

Check against delivery

**African Green Revolution Forum (AGRF)
Africa Food Prize**

**Statement by
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(IFAD)**

**Nairobi, Kenya
7 September 2016**

Excellencies,

Esteemed colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am deeply grateful for the honour you are bestowing on me today. I would like to express my thanks to the members of the selection committee who judged me worthy of this inaugural Africa Food Prize. I would also like to thank those individuals who so kindly nominated me. And my deepest gratitude to the rural people of Africa, my foremost partners in agriculture and development for all the years of my professional life.

2. I would also like to take a moment to **thank my wife, Juliana,** my partner and constant friend in life and work. But I also owe her an apology. Yesterday, instead of celebrating our 25th wedding anniversary, I had to leave the house at 5:30 a.m. to catch a flight on my way to Nairobi! There are not many events in life that compel you to sacrifice your silver anniversary celebrations!

3. But here I am. This Prize is the culmination of a 40-year professional career dedicated to agriculture in general, and African agriculture in particular. It comes just a few months before my retirement from IFAD. But even as I talk of retirement, this prize is also a call to action, so I hope that you won't mind if I speak open-heartedly.

Progress so far

4. There is no doubt that Africa has made progress at the policy level and that there have been major developments – these include the Maputo Declaration of 2003, the and the Malabo Declaration of 2014; and the CAADP compacts of more than 20 countries to accelerate agricultural development.

5. However, the question remains – **What do we actually have to show** for all these declarations, commitments and frameworks?

6.What are the tangible results on the ground?
Can we say there has been progress when 58 million of our children suffer from stunting and 43 per cent of our people live in extreme poverty? When Africa is the only region in the world where the number of people living in absolute poverty has actually grown since 1990 and is now 330 million?

Potential squandered

7.Africa has such enormous potential. It is a land rich in resources, in minerals, oil and gas; a continent blessed with fertile land, abundant rainfall, sunshine and a youthful population.

8.Can we say there has been progress when a region as rich as Africa is unable to feed itself?

Are we really proud to be Africans?

9.I can remember a time when countries like Brazil, Cambodia, China, India and Korea were

in deep crisis. In those years, Africa was a beacon of hope.

Where did we go wrong?

- 10.** The answer, I think, is both simple and devastating – lack of committed, visionary leadership at all levels of our society; lack of national pride, and a blind eye to greed and corruption.

- 11.** For decades, Africa has wasted opportunities and squandered its potential. Economies based on extractive industries and commodities have made a few people very rich and left hundreds of millions in hunger, poverty, and squalor. And today, when food security is of global concern, there is a growing danger that the richness of Africa's agricultural land will be recognized and exploited – but not by Africans for the benefit of Africans. But by outsiders for foreign markets.

- 12.** And if we are letting others gain from our land and resources, who is to blame? If you choose to rent out your bedroom, do you blame your tenant if you have to sleep on the veranda?
- 13.** At the same time, Africa's annual food import bill is US\$35 billion, and it could top \$100 billion by 2025.
- 14.** We all know what this means. It means that Africa is creating jobs in other countries – in Europe, Asia and the Americas – to grow and process our food when millions of our young people are unemployed and our region suffers the highest youth working poverty rates in the world. This is money that should be fuelling Africa's growth and creating wealth, employment and opportunity.

Investing in rural people

Ladies and gentlemen,

- 15.** In my years as the head of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, I have travelled the world.
- 16.** I have travelled the length and breadth of our continent, from Senegal to Zanzibar, from Rabat to Cape Town, and I know that our continent is teeming with opportunity. I have met with all levels of government, civil society and the private sector, to spread the message that agricultural development can change lives and lead to economic prosperity when it is centred on smallholder farmers.
- 17.** And I have seen over and over again that when we invest in rural people – particularly in women – it generates huge dividends. For we know, no nation has transformed without giving women the same rights and opportunities as men.

18. I don't think I need to convince anyone here today about the importance of small-scale agriculture to food security and nutrition, to economic growth, to social well-being and to vibrant, cohesive communities.

19. But agricultural development alone does not transform nations.

Transformation requires good governance, transparency and accountability. It requires strong institutions, the rule of law, and the protection of the rights of the most vulnerable. Only then can the benefits of agricultural development be fully realized.

20. And change cannot be imposed from outside, it must be cultivated from within. As I have said before: Every tree, every plant, must be fully rooted in its own soil to flourish. And it is the same with nations.

21. Africa's transformation must begin and end here, on our own African soil – not at meetings and conferences in the capitals of our development partners.

African success stories

- 22.** All said, I remain the ultimate optimist. And I am happy to say that we are seeing the beginnings of that transformation. As we celebrate today's Award, let me highlight a few of the remarkable success stories I have witnessed.
- 23.** Just last month I was in Liberia and Sierra Leone - two countries that have suffered multiple shocks from civil war, Ebola, and the effects of falling commodity prices. Yet I met Africans from all levels of society who are looking to the future, who see a new era opening up, and who have hopes and dreams to change their lives, and the world.
- 24.** From my own country, Nigeria, a couple of weeks ago, I received a letter from a young bee-keeper named Mr Kinsley. With the help of an IFAD-supported project, Mr Kinsley had

gone from having a few beehives to almost 400. He was writing to thank IFAD and to tell me that his honey had won a competition and was now registered for export to the EU.

- 25.** I am also inspired by a project here in Kenya, where 120,000 farmers are being trained in dairy production. By working together and ensuring quality and hygiene, these smallholders have been able to sell to the big national milk processors, increasing their own income and nutrition.
- 26.** In fact, the Kenya dairy industry is a smallholder success story, with 80 per cent of Kenya's milk provided by over one million smallholder farmers.
- 27.** It is stories like these that give me hope. And it is also very heartening to see how African institutions with the right leadership are taking charge of African development, FARA, the Africa Rice Center, the Food, Agriculture and Research Policy Network

(FANRPAN) and the African Development Bank, to name just a few.

28. We also have fine examples from science, development, business and industry – in Monty Patrick Jones, the father of NERICA rice; in Akinwumi Adesina of the AfDB; in Agnes Kalibata of AGRA; in Strive Masiyiwa of Econet and Aliku Dangote of the Dangote Group; and in philanthropists like Mo Ibrahim. We need more people of their caliber.

29. Africa can feed itself. Of this I am sure. And I look forward to the day when I can say that Africa is feeding itself – and doing so with the full involvement of our continent’s smallholder farmers.

30. But let me be clear. It will not be yesterday's generation of farmers who are on the average, 55-60 years old. It will be the young women and men of today -- with their energy, creativity and drive -- who will need to feed the Africa of tomorrow.

- 31.** To succeed, they will need opportunities. They will need inspiration. They will need resources. And above all, they will need hope.
- 32.** It is hopelessness that deprives the human spirit of the will to survive and leads to desperation and acts of destruction.
- 33.** Those of us who have been fortunate to achieve so much over a rich and full life time must now do everything in our power to provide our young people with opportunity and hope.
- 34.** We owe it to the 370 million young Africans who will enter the labour market by 2030 -- the young entrepreneurs and leaders of an emerging Africa who hold our future in their hands. And we owe it to our hard-working and resilient rural women - mothers and wives, sisters and daughters - to whom I dedicate this Prize.
- 35.** With this Prize, I pledge to continue to support them - by coaching, mentoring and

inspiring our younger generation in building a better and brighter future for this continent, our Africa!

I thank you all!