

Towards a Food and Nutrition Secure Continent

Keynote address delivered by

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at the 2nd Global Conference on Biofortification: “Getting Nutritious Foods to People”**

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Excellencies, honorable ministers, distinguished eminent scientists, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, good evening. After all the discussions of the last two days, I hope you will be having bio-fortified foods for dinner tonight! So Bon appetite!

It is indeed a great honor to be here with you today. Thank you HarvestPlus for the kind invitation. I would also like to thank the Rwandan Government for being such gracious hosts. Your support for this important conference is a testimony to the exemplary leadership President Paul Kagame continues to demonstrate in matters affecting the health and welfare of the good people of Rwanda and Africa. I congratulate my dear sister, Dr. Agnes Kalibata, Rwanda's minister of agriculture, for her great work organizing this Summit. I am very pleased to see Professor M.S Swaminathan, the father of the Indian Green Revolution, here today. You bring back memories that agricultural science and technology can transform our world.

HarvestPlus, your contribution to healthier futures for families and communities here in Africa and around the world is exemplary. Howarth, you and your team are to be congratulated. I am also delighted to see the great teams from the CGIAR (recognize Rachel Kyte, Chair of the CGIAR Fund Council and Frank Rijsberman, CEO, CGIAR consortium), Global Alliance for Improving Nutrition (GAIN), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Chris Elias, President, Global Development), the World Bank, USAID (I see Jonathan Shrier here), DFID, IFAD and several other major supporters of nutrition agenda in Africa.

I don't know how you got all the distinguished people in this room here to Kigali. One thing is sure: you are definitely fortified by their presence and participation at this Summit.

Ladies and gentlemen, the scourge of poverty in the world is unacceptable. While many gains have been made in reducing global poverty, nearly 50 percent of the world's people still live below the poverty line. Nearly 850 million of the 7.1 billion people in the world, or one in eight, are hungry. Malnutrition is the cause of 45% of deaths in children under 5 years old, about 3.1 million children each year. Yet global wealth in 2013 reached a new all time high of \$241 trillion, up 68% within the past ten years. This high inequality is untenable.

Back here at home, Africa is rising. Today, 7 of the 10 fastest growing economies in the world are in Africa. Much is said about a rising Africa on the global economic stage. To be sure,

there is a new energy and dynamism across the continent. It can be seen in an emerging middle class, improved governance, and a heightened interest by foreign investors. Economic growth is rising, but we need more than GDP growth.

People eat food, not GDP growth.

Malnutrition, especially lack of essential minerals and vitamins pose major challenges in African countries. It is estimated that twelve Africans die every minute as a result of hunger and malnutrition. Almost 240 million people in sub-Saharan Africa do not eat well enough for their health and well-being. Africa has the highest prevalence of undernourishment in the world afflicting almost one in four people. Eighty percent of the world's stunted children live in just 14 countries, of which eight are here in Africa.

This is not a pretty picture at all.

There is a disconnect between the nature of growth and the swelling number of poor people. For Africa to succeed in lifting millions out of poverty, and create a model of shared prosperity, it must focus on transforming its rural economies. And the way to do this is to transform agriculture. In other words, we must make the rural economy the new wealth economy. Poverty is not an industry and we must not grow it. Poverty must not become the comparative advantage of Africa.

A major reason for high rural poverty and malnutrition in Africa is the poor performance of agriculture - the main source of livelihoods for majority of the poor. For way too long, agriculture has been treated as a development sector, as a way to manage, not eliminate, poverty. To turn things around, we must end treating agriculture as a development program, and start seeing agriculture as a business. This is especially needed, since 65% of all the arable land in the world is on the continent.

Over fifteen years ago, Howard and other scientists thought why don't we simply develop crops that have micronutrients, to make them easily accessible? That work, spearheaded by HarvestPlus, has shown great opportunities, which are now beginning to get reaped across developing countries. Since four years ago at the first global conference on bio-fortification, high iron pearl millet has been released in India, pro-vitamin A cassava and maize have been released in Nigeria and Zambia. Orange flesh sweet potato continues to make significant progress in several countries, including Rwanda, Mozambique, Kenya and Nigeria. High iron beans are being cultivated by over 600,000 farmers in Rwanda.

