

Check Against Delivery

**“Forging a Uniquely African Green Revolution”
Address by Mr. Kofi A. Annan, Chairman of AGRA
Salzburg Global Seminars
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is wonderful to be here amongst so many friends and colleagues, united in our commitment to end poverty and hunger in Africa. My warm appreciation goes to the Salzburg Global Seminar, and to Edward Mortimer in particular, for organizing and hosting this important event. In addition, I would like to thank the Institute of Development Studies and Future Agriculture for their support of this gathering and their attention to the critical issue of agricultural development in Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Chichewa people in Malawi have a saying: *Njala ndi chilombo*. It means, “Hunger is a beast”.

Today, this beast is rampaging around the world. As food prices escalate at an unprecedented rate, the food crisis in developing countries is deepening. Food prices have doubled over the last three years and the cereal bill for low-income food-deficit countries in Africa is projected to increase another 74 percent in 2007/2008. This is devastating African countries.

We have seen food riots--in Egypt, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Senegal, Burkina Faso and Madagascar. The economic, social and political costs are very serious. They threaten to undo the economic and political gains that Africa has made in recent years.

Today’s crisis is partly due to the impact of climate change which has lowered yields in major grain exporting countries such as Vietnam and Australia, thus limiting the supply to the global market. This -- combined with higher fuel prices that are driving up the costs of production and transport, and the wide-scale conversion of maize production to ethanol production – has contributed to spiraling food prices.

Global grain reserves are at their lowest in a decade. Clearly, African countries can ill afford to rely on the global market for food. But their own national agricultural production is woefully inadequate.

For decades African agriculture has been neglected, and the price for this neglect is now glaring. National grain reserves are very, very low. People are asking, “Where is the maize?” In some places, people are eating seed set aside for planting, seed that has been fumigated with fungicide.

EMBARGOED until 1600hrs CET 30 April '08

The reason for this situation is easily explained. Cereal yields in Africa are one-quarter the world average. As a result, an estimated 200 million people – one third of Africa's population – are hungry.

This is not acceptable. It is time for Africa to produce its own food and attain self-sufficiency in food production. There is no reason why Africa cannot join the league of net-food exporting regions.

Food insecurity should not be accepted as a normal state of affairs. The situation can and must be reversed.

My friends, the solution to the food crisis in Africa today is to stimulate a domestic supply response to raise food production.

If ever there was a time for an African Green Revolution, it is now.

The time for talk is over. We must implement immediate solutions for today's crisis, and do so in the context of a long-term concerted effort to transform smallholder agriculture, to increase productivity and sustainability, and end poverty and hunger.

To accomplish this we need a sustainable and uniquely African Green Revolution. This Green Revolution must take into consideration the diversity of Africa's agro-ecological environments; develop improved crop varieties for the staple food crops; protect and enrich genetic diversity; improve soil fertility; improve the environment; and assure sustainable food production.

The Alliance for a Green Revolution's (AGRA) vision, goals and programs are comprehensive and cut across the entire value chain. It covers significant investments in developing improved seeds that are adaptable; improved soil health; irrigation and water management; agricultural extension; market access; and policy development.

However, we cannot do it alone. AGRA is a platform for engaging all stakeholders on the green revolution agenda for Africa.

AGRA aims to build partnerships that pool the strengths and resources of the public and private sectors, civil society, farmer organizations, donors, scientists and entrepreneurs across the agricultural value chain.

Our work is in alignment with and supportive of the African Union's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program which sets out the bold target of achieving 6 percent annual growth rates in agriculture. If spurred by rapid agricultural productivity from a green revolution, such a growth rate can be achieved.

The African Green Revolution must learn from lessons of the Asia and Latin American green revolution. That Green Revolution began more than 50 years ago, and relied on improved seeds, fertilizer and large-scale irrigation to boost farm productivity. Government policies assisted these efforts, and succeeded in boosting rural development and alleviating widespread hunger. Indeed, it is credited with having saved the lives of hundreds of millions of people.

At the same time, problems emerged along with the successes. Overall increases in food productivity did not always benefit the poor. Environmental problems emerged as well. Vast expanses of mono-cropped wheat and rice led to biodiversity loss, and overuse of fertilizers in some places harmed the environment. These are problems we must aim to avoid.

How then is Africa, and an African Green Revolution unique?

More so than Asia, Africa has great diversity of crops and crop varieties, which we must conserve. This diversity is a result of the great variety of landscapes, soils, climates and cultures, including thousands of ethnic groups who speak no less than 800 languages and live across 53 African nations. Africa needs dozens if not hundreds of improved varieties of our indigenous and staple foods – crops better able to cope with climate change, to weather drought, pests and disease. AGRA is developing new crop varieties through conventional breeding and close collaboration between breeders and farmers to ensure that new varieties meet farmers' needs.

Also unlike Asia, farming in Africa is largely done under rain fed conditions. Less than 5% of cultivated land is irrigated in Africa, compared to over 40% in South Asia. We need to scale up wise water resource management through a variety of innovations, and reduce the continent's dependence on increasingly erratic rainfall.

Africa must also revitalize its soils. Continuous farming, without replenishing nutrients taken up with each crop, has left Africa's soils the poorest in the world. We need to increase the level of use of fertilizers – which in Africa are scarce and expensive - but fertilizers alone are not enough.

We need to ensure that our farmers understand how to use fertilizer in efficient and environmentally sound ways. We need an integrated approach to soil fertility management, one that takes into account local soil and water resources and considers how organic matter, fertilizers, farmer cropping systems, and farmer knowledge can work in concert to restore soil fertility. This will, in turn, ease the pressure to cultivate new lands and help to conserve Africa's forests.

