



Ministerial Roundtable Dialogue

High-level Segment - Geneva, 4 July 2007

Roundtable 1

4:30 – 6:30 p.m.

Issues Paper

Ending the cycle of food crises: cultivating a home-grown Green Revolution in Africa

1. *Why a Green Revolution in Africa?*

In several ways, Africa has scored numerous success stories towards achieving food security for its citizens. A good number of countries have demonstrated that yields of staple crops can be boosted significantly, as with maize in eastern and southern Africa, and cassava in West Africa and more recently rice in West and East Africa. In commercial agriculture, successes have been booked in the cotton, horticulture and dairy sectors, and in various other agricultural sub-sectors and commodity markets. Commitments to cut hunger and malnutrition are featuring ever more prominently in key national development and poverty reduction strategies and policies. Nevertheless, these successes have not led to a sustainable reduction in the prevalence of poverty and hunger on the continent.

African governments are acutely aware of the need to address the region's food security concerns and have already taken important political steps to accelerate poverty reduction efforts. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) provides a vision and strategic framework for "Africa's renewal"¹, while the recent Summit on Food Security in Africa (held in Abuja in December 2006) among other measures to enhance food security, re-called the importance of implementing the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) as a central programme for 'accelerating agricultural development and food security on the continent'. In addition, policy makers are fully aware of growing environmental concerns, and the need for careful management of (still abundant) natural re

people suffering from extreme hunger today, representing more than one third of the total population in Africa. Launching an African Green Revolution to increase agricultural productivity – particularly among Africa’s smallholder farmers – is therefore central to ending hunger and extreme poverty by accelerating growth. **At the heart of the Green Revolution is the idea that, using existing science and technology, agriculture can become the engine for Africa's economic growth.**

Beyond low productivity and weak policy environments for agriculture and rural development, natural and man-made disasters have had a severe negative impact on Africa’s overall food security situation, resulting in repeated food crises in all parts of the continent. In addition, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the high prevalence of other diseases, places a serious additional burden on people’s productive capacity and gender inequalities in a highly gendered sector, sharpening the deleterious effects of hunger and malnutrition in rural areas, and undermining efforts to improve agricultural production. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) simply appear out of reach for many countries.

Given that the vast majority of Africa’s population depends on agricultural and rural development for the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, and economic prosperity, there have been several calls for stepped-up action in Africa, including in the context of the UN Millennium Project.² Most prominently, Kofi Annan, Jacques Diouf and several Heads of State reinforced the calls for urgent action at the high-level presidential seminar on ‘Africa’s Green Revolution’ held in Addis Ababa in July 2004.

2. What have we learned?

While there are renewed cries for a Green Revolution in Africa, there are also calls for caution to ensure that lessons learned from the Asian Green Revolution are adapted and adjusted to the African context. A technical paper written for the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS) highlights that lessons from Asia have taught us that scientific advances alone cannot solve the food security problems of developing countries³. Political leaders must create suitable socio-economic and institutional enabling environments, while much easier access to credit and markets should play a key role in improving productivity, in particular of the poorest.

A new thrust to the Green Revolution must meet the legitimate needs of the hungry and food-insecure themselves and directly involve smallholders across all productive sectors (agriculture, livestock, fisheries, forestry) in the development and application of new technologies. It has also been recognised that greater equity does not necessarily arise from increased food production alone, and that sustainable and successful progress nearly always involves broad popular participation, allowing people themselves to select from among the new tools and blend these with the technological, social, cultural and economic settings with which they are familiar in their traditional livelihood systems. In this context, research has shown that based on alternative methods and philosophies, indigenous knowledge, and native crops,

² UN Millennium Project. 2005. Investing in Development. A practical plan to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. New York. 329 pp.

UN Millennium Project Task Force on Hunger. 2005. Halving hunger: it can be done. Earthscan, London, 245p

³ FAO, 1996 World Food Summit; “Lessons from the green revolution: towards a new green revolution”; available at: www.fao.org/docrep/003/w2612e/w2612e06a.htm

joined with cutting edge technology, offer hope for a more lasting solution to the world's increasing food needs⁴.

more open access to markets and fair and predictable prices for produce are important to enable production increases on the African continent.

