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Key note Address at the South African Food and Nutrition Day Celebrations

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by

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“Why should there be hunger and deprivation in any land and in any city, at any table, when man has the resources and the scientific know-how to provide all mankind with the basic necessities of life. There is no deficit in human resources. The deficit is in human will”.
Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King’s words are apt for Africa. Why should there be hunger and poverty in Africa, in our countries and in our communities? Africa has a huge repertoire of natural resources to feed its population of one billion and Africa has the potential to feed the World. Africa is not short of scientific and Technological know-how, Africa is not short of the required human resources to feed itself. What Africa lacks is the political will.

There is however an emerging tide in unlocking this political will. There is clearly a wind of change sweeping across Africa. Africa is a re-energised continent where there is hope in the horizon for renewal of growth. As the Mackenzie Report has observed; the ‘African Lion’ economies are on the move. After decades of stagnation, the continent’s economies experienced a marked acceleration in growth during the past ten years, with real GDP increasing by 4.9 percent annually between 2000 and 2008, compared with 2.4 percent in the 1990s. The magnitude of this growth story, while broadly understood, is startling in its specifics and the opportunity it presents:

Take a look at Ghana where over the past fifteen years the economy has grown by a robust 5 per cent per year translating into an annual growth - per person – of 2.5 per cent. This is well above the global average of 1 per cent per annum. Take also Mozambique where GDP has grown a remarkable 7.5 per cent for 15 years. And there is Mali which despite being a land-locked desert country continues to achieving a GDP growth rate of 5.5 per cent per year since the mid 1990s. In Tanzania economic growth has reached a robust 5.9 percent leading to an increase in agriculture since 1996.

These countries are part of a growing and dynamic group of emerging African economies that are providing hope for the new and future Africa.

Yet in the midst of this euphoria and hope there is concern on how the benefits of The Lion Economies will trickle to the majority of the African population. There is concern that Food and Nutrition Security for millions of Africans remains a serious obstacle towards the attainment of the broad socio economic transformation of Africa. The glaring abysmal images of emaciated children, men and women from the Horn of Africa are a sharp reminder that not all is well in this continent of Africa and the blame can be placed squarely on the doorsteps of us as Africans.

The days are gone when we can continue to blame outsiders for the glaring levels of poverty and hunger that has continued to be an affront to the continent. Africa cannot continue and should not continue to be designated as the home of hunger and poverty in a sea of global economic prosperity. The eradication of poverty and hunger in the continent is within the grasp of African leaders. It is doable and it must be achieved. China, for a period of less than two decades has managed to drastically reduce the numbers of its poor people. Africa has the capacity to do the same.

Change is certainly not only within our grasp, but change it is also beginning to take shape. This change and hope has arisen within the context of new voices that are emerging at a continental level. A new crop of African leaders have emerged who are keen to de-link from the past African narratives of wars, famine, and bad economic and democratic governance. This crop of African leaders is a testimony to the growing African momentum in support of a new development architecture for Africa as embodied in 'The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)' which reflects that new hope... a new development thinking coming from Africa.

CAADP, Charting the African Food and Nutrition Security agenda

When the African leaders endorsed NEPAD ten years ago, they were sending a powerful statement to the global community that they were prepared to change the development gear by moving away from the "Business as usual" approach. They were committed to a reformist agenda that would put Africa on a path towards sustainable socio-economic transformation. They were sending a powerful message that as Africans they have a responsibility in crafting their own development pathways rather than relying on foreign capitals and thinkers to craft a development agenda for them.

NEPAD therefore arose as a new development paradigm, as a new 'African consensus' rather than a 'Washington consensus'. Within the context of NEPAD, Agriculture and

Food Security was positioned on top of the continental development agenda. CAADP was in this regard endorsed and adopted in 2003 as a framework for restoration of Agriculture growth and Food and Security in Africa. CAADP has since 2003 emerged as a rallying point for the renewal and transformation of the African Agriculture sector and the renewal of food and nutrition security.

Regional Economic Communities and National Governments have now internalised CAADP with 29 countries having signed their CAADP Compacts. We have over the past 4 years seen a re-energized commitment towards addressing the challenges of hunger and poverty reduction in Africa. We have seen the evolution of a process akin to a social movement where Civil Society Organizations, Public institutions and the Public Sector are subscribing towards a common narrative in saying that poverty; hunger and malnutrition are an unacceptable face in the continent.

The Significance of the Africa Food and Nutrition Day

- **Advocacy Platform**

The decision of the African Heads of State and Government in establishing an Africa Food and Nutrition Day provided additional impetus towards the acceleration of CAADP goals. We see the designation and establishment of an Africa Food and Nutrition Security Day as a platform where National Governments will be conscientized towards the debilitating and grossly unacceptable circumstances of human misery that continues to manifest itself in close to a third of the African population who are chronically undernourished.

- **Accountability Platform**

We see this as a platform which will hold National Governments accountable to the citizenry by responding to the cries of those who have continued to wallow in the quagmires of destitution, poverty hunger and malnutrition. We see also the African Nutrition Day as a platform where models of good practice will be showcased. Indeed, we cannot deny that Africa has made positive inroads in addressing the challenges of Food Security and malnutrition in certain countries. A good case in point is Ghana, one of the few Sub-Saharan countries that is likely to achieve the MDG goal number 1.

