

**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:**     **Implementing Action in Key Areas: Raising Agricultural Productivity**

**Panelist:**             *Glyvyns Chinkhuntha*, Executive Director, Freedom Gardens, Malawi

**Title:**                 **How to Support Innovation and Entrepreneurship in African Farmers**

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**Introduction**

During the last century the continent of Africa has witnessed an unprecedented rise in agricultural education and scientific advancement through institutional development and research. Every country on the continent hosts at least a college, or a whole university dedicated to the teaching of agriculture at the tertiary level.

These institutions of higher learning have been churning out thousands of graduates and post-graduates into society for the last 30–50 years.

This, of course, is in addition to the teaching of agriculture at both secondary and primary school levels. The direct cost alone that has gone into this single social investment in Africa's youths is, I guess, so enormous we cannot afford to continually take it for granted.

Why should dear mother Africa continue to be malnourished and a net beggar for food way into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, surrounded by 'children' so adequately initiated and groomed in the art of food production and nutrition, endowed with a rich diversity of natural resources and factors rivaled by few other continents? Add to this a flash of foreign aid with which the continent is given! Yet, in spite of her favorable factors, Africa is said to be emerging as the only continent that has grown poorest and hungrier in the last twenty-five years.

Such, therefore is Africa's food security jig-saw puzzle — large bits of higher education here, baskets of research technologies there, chunks of foreign aid here, rich soils and favorable climates here and there, and so on and so forth. Surely Africa's problem cannot be the lack of resources. Africa's problem is inability on the part of African nations to convert their natural resources into national wealth and food sovereignty.

**Education versus Farming**

From the foregoing diagnosis, it is very obvious that our education, along with its academics, has failed us in relation to food security. Far from being a part of the solution to the problem, our education has become an integral part of the problem of food insecurity on the entire continent. As a matter of fact, the majority of Africans went to school to avoid farming, to avoid the hoe and tilling the land. Education has thus driven our productive youths out of the land to urban centers in search of white-collar jobs. Our youths have grown to be agrophobic. Unless this trend is reversed, there will be need for a shift in Africa's food security support paradigm from education, perhaps to innovation and creativity.

## **Innovation, Creativity, and Entrepreneurship**

Most of the food that the continent is able to produce to feed itself has been produced by peasant farmers — those who have remained on the land to tend it. They have achieved this through the power of innovation and creativity driven by the forces of entrepreneurship.

At the center of this process are the innovative farmers, also called magnet or nucleus farmers. Throughout the centuries these poor men and women, out of their inner urgings, have devised, developed, adopted, adapted ingenious technological ways and means of ensuring food security and economic welfare for their extensive households.

## **Leadership Role**

Innovators are not made. They are born. They possess a leadership unique to themselves. I call them ‘leaders in community’ in contrast to community leaders. Innovators lead by examples of their lives. They impact on society through spheres of influence that dilate and reach out in concentric circles from a common center.

In a community, innovative farmers for instance, influence the choices, production and marketing of produce grown in that community. They also influence technology and skills development and transfer through the community employment that their activities generate. They catalyze public extension servicing and information dissemination. They command a high profile of respect, trust, and confidence from the people they influence (peers), a position that is particularly crucial to the success of the much vaunted farmer-to-farmer extension servicing. Their innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship deserve supporting.

## **Supporting Farmer Innovation and Entrepreneurship**

Support for innovation and entrepreneurship in African Farmers would be very crucial in the following areas:

- Formation of Innovative Farmer Networks and strengthening the existing ones;
- Empowerment of Farmer Networks through capacity building to enable them demand their rights and services;
- Product promotion and marketing infrastructure development;
- Institutional support for replication and spread of innovative models; and
- Lobbying and advocacy for policy reform.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion as much as it is crucial, for Africa’s food security, to support research and training programs, it is even more crucial, indeed vital to support food production itself, to support food production through supporting food producers — farmers and their work more directly.

The wake up call has been sounding for too long. It is perhaps high time the continent woke up to the truth, the truth that farming and Farmers, as opposed to agriculture and Agriculturists, hold the terminal answer for food security and nutrition on the continent.

Supporting Farmers’ work and drive is, therefore, not an option. It is the first priority. It should top Africa’s food and nutrition security agenda. If Africa ultimately realizes the distant dream of food for all by the year 2020, it is farmers, more than anybody else, who will bear the brunt. Don’t they deserve the maximum of support?

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