Africa is leading the world in the cultivation of bio-fortified crops. Of the 1.5 million farming households now growing bio-fortified food crops, 1.4 million are in Africa. Another 1 million African farming households will be added this year.

Nigeria is giving strong political support behind the bio-fortification in Africa, in partnership with Harvest Plus, Global Alliance for Improving Nutrition (GAIN), Bill and Melinda Foundation, the International Potato Center and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture.

Vitamin-A cassava, sweet potato have already been released in Nigeria by our National Roots Crop Research Institute (recognize the ED in room), as well as vitamin A maize. Iron and zinc fortified pearl millet as well as sorghum are now being tested. In 2013, we distributed stems of pro-vitamin A cassava to over 100,000 farmers. This year that number will more than triple to 350,000 farmers. We are incorporating pro Vitamin-A cassava and orange flesh sweet potato into our Growth Enhancement Support Scheme (GES) to reach 2.5 million farm households. We are determined to make Nigeria the largest grower of bio-fortified crops in Africa.

My colleague, the Minister of Health in Nigeria, Professor Onyebuchi Chukwu, has also provided support by including biofortified cassava, maize, sweet potato and pearl millet in the new Micronutrient Deficiency Control Guidelines that were approved by the National Council on Health in August 2013. Strong partnerships between Ministries of Agriculture, Health and Education will be critical for the success of nutrition efforts.

So, the challenge is no longer the science of bio-fortification. We know it works. Our challenge as policy makers now is to build up demand and scale up bio-fortified crops to reach millions of households. To achieve this, we must address supply and demand side issues, including policy, institutional, regulatory and financing of nutrition.

We must expand awareness among farmers and consumers on the benefits of bio-fortified crops, and include farmers early in the technology development process. Our farmers need to grow these nutritionally beneficial crops and consumers need to eat them. Efforts should be put to educate the public that a bio-fortified crop does not mean it is a genetically modified crop, as this confusion continues to trail and hinder more rapid uptake of bio-fortified crops. Greater attention should be put on the bioavailability of the nutrients, especially how to combine bioavailability with development of pre-biotics, non digestible carbohydrates which can greatly improve the rate of absorption of micronutrients.

The future of Africa depends on what we do with our kids today. We must not only send them to school, especially our girls, but we must ensure that they are well fed. No child should ever go to school hungry. A hungry child cannot learn and a malnourished kid will become brain impaired, with low-income earnings in the future. Investment in nutrition is investing in the economy. The greatest contributor to economic growth is not physical infrastructure but brain power - "grey matter infrastructure".

Brazil understood this, when President Lula launched the zero hunger program.

The flag ship program, the Bolsa Familiar (family grant) provided a monthly income of about \$82 to poor families, with requirements to participate in health care (immunization, prenatal care, child development) and education of children. By 2010, the program reached 48 million people per year. School feeding programs complemented this, with a national school-feeding program, that provided about 47 million free of charge meals per day, across all public schools. A unique aspect of the program is that 30% of the funds must be used to buy food directly from local farmers in the surrounding area, creating an institutional market of \$354 million per year for farmers.

Africa must learn from the experience of Brazil zero hunger program and make school feeding programs compulsory. The right of children to food and nutrition must be enshrined in constitutions all across Africa. The right to food must be entrenched in our constitutions.

School feeding programs by focusing on nutrient rich crops grown by farmers within their localities, opens up huge institutional markets for farmers crops, while feeding their kids with healthy school meals. Government tax incentives should be given to companies to incorporate bio-fortified crops into their food chains, in addition to the regular fortification of foods.

African countries need to significantly invest in scaling up food and nutrition and devote at least 3% of the GDP on food nutrition interventions. This should support conditional cash transfer programs for millions of women, especially, linked to school enrollments, prenatal care, and vaccinations for children and adherence to infant and child nutrition prescriptions.

