

Accelerating Beyond the Tipping Point

Opening Remarks delivered by
Mr. Kofi A. Annan

Chairman, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA)

African Green Revolution Forum
27 September 2012
Arusha, Tanzania

1. President Kikwete, Melinda Gates, Ministers and Ambassadors, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen – good morning.
2. It is an honour to be here with you again at this important forum whose sole purpose is to unleash the potential of Africa's agricultural sector, reduce poverty and increase food and nutrition security.
3. This is particularly important today as the global food system is under acute and rising pressure. And it is Africa which is most affected by the sharp rise of food prices and other basic commodities.
4. Africa is blessed with 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land. Plus there is huge potential to increase existing yields. Indeed, Africa is part of the solution. The continent can and must be part of the global food security system.
5. Ladies and Gentlemen, I am struck both by the diversity of organizations represented here and by the depth of expertise and level of resources that you command.
6. Gathered in this hall are African leaders, CEOs of corporations large and small, representatives of international development agencies and private foundations, commercial banks, farming and many others – all with a vital role to play in transforming agriculture across this continent.
7. But most important are the farmers, who must be at the heart of the uniquely African Green Revolution. We can't increase food production at the speed and scale we need without mobilizing the continent's all-too-often neglected army of small-holders.
8. Their needs and realizing their potential must remain at heart of all our discussions.
9. It is also very fitting that we are meeting here in Tanzania. This is a country which has taken major strides in unleashing the potential of its agricultural sector for the benefit of its citizens and wider world.

10. I therefore would like to congratulate President Kikwete for his strong commitment and his important achievements in agriculture.
11. It is how we expand and build on this success here in Tanzania and across the continent which is the goal of our discussions.
12. Ladies and gentlemen, in my closing remarks in 2010, I declared that we had arrived at the “tipping point” in the challenge of scaling up Africa’s Green Revolution.
13. We can take pride in what has been achieved over the last two years. There has been a rising level of interest and action to improve the agricultural policy environment.
14. Public and private investment in agriculture increased, due to better policies and regulatory measures.
15. We have seen greater small-holder access to improved, higher yielding seed of stable foods, and to more affordable fertilizer and better techniques for its application, such as microdosing.
16. Significant investments have taken place in large breadbasket areas in Ghana, Mali, Mozambique and here in Tanzania, as well as in several agricultural growth corridors.
17. New partnerships have sprung up such as the Grow Africa initiative. Small-holder access to more efficient input and output markets has improved.
18. And we have also seen major investments in Africa’s rural infrastructure and key port facilities by governments, the donor community, and private companies.
19. These achievements convince me that we have indeed begun to accelerate beyond the tipping point.
20. We have proof that investments in agriculture work. But – as everyone here understands – there is also no room for complacency.
21. For we cannot afford to lose momentum if we are to increase food and nutrition security, reduce poverty and drive economic growth and development across the continent.
22. Delivering these ambitions requires action on every front and by every partner.
23. We have seen, for example, significant promises of support for Africa’s agriculture from developed countries and private sector organizations, most

recently through the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition. Often promises are broken. But these must be kept despite the uncertainty and fiscal challenges facing many developed countries.

24. In turn, African leaders must uphold their end of the bargain by continuing to increase investment in agriculture and accelerating the implementation of their country-led plans to achieve food and nutrition security.
25. The signatories to the 2003 Maputo Declaration committed to investing at least 10 percent of their national budgets in agriculture – the minimum considered necessary to achieve the goals of the African Union’s Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).
26. This threshold remains vitally important. African governments need to step up efforts and put in place policies that increase public and private investment in sustainable agriculture, inspire innovation, and reduce risk.
27. We need to strengthen agricultural value chains – especially those involving staple foods – and boost private sector development and participation. New vibrant public-private partnerships must be created and international investments must be aligned with Africa’s priorities.
28. And our focus on improving the productivity and profitability of smallholder farmers – most of whom are women – cannot waver. They are the ones who put food on our tables. They are the ones who care for our land and water resources. In the end, they will be the ones to propel the economic growth and development of Africa in the 21st century.
29. Creating opportunities for small-holder producers, enabling them to transition from subsistence farming to running their farms as businesses, and to market their surpluses. This is what we need.
30. We also have to ensure they are well organized and given the knowledge and support to play their full part in the transformation of Africa’s food system through access to seeds, fertilizers and other resources.
31. They also need integrated soil health management practices to maximize their harvest, better rural infrastructure and ready access to efficient markets for their produce. And they also must have better access to more affordable credit, as do the small-scale agribusinesses that add value to their efforts.
32. But while improving the productivity of smallholders must remain our primary focus, larger farms also have a critical role to play. These enterprises can test new technologies and provide opportunities for aggregating smallholder

production for market. The benefits of supporting small farmers must be emphasized to commercial farmers.

