

**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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President, Republic of Uganda

April 1, 2004

Your Excellency, Maitre Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal; Your Excellency Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Republic of Nigeria; Dr. Joachim von Braun, Director General of the International Food Policy Research Institute; Honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament; Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps; Distinguished Participants; Ladies and Gentlemen

I welcome you to Uganda. We are hopeful that by the end of your deliberations, the way forward to Assuring Food and Nutrition Security in Africa by 2020 will materialize.

Africa leads in hunger, malnourishment and undernourishment; Africa leads in the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and the experts assure us that unless an extraordinary effort is made by all of us, 40 million children on this continent will be malnourished by 2020. That is why a new vision is so urgent.

This conference represents a wide spectrum of stakeholders — policymakers, scientists, investors, and civil society, and if we can all work as a team we can achieve food and nutrition within the next 16 years.

I wish to assure you and, I am confident, I speak on behalf of all my colleagues that there is a political will to reverse the grim statistics on food and nutrition security.

Through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), African leaders have committed themselves to the consolidation of democracy, the promotion of peace and security, and to a sound economic management where the welfare of the people is paramount.

Our development partners made a solemn pledge to provide more aid for infrastructural projects, health and education, to reduce our debt burdens and, most important, to invest into our economies and allow greater access of our products into their markets.

If African leaders and our development partners can each fulfill their part of the bargain, Africa can fulfill and even exceed the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**; and, indeed, of the 2020 Vision initiative of the International Food Policy Research Institute, the organizers of the conference.

I can assure you that it is not all gloom and doom on our continent; I am sure everyone here knows of a success story somewhere on this Continent in agriculture, health, education, and governance. What we need is to multiply those success stories to encompass the whole Continent.

Here, in Uganda, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS some 15 years ago was in the region of 30% in some categories of population groups; today it is 6%. Although we shall only be satisfied with zero prevalence, we can still claim some progress in this area.

If you take primary education, in 1997 we launched our Universal Primary Education Programme (UPE). Before the programme was launched, only 2 million children were enrolled in primary schools; today close to 7 million children are in primary schools. This is some progress.

All these advances are relevant to the assurance of food and nutrition security.

As you know, HIV/AIDS and other diseases especially malaria reduce people's capacity to work and hence grossly affect output. This is especially the case in agriculture where most Africans work.

Mass education definitely makes a difference in agricultural output. Those who can neither read nor write, those who are without basic numeracy, cannot be relied upon to modernize our agriculture, and to achieve the quantities and quality we need to compete globally or even regionally and continentally.

With regard to nutrition, it is not always, or even primarily, the absence of nutrients that condemns our children to malnutrition; it is ignorance, mothers not knowing what is needed to feed their children properly. Education is, therefore, vital in our struggle to ensure food and nutrition security.

For too long we have relied on the poor and the not so well informed to feed us and to produce our exports.

The peasants have done their part in the most difficult conditions imaginable. They have often worked under exploitative works of landlords and governments; they have not had access to credit and markets; and they have lacked the basic information and infrastructures they need for efficient production.

Peasants will be with us for sometime to come. Although the aim of NRM is to transform our society so that, in about 20 years time from now, we have a society of the middle class and skilled workers, it will, obviously, take that much time. While they still exist, the greatest challenge for all of us is to improve their conditions of production in order to reduce their poverty and numbers.

The reason 3% of the population of the USA feed all Americans and the rest of the world is that their farmers farm on a large scale and use the latest technologies in their production. They can produce in commercial quantities, have a consistent quantity and put their products on the markets at competitive prices — although, quite often, they are also assisted by unfair subsidies.

We too must move towards medium- and large-scale commercial agriculture to attain the goals we have set ourselves.

As governments, the Maputo Declaration commits us to the devotion of 10% of our national budgets to agriculture. We should steadily work towards the realization of this commitment.

With increased public funds going into agriculture, we can support research and the infrastructures needed to modernize and increase the production and productivity of agriculture.