I wish to suggest eight major issues that must be addressed for bio-fortified crops to go to scale:

1. Build strong political will behind nutrient rich crops, using top political leaders as nutrition champions. This is where the Africa Union and the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition can play major roles. But also remember sports, music and film celebrities, who can help with raising visibility and awareness. Essentially, we must build a social campaign around bio-fortified crops in Africa.
2. Focus sharply on improving the technology delivery system to farmers, especially extension systems to improve the knowledge of farmers on nutrient rich crops.
3. Use price incentives and farm subsidies to massively scale up the adoption of nutrient rich crops.
4. Address demand side issues, especially consumer behavior, through marketing and awareness creation to drive demand.
5. Public-private partnerships should be used to scale up nutrient rich crops, with dedicated funding from national governments and multilateral and bilateral agencies.
6. Look critically at the cost/benefit analysis ratio for investments in bio fortification compared to other nutritional interventions. Ultimately, we must lower the cost of developing nutrient enriched crops.
7. Intellectual property rights should be enforced to support development of bio-fortified crops, and varietal release systems should fast track the release of nutrient rich crops.
8. Bio fortification is not a silver bullet. It must be integrated within broader national nutrition intervention policies and programs, in close collaboration between Ministries of Agriculture, Health and Education.

As part of the larger picture on nutrition, Africa must also look into developing high-energy nutritious foods for children. Today, over 90% of the high-energy foods distributed in Africa by the World Food Program is imported from Asia. This must change. Imported high energy foods are not culturally acceptable, takes a long time to arrive, are expensive, exports jobs out of Africa and do not benefit African farmers or the private sector. All that is needed to produce high-energy foods are sorghum, soybeans and maize, all of which Africa grows in abundance. My country, Nigeria, is the largest producer of food sorghum in the world.

Africa must look inwards and take advantage of its own crops and private sector to produce all the high-energy foods it needs. Nigeria has engaged with the World Food Program to turn this around. Our goal is to become the largest producer of high-energy foods in Africa. Dansa Foods, part of the Dangote Conglomerate, is putting up \$50 million to develop Africa's largest high-energy food plant in Nigeria, in partnership with the government of Nigeria and the World Food Program. African governments and the private sector need to do similar initiatives across the continent.

To achieve this, I propose the establishment of a Partnership for High Energy Food in Africa, to focus on building private sector capacity for producing high-energy foods in Africa.

Multi-nutrient powders should be encouraged, as they form cheap sources of vitamins and minerals for home fortification. Nigeria is partnering with the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) to use mobile phones to deliver Micronutrient Powder (MNP) to 10 million children under the age of five in Nigeria.

The use of mobile phones to deliver agricultural technologies is a key part of our success story in Nigeria. Within the past two years, we have reached 8 million farmers with subsidized seeds and fertilizers through electronic vouchers on their mobile phones (e-wallets) - a global first. This has improved the food security of 40 million persons in rural farm households. As a result, Nigeria produced an additional 15 million MT of food, reducing inflation and creating about 2.5 million farm jobs.

Today, women farmers who never used to get subsidized farm inputs have been empowered. Because of the program, Ms. Baladi, of Zamfara state (a state in Northern Nigeria), who cultivates 2 ha of rice land, now earns enough to take care of 23 orphans.

To succeed with nutrition and save the lives of children we must first invest in women. When we secure the life of women, we secure the nutrition and health of their children, and we secure the future of nations. Education of women could reduce malnutrition of children by as much as over 40%. Education of girls delays marriage, improves income earnings in the future and nutrition of their children.

This is all well and good, but we must ensure that political systems institutionalize and sustain these gains. We must build political ladders to elevate the poor and sustain reforms that will foster shared prosperity from economic growth. Farmers must become more organized to seize greater economic and political space for elevating their issues and forcing the political class to

pay attention to them.

To end malnutrition, we must reduce extreme poverty. Our political system must be held accountable for poverty and malnutrition. I propose that we should start with what I call "poverty accountability index".

The index should be developed by benchmarking poverty in constituencies and senatorial zones, as well as local governments. Every elected public official would have four years to reduce poverty. Every four years the poverty accountability index would be recompiled and politicians would be rated based on the extent to which they have reduced poverty and malnutrition, and improved social indicators such as food security, education, health and sanitation. The poverty accountability indices would be published each year, in partnership with the civil society. Africans would then have a choice on who to vote for based on their effectiveness in transforming their lives - what a dream come true!

Ladies and Gentlemen, I too have a dream today. That no child will be malnourished or go to bed hungry. That Africa's defining characteristic will no longer be the scourge of poverty and malnutrition among her children. To this, we all must commit ourselves. For the poverty and malnutrition we see today must be transformed into the wealth and nutritional security of tomorrow.