



NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency  
Agence de Planification et de Coordination du NEPAD

## Remarks by the Chief Executive Officer, NPCA

### On the Occasion of the commemoration of the Africa Food and Nutrition Security Day

October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

H.E. Chairperson of the AUC, H.E. Jean Ping

Hon. Ato Tefera Derebew, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Excellency Mme Rhoda Peace Tumusiime – the AUC Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture

Amb. Isaac Mbuya Munlo – Ambassador of Malawi to Ethiopia, AU and ECA

Amb. Haile Gebreselassie, Goodwill Ambassador

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

All Development Partners

Distinguished Speakers,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning!

Let me start by conveying greetings from the Chief Executive Officer of the NEPAD Agency, H.E. Dr. Ibrahim Assane Mayaki, who is unable to be with us today due to other commitments that he has to attend to. I thank you very much for the privilege accorded to the NEPAD Agency to address this audience on the occasion of the commemoration of the **Africa Food and Nutrition Security Day**. The year 2011 marks the first year that this significant Day is being commemorated on the continent following its launch in Lilongwe, Malawi in October 2010 by H.E. Prof. Bingu Wa Mutharika, the President of the Republic of Malawi.

Although not a comfortable fact to face, after more than half a century of independence, Africa is struggling with massive food and nutrition security challenges that prevent it and its people from reaching their full developmental potential. For instance, 240 million people in Africa are undernourished (consume less than the required recommended 2100kcal/day); 5 million children die of malnutrition every year. This is equivalent to a child dying every 6 seconds. Malnutrition is the leading

cause of death (35% of child deaths per year) and disability. Over 50 million African children suffer from chronic malnutrition which translates to about 40-60% of these children being stunted (low height for age). Over 40% of pregnant women are malnourished, and this has a direct consequence on the child's health and development as well as the mother's survival and health, as it is estimated that 50% of maternal deaths are due to malnutrition.

Hunger leads to a 6-10% loss in GDP as a result of low labour productivity of which 2.7-4.2% due to iron deficiency anaemia alone. Malnutrition can lead to a significant loss of earning potential. Further consequences of malnutrition include birth defects, maternal deaths, childhood mortality, blindness, susceptibility to disease, low IQ, academic performance and productivity as noted above. Generally, a vicious cycle of malnutrition leads to intergenerational poverty, economic deprivation and more malnutrition.

Having said that, I am pleased to point out that Africa on the other hand has made a lot of positive strides and hence there is no need to despair. As NEPAD celebrates 10 years this year, we look back with some clear satisfaction since there is visible progress on Africa's development agenda. For instance, to-date, close to 30 African countries have completed their CAADP round table processes and reviewed their country investment plans. About one third of the Member States are on track towards achieving MDG1 of reducing poverty and halving hunger by 2015.

NEPAD as a development framework to accelerate the implementation of programmes and projects on the ground has proven to be one of the continent's best initiatives that all development partners rally around in a concerted, coordinated and not fragmented fashion. The development community today understands that for example in order to support agriculture development, they must align with the Africa Comprehensive Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), and the same applies for other sectoral agendas whether its infrastructure, science and technology, education, health etc. This year's theme "Investing in intra-Africa trade for Food and Nutrition Security" is in line with the theme for the 2012 January AU Summit, and is also linked to five major sub themes which relate to AU-NEPAD's food and nutrition flagship programmes, namely:

- **Dietary Diversity;** Considering that the majority of African people's diet is mostly starch based and lacks the essential vitamins and minerals for optimum health and productivity, the NEPAD Agency is undertaking several activities to improve horticulture production, fisheries, and livestock to enhance access to micronutrients
- **Home Grown School Feeding;** This flagship programme is being rolled out in 12 African countries with a view to stimulate local small holder farm production, ready markets through schools while improving the food and nutrition security, school attendance, retention and performance among school pupils.
- **Food Fortification;** Currently, with some of the NEPAD partners, specifically the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), we have initiated commercial level food fortification programmes in 14 countries. Commodities that are being fortified include maize flour, wheat flour, edible vegetable oils and margarines, and condiments. In addition to commercial fortification, we are also promoting home based fortification using micro-nutrient sprinkles and powders.

- **Maternal and Childs’ Health and Nutrition;** There are several evidence based high impact interventions that NEPAD in collaboration with partners like UNICEF, WFP, WHO, Save the Children, and others, are implementing targeting the window of opportunity of the first 1000 Days. These programmes include the protection, promotion and support of optimal Breastfeeding, adequate complementary feeding (timing, amount, animal source foods, fortified foods); Integration of Food Security, appropriate management of infections, Social Protection & Education.
- **Policy Review, Programmed design and Capacity Development** to support specific interventions at Regional Economic Communities and Member States level.

Today as per a report by the United Nations, the world population has hit the 7 Billion mark. What does this mean and why does it matter? The statistics are very well known; about a billion people worldwide still go hungry and malnourished, and a significant share of these people is in Sub-Sahara Africa, where it is estimated that a child dies of hunger and malnutrition every 6 seconds. A growth in population naturally has serious implications for human and economic growth and the capacity to provide requisite food and nutrition security to the most vulnerable, especially in the backdrop of weakening global economies and resultants financial crises. The reality is that poor people are squeezed into spending even more of their meagre incomes on food, more than 80% of their income, which because of obvious reasons, would be food of the poorest quality.