We must ground initiatives firmly in present-day African realities, as we work toward a prosperous future.

Our inspiration comes first and foremost from Africa's farmers. Farmers like Mrs. Jemimah Barisiyoy, a mixed farmer in Uganda's Nalumuli Village. Mrs. Barisiyoy grows everything from cabbages to African eggplant, from beans to bananas. She constantly tests and experiments with new varieties, developed in collaboration with breeders at the National Agricultural Research Organization. You will find in her fields old banana trees with leaves browned by a wilt disease, standing next to young new trees, bred to resist the disease.

With an outlook that is both daring and thoughtful, Mrs. Barisiyoy, continues a long history of experimentation, adaptation and change by Africa's farmers. What she and her contemporaries need now are choices.

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The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, is working with our partners to rapidly expand the choices available to small-holder farmers.

We must start by addressing the immediate food crisis, by urging the adoption of policies that increase the supply and lower the cost of food. Food for the poor can be subsidized, import tariffs can be lowered, price controls implemented.

Governments need to put in place social protection policies that provide a safety net for the poor, to enable them to cope with economic and climatic shocks and high prices. Governments need to access food for their people, whether from their own or external resources.

At the same time, donors must respond with urgency and increase their aid to organizations such as the World Food Programme, whose budget for food aid cannot keep up with global price increases.

Such short-term interventions are essential, but they are only the beginning.

We must work with the continent's smallholder farmers to rapidly and sustainably increase food production. Farmers need access to essential inputs: high quality seeds and fertilizers – both organic and inorganic - in appropriate quantities and at affordable prices. A major effort is needed to rapidly scale up the access to improved farm inputs to farmers all across Africa.

Africa needs to develop new seed varieties, not of one or two crops but of dozens. To do so, we need more African agricultural scientists, able to apply the best of science to Africa's agricultural problems. We need stronger agricultural extensions systems, with trained agriculturalists working alongside farmers, learning and teaching to apply the best possible crop management techniques. And we need not only seeds, but also the means of replicating and selling them. Africa needs its own home-grown seed industry of small and medium size seed companies.

Access to fertilizer is equally difficult for Africa's small-scale farmers. Its cost of has skyrocketed. The fertilizer DAP, for example, has soared from about \$216 per ton on the global market in 2007 to about \$680 per ton today. African countries need to pool resources to bulk purchase imported fertilizer, while building up their own capacity to manufacture fertilizers from local materials. The Africa Fertilizer Financing Facility recently established by the African Development Bank deserves urgent support, to allow African countries to cut down on costs of importing fertilizers.

Unless farmers can access the inputs they need, the impact will be seen in empty granaries. Farmers and rural farm supply retailers, or agrodealers, need financing to jump-start and support their operations. Innovative financial arrangements that do away with prohibitive interest rates are needed. The banking system needs to direct more liquidity to agriculture. Innovative financing approaches are needed to leverage commercial banks to lend to farmers at scale and at affordable interest rates.

EMBARGOED until 1600hrs CET 30 April '08

Farmers and farm communities need options for adding value to their agricultural products through food processing. The majority of staple food crops of Africa (such as cassava, East Africa highland bananas, sweet potatoes etc) are of low value in their current form. If efforts are made to raise their yields, without creating improved markets, their prices tend to collapse. The value of staple food crops in Africa has been estimated to be around \$150 billion per year. We need to realize this potential through greater focus on processing and value addition activities.

We need to solve systemic problems in distribution and markets, in financing, infrastructure and trade. For Africa to feed its people, it needs to strengthen its local and regional markets. Our road system is a legacy of colonialism – all major roads lead to the coast. We need roads that connect countries, especially land-locked countries that struggle under the burden of outrageous transport costs.

These changes can only be realized if supported by bold pro-poor policies, both from African governments and its international partners.

These policies need to give priority attention to women, who form the majority of farmers in Africa. Improving their access to land, extension, technologies, and finance are critical to achieving an equitable green revolution.

But global policies are just as important as national policies. We need equitable global trade regimes and progress in negotiations to expand markets for African farmers. Developed countries must discontinue programs that subsidize their farmers resulting in major negative impacts on African farmers. Farm support in OECD countries amounts to US\$270 billion per year—equal to more than half the GDP of Sub-Saharan Africa, excluding South Africa. How is the African smallholder farmer to compete with that?

Finally, a Green Revolution in Africa is particularly important given the continent's disproportionate exposure to climate risks. A report last year by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that climate change could cause crop yields in some African countries to fall by 50 percent by 2020—a disastrous scenario.

The poor already struggle to survive. Climate change comes as a major additional burden: changing rainfall patterns and extended drought cause more crops to fail and livestock to perish; higher temperatures allow vector-borne disease, like malaria, to propagate and spread faster; more frequent and severe storms destroy homes and infrastructure; rising seas threaten low-lying settlements; while expanding deserts, drying rivers, lakes and other ground-water sources are squeezing the life out of once fertile regions.

An African Green Revolution must help farmers to both adapt to and mitigate climate change.

Today, momentum for investments and action to promote an African 'Green Revolution' are gaining ground: with African governments, with international and bilateral donors, with private donors, with farmer organisations, and with the private sector.

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An African Green Revolution that doubles or triples the productivity of smallholder farmers, preserves our biodiversity, and creates rural income, will play a catalytic role in ending widespread poverty and hunger, and freeing Africa from its unsustainable dependency on food imports and food aid. It will allow the continent to meet its Millennium Development Goal on chronic hunger and poverty.

Let us together arise and work together to make the African green revolution a reality. Failure is not an option. Together we will succeed!

Thank you very much.