

Welcoming Address to the 2012 African Green Revolution Forum

September 27, 2012

Arusha, Tanzania

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Your Excellency President Kikwete and other respected Heads of State here today; Mr. Annan; Honourable Ministers; Melinda Gates and all Distinguished Guests and Participants: my warmest welcome to this very important forum.

It is an extraordinary privilege to be here with you as together we explore ways to scale up investment and innovation in support of sustainable agricultural growth and food security across the African continent. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Tanzanian Government for hosting this Forum, and for its enthusiastic participation in this on-going, action-oriented dialogue focused on transforming Africa's agriculture.

All of us here today understand the critical importance of agriculture to Africa's future, and how integral it is to our diverse cultures and to our collective socioeconomic and nutritional wellbeing. We are also aware of how African agriculture – long constrained by misguided policies, underinvestment, and at times outright neglect – has emerged as the foremost concern within the global development community.

Agriculture's role as the driver of broader economic growth is now being reflected in the policies and investments being made by African governments, international development organisations, private foundations and, very importantly, by a rapidly growing number of private sector agribusinesses.

Having recently joined AGRA, I am impressed by the substantial progress this young organization has made in just five years. I am also impressed with the progress achieved since the 2010 AGRF by the stakeholders – both public and private – who participated in that, as well as earlier forums.

Many of those same stakeholders are here today to build on that progress and look for ways to really accelerate change in Africa's agricultural sector.

And while we are a diverse group – governments, private companies, donor agencies, multilateral institutions, farmer organisations, and civil society – we share a fundamental belief. We believe that smallholder farmers – who account for well over 80 per cent of Africa's staple food production – are key to unlocking the continent's agricultural potential.

We have all seen from our different vantage points that investments that target smallholders are yielding impressive results in terms of increased productivity and incomes for African farmers.

AGRA's investment in small- to medium-sized seed companies is a good example of the kind of intervention that helps smallholders. With our support to 60 small, African-owned seed companies, an additional 40,000 metric tonnes per year of certified seed were produced in 2011, more than a 50 per cent increase over 2010.

In terms of food security, this means the availability of an additional 4 million tonnes of staple crops. The production of this essential agricultural input will continue to rise as these small-scale seed companies grow, and others enter the market.

AGRA has a strong track record in working with international and African institutions to mobilise investments in smallholder agriculture.

Working with our many partners, we have helped to create and strengthen almost 15,000 small-scale agro-dealer businesses, which are so important to improving smallholder productivity by increasing the availability of improved seed and more affordable fertiliser, and helping to open up and sustain access to input and output markets.

There is another important belief those of us here today share and one that must be at the forefront of our discussions over the next two days. Small-scale farming is a business, and it is time that it be recognised as such.

Subsistence farming should not be seen as an acceptable way of life, and governments and private sector organisations must invest in the development of an African agribusiness sector in which smallholders can participate and benefit – rather than produce just enough, if they are lucky, to keep their families fed.

Smallholders can increase their incomes only if they are better integrated into competitive markets and have post-harvest opportunities to add value to their produce.

The agenda for this forum highlights the continuing need for major investments in African agriculture.

We must develop ever more creative ways to scale up what works, and to foster agricultural productivity at all levels. Small- to medium-scale agribusinesses (including smallholder farming operations) must receive the bulk of our attention.

But we should not forget the importance of linking smallholders with larger-scale agro-enterprises. They can more easily bear the risk of testing and demonstrating new production technologies, as well as improve market access for small-scale producers.

Private and public sector institutions must join forces to further stimulate Africa's agribusiness sector. Governments must fashion policy environments conducive to private investment.

They must also invest in agricultural research and development, as well as the rural infrastructure needed to improve productivity, marketing and competitiveness at all levels.

But to help ensure the effectiveness, sustainability and predictability of those investments, we need to encourage strong public/private partnerships – such as Grow Africa, for example – as well as global collaboration in agriculture.

The creation of the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition is a major step in the right direction. Its aim is closely aligned with our own: to create new public/private partnerships focused on improving the productivity and profitability of African agriculture.

So I encourage all of us to think big, think creatively, and share openly while we are here, and after we return home.

All constructive points of view are welcome in our deliberations, and I hope to see the formation of new, action-oriented alliances and partnerships as we move forward, as well as the strengthening of those already in place.

Together, we can achieve the agricultural transformation we all want, and that Africa so desperately needs.

Let me leave you with this African proverb: **Fine words do not produce food.**