

Confidential

**Responses to Mr. Kofi Annan's
Keynote Address**

**By
H.E. Dr. Abera Deresa
State Minister**

**Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia**

“Towards A Green Revolution in Africa?”

**Co-organized by the Institute of Development Studies,
the Salzburg Global Seminar and Future Agricultures
Consortium**

You're Excellency, Mr. Kofi Annan

**Former Secretary General of the United Nations and
Current Chairman of the Alliance for Green Revolution
in Africa**

Excellencies

**Distinguished Conference Participants, Ladies and
Gentlemen.**

It is a great pleasure and an honor for me to be amongst distinguished agricultural researchers and policy makers in this beautiful city of Salzburg and the Salzburg Global Seminar. I thank the Organizers for giving me the opportunity to convey a message following the Honorable Mr. Kofi Annan's keynote address.

At the outset, let me thank Mr. Kofi Annan for his stimulating address and also for taking the initiative to launch AGRA – an African-led partnership working across the African continent to help millions of small-scale farmers and their families lift themselves out of poverty and hunger.

In his address Mr. Annan has raised several challenges facing African agriculture ranging from the current food crisis, climate change and agricultural inputs. I will add my voice to these issues in a minute. But first let me state

some facts about African agriculture that you may already know.

Agriculture is the most important sector in Africa. It is the mainstay of African Nations. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where I come from, there are an estimated 67 million smallholder agricultural families, comprising over 200 million people. This makes agriculture the largest employer in the continent. African agriculture also has several good attributes that Mr. Annan has underlined.

Nevertheless, African agriculture remains subsistence in which crop and livestock yields are persistently low because of poor and declining soil fertility and limited adoption of modern agricultural technologies. As a result, as His Excellency, Mr. Annan pointed out our own production is inadequate to feed our people. This shortage in production has contributed to rise in food prices and has led to recent food related riots in many African countries, Mr. Annan has highlighted.

More recently, African leaders have committed themselves to improving the livelihoods of millions of our people and bring them up to a world of opportunity and hope. They have developed a common agricultural development framework which commits all African countries to invest at least 10% of their budget in agriculture and at least achieve 6% consecutive growth to meet the MDG. The progress of implementation of the agreement is slow but some

countries are demonstrating their commitment. For example, Ethiopia is investing 17% of the budget on Agriculture and has attained over 10% agricultural growth for the last five consecutive years. If these efforts are sustained, I am confident that we can reverse the food aid dependency that Ethiopia is known for. We have already witnessed a decrease in the number of people needing emergency food aid from 7 million to 2.2 million.

Conference participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me now come to adding my voice to the challenges. Mr. Annan has underlined that the solution to the food crisis in Africa is to stimulate production. We all agree on this!

African green revolution also faces new challenges that are not only technological in nature and perhaps some were not apparent when the Asian Green Revolution took place. I will list them in no particular order.

1. **Designing and implementing broad-based policies** – We policy makers must listen to farmers, extension agents and researchers. Our researchers must listen to farmers and policy makers. We must recognize that farmers like Mrs. Jemimah, mentioned by Mr. Anna, are also researchers!
2. **Gender equity** – we must properly account for women's contribution to agricultural development and ensure that they get appropriate share from the fruits.

That means women's right to income, access and control over land and other assets must be respected. We must take "the African farmer and her husband" seriously – as Mr. Annan often says!

3. **Private sector development**: the public sector should play its part in realizing the green revolution vision. It must also create a window of opportunity for the private sector to develop - private sector that is driven not just by profit but that can also bridge gaps in knowledge and investment in rural communities.
4. **Risk reduction capacity** – we must move away from crisis management and towards risk reduction strategies. African researchers must work hard to assess the risk posed by climate change to African agriculture and devise appropriate mitigating strategies. The causes of the current food crisis need to be fully investigated and measures put in place to minimize its frequency.
5. **Commercialization of smallholder agriculture** – the majority of African farmers are smallholders and will continue to be in foreseeable future. Therefore, commercialization of small holder agriculture should be the focus of African green revolution. The research and development focus should be market oriented. The agro-processing unit should be given especial attention.

6. **Culture and values that are in the way of progress** – Africa has rich culture and values that are the envy of the world. However, we need to sort out the good and the bad and eliminate those that are blocking our path to development.
7. **Institutional and human capacity** – designing appropriate policies and strategies is a necessary but not sufficient condition to realize the green revolution vision. African needs to strengthen its institutional and human capacity to effectively implement the policies and strategies. AGRA has a clear role to play in this area!
8. **Bio-gas/fuels**: we all recognize that alternative and if possible renewable energy sources should be found. We can't continue to fall victim to ever increasing oil prices. However, diverting food crops and fertile land to bio-fuels is not acceptable. I am not an expert in this field to put forward any concrete recommendation but my gut feeling is that we should look elsewhere!
9. **Leadership and Good Governance**: The assignment of appropriate, competent and dynamic leaders at various levels of the agricultural sector is a very critical issue that we Africans should consider. Equally important is good governance at national, federal, regional state, district and community levels.

10. Establishing Factories for producing Fertilizer: As Mr. Annan pointed out, smallholder farmers could not afford to purchase inorganic fertilizer as the price of inorganic fertilizers is going up. I hope AGRA will support establishing factories for producing fertilizers in Africa. As land holding is shrinking, we need to intensify agriculture production. Such intensification needs the fertilizer as priority input. We need to establish seed companies. I hope you will join me in appreciating the initiative taken by AGRA to support African seed systems.

12. Strengthening Sanitary-Phyto-Sanitary Standards: African green revolution should focus on market oriented agricultural production. I believe AGRA is established to facilitate that process. Therefore, Strengthening Sanitary-Phyto-Sanitary Standards is a must if we want to target international markets.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr. Kofi Annan, who is the son of Africa and who has proven that Africans can be competent International Leaders. I am proud of Mr. Annan and you should be proud of your Continent.

Conference Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have learned from the conference programme that you will address several of these challenges facing African agriculture. It is my hope that your deliberations in the next few days will come up with concrete recommendations

that will assist we Africans in our effort to kick start a uniquely African green revolution!

I thank you for your attention!