- A clear focus on improved delivery systems for the physical inputs required for increased productivity (seeds, fertilizers, crop protection chemicals and veterinary supplies) must form part of these policies, as should policies to enhance access to credit and strengthened rural financial markets
- Importantly, stable political and economic conditions must prevail for agricultural potential of any one country to be realised.
- Last but not least, there should be a clear recognition of the great potential for African women to play a central role in enhancing competitiveness of the agricultural sector; in this regard, programmes supporting gender equity and women's empowerment in all sectors

consider where there are environmental or other benefits to managing land-based resources such as rangeland, water and forests as common property.

- A key formula to success emphasized by the Africa Green Revolution initiative are public-private partnerships in support of providing smallholders with access in input and output markets while also facilitating access to credit (more on public-private partnerships under www.africagreenrevolution.com whose theme this year is “Partnership for Productivity”)
- Given the high degree of hunger and malnutrition in rural Africa, there is an urgent need for strengthened national institutions for targeted nutritional and food security program interventions, especially in the growing number of post-crisis situations on the continent, and in areas where HIV/AIDS is wreaking havoc. Deep micronutrient deficiencies must be addressed directly, especially among women, who dominate Africa’s current cohort of farmers, and children, who will be her next.

As suggested earlier, the **central question is how precisely these elements of an African Green Revolution can be brought together** in Africa’s varied contexts. History and recent experience suggest that the Green Revolution in Africa:

- must be continental in design but fundamentally context-specific in implementation, based on a common vision, *owned and led by Africans*;
- involve simultaneous action in the technical, institutional, and environmental domains based on a *radical transformation* of agriculture sectors, including their underlying capacities for implementation;
- address socio economic issues, while paying particular attention to *gender equity* and the empowerment of women; and
- involve *coordinated efforts* from inside and outside of Africa, while recognising different roles and responsibilities of all actors.

Implementation capacity in agriculture is especially crucial if an African Green Revolution is to take hold. Appropriate systems for building partnerships, assigning responsibility, rewarding performance, and monitoring and evaluating outcomes are required. An immediate priority is identification of the policy, institutional, and organizational platforms that will provide a basis for identifying best practices in each of the above four thematic areas, and for mobilizing resources and action toward broad-based and rapid replication and up-scaling of winning interventions.

There is considerable experimentation and learning underway across the continent with alternative platforms. For instance, soil improvement, new crop and livestock varieties, and intensified input use are being combined with farmer collective action in input and output markets, revealing significant potential for increased incomes, improved sustainability of farming systems, and adaptation to a range of farming systems and agroecologies.⁷ Also showing promise are organizations that link farm input supply with information dissemination, organizations that explicitly integrate research, extension, and training, and organizations that connect development, testing, and dissemination of improved post-harvest commodity

⁷ See for example: “Readily Available Technology, Research Findings and Recommendations for Transfer to Farmers or End Users.” The African Highlands Initiative of the Association fo

management methods.⁸ Efforts to link agricultural development policy with broader national development policy are also proving powerful instruments for promoting the multi-sectoral perspectives crucial to sustained growth in agriculture.⁹

A key unifying theme in this process of experimentation and learning is the importance of addressing the high degree of risk facing Africa's agricultural households, both as producers and as traders, especially in the context of climate change and variability. Overcoming some of this risk appears to require interventions predicated on rights-based entitlements, especially the

costs. The lack of safe storage increases post-harvest losses (often over 30% in Africa), and the lack of market information depresses farm gate prices.

5. The way ahead: political and institutional requirements, partnerships, and regional cooperation

Countries that have achieved national and household food security and sustained hunger reduction, also for the poor, have a track record of strong political emphasis on agriculture, careful consideration of economic incentives for agricultural production, human and economic investments in research, extension and training, while also paying particular attention to gender equity and empowerment of women. A major lesson from the Asian Green Revolution is that governments must take the lead in shaping strategic priorities and mobilizing strategic investments in line with those priorities. The private sector and civil society bodies, particularly farmer and trader organizations, also have an important role to play, not only during strategy formulation, but also in design and implementation of context-specific interventions. These lessons apply strongly for Africa.

Many of the constraints and opportunities faci

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