focusing their attention on how to cope with the task of dealing simultaneously with short-term food emergencies and the long-term challenge of economic growth to enable them to feed the extra half a billion Africans who will be born over the next 20 to 25 years.

We will devote a great deal of attention over the next three days to agriculture and relating it to food, nutrition, economic growth, health, and poverty eradication. This is clearly appropriate because the center of gravity of poverty, food, and nutrition insecurity on this continent is in the rural areas where the majority of our people are dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods.

In this context, the Conference will discuss investments in agricultural productivity that empower smallholders, in particular to acquire improved seed and stock, access to water for both production and human consumption, credit, infrastructural development, and concerted efforts to assure soil fertility continent-wide. We will be challenged to build capacities of small-scale farmers and other poor and food-insecure people, and assure their access to information on technology, markets, and negotiation skills.

Another area that will be covered is public investments, which assure access to HIV/AIDS drugs at affordable prices, primary health care, and basic education for all.

Given the important roles that women play as food producers on this continent, efforts to empower them will be debated and action taken.

We will also talk a great deal at this Conference about “good governance.” For obvious reasons, sound public policies and public accountability are crucial means to achieving the end we seek, which is sustainable food and nutrition security for all. Peace and Human Rights are at the core of good governance, and our efforts to empower and strengthen capacity must focus, above all, on the rights of food- and nutrition-insecure people.

In addition, this Conference will give considerable attention to partnerships, particularly between the public and private sector as well as with farmers, which are necessary for progress toward food and nutrition security on this continent. On a regional context, those countries within Africa showing good progress in achieving food and nutrition security can function as sub-regional leaders for the sharing of information, approaches, and best practices. In the NEPAD spirit, we should examine the possibility of carrying out “Country peer reviews” of food and nutrition security, using a small and transparent set of criteria for evaluation of quality of implementation.

The Conference will further deliberate on the need for partners from outside Africa to help build capacity as well. International cooperation is necessary to address many of the problems that face us in Africa today, such as: (i) disease epidemics, including HIV/AIDS and malaria; (ii) crisis-related food security shocks; (iii) development and maintenance of infrastructures; and (iv) coping with trans-boundary animal and crop disease and pests, trade, labor migration, regional policies, and management of regional common resources.

The level of investments needed to accomplish all the above is substantial, but we must recognize that current levels of food insecurity and malnutrition in Africa are unacceptable and much more costly alternative. So investments in the identified areas will have a great payoff.

To underscore the importance of this Conference, we are reminded that the ***human history of governance reveals no sustainable democracy has ever been built on empty stomachs and where poverty is rampant***. In other words, food and nutrition security has had a far-reaching impact on democratization processes. It has been a sound road map to rural development and political stability. Therefore, the issue of assuring food and nutrition security for all in Africa is a critical concern not only for African governments but also for the international community, because all are affected though at different levels.

To you, the distinguished participants in this Conference, you can and must take actions when you leave this Conference whose outcome add value to other ongoing activities related to food and nutrition security in Africa and also move us from mere promises to action.

Over the next three days, you will hear insightful paper presentations and have ample opportunity for debate. We are cognizant of your wide experiences and expertise, so you are requested to actively engage and to share. No insightful idea or view should be lost. Your active participation will certainly enrich the outcome of the Conference.

The challenge facing all of us is to use this process to create insights on how to bring about change and stimulate actions by all key stakeholders to meet the ever-increasing and changing demands on food and nutrition on this continent.

Therefore, in your various capacities, you should shed light on what Africans can do to take charge of their development agenda and begin the ascent to a better tomorrow. If all the key actors are strengthened and walk forward together in new partnerships, we are convinced we can end hunger in Africa by 2020, eliminate the worst aspects of micronutrient malnutrition, and make solid progress toward achieving food and nutrition security in this generation.

The success of the Conference is now in your hands. While we are here together, please do not hesitate to direct any questions to the Conference Organizing Committee and Management Consultant team. They are here to ensure that you have a fruitful Conference. Enjoy your stay in Munyonyo, Kampala, Uganda.

Thank 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.