Investment by the private sector is crucial to the agriculture sector. Hitherto, with a few exceptions, peasant agriculture, which is dominant, had only two resources on offer, land and labour; and, very often, even access to land was problematic. Modern agriculture requires capital and technology and for these inputs we need both local and foreign investors to produce food and other products in sufficient quantities and the right quality for both domestic consumption and for the external markets.

However, the main motivation for investors is the market. We need a level-playing field in the global markets; and I appeal to our development partners in Europe, the USA, and Japan to level the field. Market access is the main stimulus for somebody to produce sustainably. This problem was neglected in the past in preference for Aid to Africa. This has, obviously, failed.

It is a fact that agriculture in the developed countries is protected through heavy subsidies. Their agriculture is subsidized at the rate of 1 billion dollars a day at both ends — production and exports. At this rate, there is no way we can develop our agriculture because we are out-competed in our own markets and cannot sell competitively in their markets.

The developed countries introduced to us the magic of free markets. You cannot preach free markets and practice protectionism. It is not right!

We appreciate the markets the developed countries are opening up for us such as the EBA of Europe and the AGOA of the USA. This is a good beginning provided it is consolidated. AGOA III is not yet addressed. This is very serious! I have written to President Bush and Congressman Thomas to get the USA Congress to address the outstanding issues in AGOA III such as the extension of 3rd party fabrics for some more years. ***All of us need to speak with one voice on this and now.*** Otherwise, the AGOA generated jobs and increased export earnings will evaporate. I have described AGOA and EBA as the greatest acts of solidarity extended by the West to Black Africa in the last 500 years. All our previous interactions have been either parasitic or just mere tokenism. Both of these have, obviously, failed. After 47 years of independence, not a single Black African has transitioned from Third World to First World country like Singapore, Malaysia, or South Korea did.

AGOA and EBA are only modest beginnings. We need to broaden Trade partnership, eventually, to affect the trade-distorting subsidies for agriculture and for export promotion in the developed countries and some of the more developed Third World countries such as India, China, Brazil, etc.

Of course, we need to organize the regional and continental markets better. Sometimes, it is not the lack of food but the lack of logistics for moving the food that leads to famine within our countries and regions. There is also a tendency, when there are food crises, to look beyond the country, region, and continent, to sources in Europe and America. I appeal to organizations, which handle these crises to exhaust the sources here before they look elsewhere, that way they will be making a great contribution to the development of our agriculture.

The other factor that has stunted the growth of agriculture in Africa is the curse of exporting only raw materials, without adding value; without producing final goods out of these raw materials. This is why I have described the African countries as the real **donor countries**. Until recently, Uganda has been donating to the world about US\$20 in every kilogram of coffee and about US\$12 in every kilogram of cotton. Besides, we donate jobs. If you only export lint cotton (after ginning), you export all the spinning, weaving, finishing, and tailoring jobs to others. By so doing, you are also exporting purchasing power.

I am very happy that most of the stakeholders who can cause a revolution in our agriculture and, therefore, lead us to food and nutrition security are gathered here to deliberate on this security. I urge you to make realistic propositions, and to dedicate yourselves to their implementation. All of you here are leaders in your various fields and are in a position to influence events at the highest policymaking levels. I urge you to use your influence to effect a change in our agriculture so that Africans can attain the security of food and nutrition in the time frame we have set ourselves.

I am tempted to add that sustainable food and nutritional security is only achievable in a sustainable way through social transformation. I cannot remember a society in history that sustainably guaranteed food security and nutrition but also remained backward. Food security and nutrition came to Europe after those societies were transformed. I used to wonder why it is considered rude to call somebody old among European cultures while in my tribe you even pretend to be old even when you are young. I was told by somebody that it was because of food insecurity. Too old people would be killed. On account of social transformation, food insecurity in Europe is now history.

Let me end by thanking the International Food Policy Research Institute for organizing this Conference and all the sponsors for the material support which has enabled all of us to be here today.

We are very happy to host this Conference and I would like to thank Dr. Otim and his team for the work they have done to coordinate this exercise.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and I declare the Conference on **Assuring Food and Nutrition Security in Africa by 2020** open.

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.