In taking the Decision in Kampala, Uganda last year to commemorate the Africa Food and Nutrition Day annually on October 30<sup>th</sup>, African leaders have made yet another bold step towards ensuring that food insecurity and malnutrition are comprehensively tackled with renewed vigour by all relevant sectors, stakeholders and partners. What is indeed clear is that in the long term, the best way to conquer malnutrition is to promote a nutrition sensitive growth strategy that links with intra-African trade.

Such a strategy could increase demand for and access to nutritious foods all along the value chain, mitigate the health and nutrition risks associated with agriculture and breed more nutritious foods and promote diversification of agriculture into high value commodities such as dairy, horticulture, fish, and livestock. In other words, the type of agricultural growth that places nutrition at the centre; Investments in rural infrastructure could help ensure that this growth indeed contributes to improved nutrition.

Lessons learned from developed countries are that most of them have first developed their local markets before investing in international markets. Intra-trade represents 40% of American trade, 63% in the European Community, while it does not exceed 10% in Africa. 40% of the population of Africa are trapped in land-locked countries, where weak trade development is a result of ineffective national and regional policies. The result of this is poor access to adequate foods, leading to low nutritional status, high disease burden and compromised productivity, and slow national economic growth. Nutrition is both an input and output of development.

Therefore, African countries should start relying more on local production and on each other, in order to achieve food and nutrition security, which can be boosted by structural reforms that can play a greater role in national, regional and continental integration.

Going step by step will require first, restructuring national and intra-regional trade policies, relying on agricultural-based complementarities and capacity building in order to increase productivity, income and further investment in order to consolidate infrastructure base that will allow gaining competitiveness for further expansion to inter-regional and intra-African trade.

The Africa Food and Nutrition Security Day provides one of the best platforms and rallying points for getting leaders and practitioners to best understand nutrition as a development imperative and therefore to design policies and implement programmes in a manner that halts the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition dead on its tracks. Therefore we need to shine a spotlight on nutrition, and to target those windows of opportunity such the first 1000 Days from conception to the first two years of life as this provides biggest impact on saving lives and improving lifelong cognitive and physical capacity and enhanced productive capacity in adulthood.

At global level as well as right here in Africa, there is strong momentum to accelerate the implementation of proven interventions and scale up actions at individual AU Member State level. This requires strong and effective partnerships. In this regard, we as the AU and NPCA are grateful for the continued support that we receive from our development partners in planning and delivering projects and programmes to improve food and nutrition security.

But in order to ensure that we follow through with the determination to end the scourge of hunger and malnutrition and to instil a heightened sense of accountability for food and nutrition security by the African leadership, and across all key sectors we need to do more. With this recognition for doing more, the NPCA is developing a “Score Card” and working on a comprehensive Africa Annual Report on Food and Nutrition Security. This Score Card and Report will not only act as information and advocacy pieces, but will act as a tool to spur urgent action to address the challenges of malnutrition across Africa in a sustainable way.

It is only through such a robust accountability mechanism that we all can recognize and appreciate the food security and nutrition gaps and therefore act appropriately to design and deliver solutions in a timely manner where most needed. It is a way to make sure that Africa’s leaders and citizens include human disaster preparedness and prevention, and therefore puts in place preventive and mitigation measures to avert human suffering and loss of lives over calamities that are very preventable such as hunger and malnutrition. We anticipate that the maiden Food and Nutrition Security Score Card and report will be ready by 2012 for presentation to the AU Summit and other key forums.

We believe that countries must take the lead in commemorating this important day. I am happy to confirm that South Africa successfully commemorated its national Food and Nutrition Security Day on 27 and 28 October in Midrand, Johannesburg. Their commemoration included high level officials and participants from the provinces, various development partners and experts from other African countries. This is the spirit this Nutrition Day must be viewed and staged; collaboratively for sharing lessons and good practices that must be scaled up. As we have gathered here, various countries are commemorating this day today.

As I conclude my remarks Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me iterate some key points that will usher in the way and point to doing business unusual vis-a-vis food and nutrition;

The first is that tackling malnutrition should be a much higher priority for leaders everywhere;

Secondly, proven solutions already exist and need to be replicated and taken to scale, the era of ‘pilots’ is long gone,

Thirdly, the private sector is a valuable partner in the fight against malnutrition whereas civil society remains our most important voice of conscience.

Fourthly, institutional innovations and partnerships are crucial, and therefore ensuring a good functional nutrition system, organization and management at the highest level is the most important ingredient.

It is my singular belief that every sector must be held accountable for their performance and delivery of food and nutrition with very clear indicators monitored and evaluated annually.

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, let us all remember that food security and sound nutrition are the foundations of Survival, Health, Productivity, and National economic growth. This year's Africa Nutrition Day calls for Increasing the volume of high value and nutritious foods, enhancing national and regional markets and cross-border trade, enhancing regional and local emergency response and capacity to deal with crises, and last but not least, stepping up efforts to prioritise harmonisation of SPS frameworks. The time is now to take action.

Finally, I take this opportunity to further encourage all member states to embrace this day and fully utilize it as an opportunity for enhanced multisectoral planning and coordination for improved food and nutrition security. Come 2015 we must as a continent be able to show progress on achieving the Millennium Development Goals. And nutrition remains the key that unlocks the door to achieving the MDG's and other targets.

Thank you.