33. In fact, all African farmers – large and small – must be at the heart of agricultural transformation across the continent. It is the combination of practical local knowledge and skills, strengthened by high-quality agricultural research, that will enable us to accelerate beyond the tipping point.
34. I encourage increased investment from the public and private sector in research and development, as well as cutting-edge technology. New crops and techniques are critical to boosting harvests and ensuring land can stay productive despite climate change.
35. Ladies and gentlemen, our ability to achieve food and nutrition security, both in Africa and globally, depends on catalyzing a sustainable Green Revolution across the continent.
36. Ours – the African Green Revolution – must be a revolution that draws on the lessons from past efforts of this kind in Asia and Latin America. We need a “climate smart” agriculture in Africa that increases the productivity of land, labour, and capital invested in farming, and strengthens the resilience of farmers to climate change. Negative social and environmental impacts must be avoided.
37. But while transforming our agricultural sector, we have to be aware of recent large-scale land acquisitions which risk giving away fertile arable land for other use such as the production of bio-fuels.
38. I also urge leaders for more long-term leadership and vision – both are crucial for successfully managing the transformation of agriculture in the face of a changing climate without hindering the natural resource base.
39. There are also opportunities for Africa to benefit from innovations in agriculture and information and communication technologies. These new technologies appeal to the younger generation and give them opportunities to play a greater part in the agricultural revolution.
40. And it is this new generation of Africans – male and female – with their energy and entrepreneurial spirit that needs to contribute to create a sustained transformation.
41. Six years ago, we created an African organization – the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) – to help deliver this aspiration. The founding members of the Alliance were the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and I am happy that Melinda is with us today as a partner and special guest.

42. I am pleased to say, thanks to the efforts of many people and partners, AGRA is now working in 17 sub-Saharan countries. More than 330 new crop varieties developed by AGRA grantees have been released to farmers.
43. Over 380,000 hectares of depleted soils have been rejuvenated during the past three years. The adoption of fertilizer micro-dosing is spreading quickly as well.
44. AGRA has reached more than one million smallholder farmers directly through training on improved storage systems and better post-harvest handling.
45. They also now enjoy better access to structured trading systems, including access to current market prices via cellphones.
46. The profit margins of these smallholders have increased significantly, in some cases by as much as 50 percent.
47. In addition, AGRA's agri-finance initiatives – which involve a number of partners here today– set the stage for a rapid increase in the availability of more affordable loans to agriculture. Major initiatives are being implemented by the Kenyan and Nigerian Governments, as well as by IFAD. We are confident that these initiatives will spread quickly to other countries as well.
48. With support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Farmer Organization Support Center in Africa (FOSCA) is helping farmers to join forces, to strengthen their purchasing power and ability to negotiate good prices.
49. Working alone on a small plot, a farmer can do only so much; working with her neighbors, she has power. This message underpins all the work of AGRA but also applies more widely to all of us here today. Because together we have power.
50. Transformative change will come only through strategic, results-oriented partnerships.
51. Every organization represented here is part of Africa's agricultural transformation.
52. Farmers' organizations and civil society are on the front lines, advocating for "best-fit" interventions across the agricultural value chain.
53. Stronger local seed companies, thousands of new and well-trained agro-dealers, and novel post-harvest processing and marketing enterprises are all generating important economic opportunities.

54. The “10 percent club” is still small, but with your support and action it will grow, and the chronic underfunding of African agriculture will become a thing of the past.
55. And as we achieve food and nutrition security here at home, we will be able to join in providing long-term global food and nutrition security.
56. This is the challenge for this generation of Africans – our generation.
57. Let us rededicate ourselves to that dream, a dream of a more prosperous and equitable future for all Africans.

[END]