

Goodwill Message

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Chairperson

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Consortium of 15 Centers supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), I am deeply honored by your kind invitation to participate in the Africa Food and Nutrition Security Day organized under the theme “*Investing in Intra-Africa Trade for Food and Nutrition Security*,” by the African Union in partnership with key institutions that play a strategic role in Africa’s development.

This theme resonates deeply with the mission of the CGIAR, which is a global research-for-development partnership that seeks to reduce poverty and hunger, improve human health and nutrition, and boost ecosystem resilience. For over four decades, CGIAR has been a strong partner in Africa’s development, providing improved technologies, such as the NERICA varieties developed by

AfricaRice, that target the crucial agricultural sector, benefiting poor farmers, creating wealth, and protecting the environment.

Today's event is undoubtedly very significant for Africa, which is the continent most affected by hunger and food scarcity in the world. In fact, today's event coincides with a historic milestone as 31st October 2011 marks the day when the world population reaches 7 billion. Africa is the second most populated continent, with around 1 billion people, or 15% of the world's population.

By 2050, the population of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) alone is expected to reach 1.5 to 2 billion. The FAO has estimated that the global food production must increase by 70% in order to feed the world population in 2050, while in developing countries, food production must double. This is a daunting challenge in itself, without taking into account the climate change factor.

If we take the case of rice, which has become critical for food security and political stability in Africa, the continent's production has been unable to keep pace with increases in demand triggered by population growth and rapid urbanization. Nearly 40% of the rice consumed in the continent is imported and Africa has become a big player in international rice markets, accounting for 32% of global imports.

With such high reliance on imports, the continent is highly exposed to international market shocks with serious consequences for its food security and political stability as witnessed in several African cities during the 2008 food crisis.

In 2007, we had forewarned the Council of Ministers of AfricaRice member countries about the looming rice crisis and had recommended policies that would help increase regional rice production and reduce dependence on rice imports, reducing SSA's exposure to global rice market shocks.

Subsequently several member countries have adopted some of the key policy measures we have recommended to support the rice sector such as accelerating the rehabilitation of irrigated rice areas; and providing subsidies on seeds, fertilizers and farm machinery. Countries are also strengthening the institutional capacity of their agricultural extension and research systems.

The domestic production responses to supportive government policies adopted during and after the 2008 food crisis were remarkable in several countries in SSA, particularly in West Africa ^{which is why} where paddy production increased consecutively by 26.9% in 2008, 5.3% in 2009 and 9.7% in 2010 and several countries across SSA registered double digit rice production growth. ~~since 2008~~

This is a step in the right direction but governments still need to do more in order to significantly reduce dependence on rice imports for national food

security. Based on evidence from our research we believe that Africa has the potential to not only become self-sufficient in rice, but also to become a net exporter onto the world market.

Unlike Asia and Europe, where the availability of potential land and water for agriculture is declining, Africa still has a large reservoir of underutilized agricultural land and water resources. Research has also shown that domestic rice can be competitive.

In addition, improved varieties such as the upland and lowland NERICAs and the Sahel varieties for irrigated rice farming as well as improved crop management techniques are available in Africa. NERICAs are today planted on more than 700,000 ha across Africa, showing positive impacts on rice productivity and farmers' livelihoods and contributing to achieving the Millennium Development Goals in the continent.

However to have maximum impact, we firmly believe that an intelligent combination of four factors is essential: appropriate technologies, good infrastructure, favorable economic and institutional environment, and the preservation of natural resources.

As part of this, AfricaRice has made sustained efforts to reach out to the entire range of rice stakeholders – from policy-makers to the actors of the rice value chain.

It has been actively participating in discussions with ECOWAS on regional integration, such as the viability of creating a grain reserve stock for West Africa that would help stabilize rice prices, the development of a regional rice development strategy, the harmonization of rice import policies and the viability of bulk purchase of rice from the international market. Similar activities are envisaged for the other regions.

As an association of member states, AfricaRice is proud to have been recognized by the African Union as the Center of Excellence for Rice Research in Africa and an MoU was signed recently. It is continuing to strengthen its working relationships with ^{ECOWAS} FARA and the sub-regional research organizations (CORAF/WECARD, ASARECA, SADC/FANR) and its strategy is aligned with the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP).

On behalf of AfricaRice in particular and the CGIAR as a whole, I would like to conclude by reaffirming our full commitment to working with all the partners to fulfill the goals of the Africa Food and Nutrition Security Day and our shared vision of a hunger-free, healthy and prosperous Africa.

Thank you.