- **Peer Learning and Review of Food and Nutrition Security Platform**

We also see the Africa Food and Nutrition Day as an important platform for Peer Learning and Review. There is no question that we have learnt an awful lot in addressing the challenges of food and nutrition security at the continental, country and

regional levels. However, if these experiences are to become meaningful, it will be critical that we put in place a mechanism for regular monitoring and evaluation of progress. It will be equally critical in this regard that we put in place a mutual accountability system where both the drivers of the food security agenda and the beneficiaries themselves are held accountable.

One of the challenges of the current development architecture in Africa is that our national governments seem to be accountable to development partners instead of being accountable to their people- the citizenry. The expectation in the agriculture sector would be on calling governments to be accountable to the farmers- and not FAO, the World Bank or any other development agencies that might be financing the agricultural sector.

On the part of the development partners too, there is a tendency in behaving as if they are only accountable to their governments. This is where a paradigm shift is required. Both African national governments and the development partners should be accountable to the people on the ground. They should be accountable to the ordinary farmers in the rural community, men and women and children. It would seem therefore that there is need for the development of a score card at the local level that speaks to progress towards the goals of food and nutrition security at the country as well as local level.

I would like to recommend Hon. Minister that if we are to encourage local government accountability and if we are to encourage the spirit of completion in our efforts towards achieving the goals of food and nutrition security at the local level, let us consider the introduction of a score card which will on an annual basis give us indication which provinces and which municipalities are making progress and which ones are lagging behind. I am sure our local universities would be ready to assist in the development of such a score card.

Market Access and Infrastructure in support of an African Green Revolution

As Africa continues to tackle the challenges of food and nutrition security, it cannot and should not ignore the importance of trade and the development of regional markets. NEPAD, in co-operation with RECs, should begin to take seriously regionalism as an entry point in stimulating agricultural growth and food security. Unfortunately, Africa has been slow in achieving the African Union (AU) goal of fast tracking regional trade and the development of regional markets. Trade and investment between African countries remains negligible.

There are many reasons for this, including the colonial legacy of economically disconnected small states that are externally focused with strong economic ties with their former colonial capitals, but very weak ties with their neighbours. Up to now, African states do not give adequate priority to the promotion of intra-Africa trade and inter-dependency. Economic reforms tend to focus on improving trade and economic relations with the rest of the world.

In addition, rampant conflicts and failure of political and economic governance during the last forty years **militated** against sustainable economic growth and development. African countries could not sustain economic reforms or count on sustaining trade and economic integration arrangements with their neighbours.

The environment has now improved both in Africa and internationally. Peace and political democracy have been restored in the majority of African countries. Unconstitutional changes of governments are no longer acceptable and NEPAD is promoting a socio-economic renewal that is anchored on democratic principles, human rights, good political and economic governance, people-centered development, a capable state, accelerated economic development and integration into the global economy.

In spite of the current improved political and economic governance, African countries continue to face the challenges of increased globalization and the accompanying increasing competition and distortions in global agricultural markets. African countries are expected not only to produce more efficiently, they also face large barriers to trade in foreign markets and intensive. The small-scale African farmer is not in a position to compete with counterparts in the OECD industrialized countries that receive heavy subsidies on the farm; for exporting; and subventions if their crops under-perform or if prices fall below specific threshold levels; and insurance safety nets.

It is therefore critical that Africa begins to reflect on not only diversifying the export of its commodities, but also should begin to look at the internal African markets. According to Diao et al. (2003), Africa's domestic agricultural markets are worth US\$50bn p.a., compared with current international exports of only US\$16.6bn p.a. Indeed with the burgeoning African population which is now at one billion people; inter regional markets for staples for instance will emerge as an important source of market earning for most African nations for food staples.

The projected demand and revenue growth through in these markets will far exceed that of foreign export markets, be it in the case of commodities or nontraditional high value

products, as illustrated in study commissioned by the then NEPAD Secretariat (NEPAD 2005).

The need for building effective regional markets for food staples in Sub-Saharan Africa can therefore not be overemphasized. There is a clear case for improving the flow of produce from – from rural to urban areas, from food surplus regions and countries to food deficit countries and regions. This however will require government commitment to improving national and regional regulatory impediments both official and none official. For example, local taxes and levies on agricultural trade are an emerging concern in the institutional environment for private trading activity (both large- and small-scale). These are one of the few ready sources of local revenue for decentralized administrations, especially in remote rural areas, but their proliferation (and high rates) can act as a serious disincentive to trading activity and seriously depress the prices received by producers for their output.

National governments should use the REC level to review the current impediments to cross border trade and the overall need in deepening regional trade. Available policy options should include the promotion of smallholder friendly public private partnerships the development of market infrastructure and institutions, the lowering of transaction costs of doing business in local and cross-border markets, as well as business to business alliances to strengthen domestic supply chains.

Over and above this - there is clearly a case for strengthening the capacity of local cross border official capacities in dealing with cross boarder traders. Both official and non official barriers to trade, including undue harassment and corrupt practices by border officials, especially custom officials need to be addressed.

Conclusion

What Africa needs is not just democracy, what Africa needs is not just peace and security, what Africa needs are strong leaders. Strong leaders that have a passion for the transformation of the continent, strong leaders that have a vision for the eradication of poverty and hunger on the continent where no child should be allowed to go to bed hungry where men and women can walk tall and feel proud that they are Africans. Africa will not be respected for simply achieving accelerated economic growth; Africa will be respected for the transformation of the human condition of its people. Food and nutrition security is a precondition to the transformation of the human condition in Africa.