

# **Africa's Green Revolution Forum: Initiating a Quantum Leap Forward**

**Keynote speech delivered by  
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President John Atta Mills of Ghana, Prime Minister Pinda of Tanzania President Obasanjo, Ambassadors, Farmers, Representatives of Farmers and Civil Society Organizations, Ladies and Gentlemen--

Good morning. Friends, it gives me great pleasure to be here with you today for the *first* African Green Revolution Forum on African soil. And what better place to hold it than in Ghana, which has reduced considerably hunger amongst the population since the introduction of the MDG's.

When I look around this room, I see enormous power and potential present in all of you, and in the diversity of organizations, expertise and resources that you represent. From Heads of State and CEOs, to farmers' organizations and local banks, you are the ones in a position to make change.

Today, we face huge challenges in our effort to end poverty and hunger, and to transform African agriculture into an engine of economic development.

I need not elaborate on these challenges, we know them well enough. They are systemic—from poor soils and seeds, to lack of finance and markets, and weak policy support. And these systemic challenges are compounded by the reality of climate change, of threats to biodiversity and to the natural resources that support life.

But if the challenges are systemic, so, too, are the solutions. They involve fundamental changes in government priorities and policies; a strengthening of food value chains; development of Africa's private sector; the creation of vibrant new partnerships; and an alignment of international aid with Africa's priorities.

All of this must empower Africa's smallholder farmers, the majority of whom are women. They are the people who grow our food. Transformative change will enable them to leave behind subsistence farming, to run their farms as businesses, and to market their surpluses. The commercial farms have an important role to play in this process of providing opportunities for

aggregation and uptake of new technologies.

AGRA, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, was created to help accelerate such changes. And in 2007, I assumed chairmanship of AGRA to help lead this transformation. Today I can say that, along with our partners, we are making real progress.

I saw some of that progress in Mali last week, when I visited farmers in Sanankoroba and Dialakoroba, and heard from them the difference that access to high-yielding seeds and fertilizer are making to their livelihoods.

Farmers are growing new varieties of sorghum, maize, and rice that are drought tolerant and disease resistant. They are increasing their yields. The national agricultural research organizations, new seed companies and agro-dealer shops are all part of this transformation.

But more important I heard from them their hope for the future – that with more support they and their neighbors will do well year after year. Today a hoe but tomorrow a tractor is their desire.

Similar aspirations are rising and increasing progress is occurring across the continent. AGRA has achieved significant results since its founding in late 2006. It is implementing field projects in 13 sub-Saharan countries. More than 130 new crop varieties developed by AGRA grantees have been released to farmers. 14,000 metric tons of improved seeds have been made available to smallholder farmers. Nearly 10,000 agro-dealers are delivering these inputs to remote farmers in 11 countries.

AGRA is strengthening farmers' access to secure markets, and training them in market function. In Uganda and Kenya, this training has enabled 40,000 banana growers to earn more than \$10 million in the last three years, an increase of ten-fold.

Efforts to rejuvenate depleted soils are also extensive. Just one project encompasses 300,000 farmers in the Sahel, who are using microdosing—ultra-efficient use of fertilizer—to boost their yields up to 130 percent.

Meanwhile, innovative financing using \$17 million in loan guarantee funds has leveraged \$160 million in affordable loans to agriculture from commercial banks in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana and Mozambique. For the first time, commercial banks are lending to small-scale farmers and farm businesses en masse, and they are using affordable credit to grow their businesses.

Like any business, Africa's farmers and entrepreneurs need money to make money. And, until now, they just haven't been able to get it. This is changing.

And this *all* amounts to change across the value chain.

But there is one more piece-and it is essential. AGRA is helping farmers to join forces, to strengthen their purchasing power and their ability to negotiate good prices. Working alone on a small plot a farmer can do only so much, working with her neighbors, she has power.

And the same is true for us. Working together we have power. Strategic, results-oriented partnerships are essential to achieving transformative change.

African agriculture must take a quantum leap forward. And this means we must join together.

Every organization represented here is part of Africa's agricultural transformation. Organizations as varied as IFAD, the CGIAR, the World Bank, national banks, the African Development Bank, and USAID have launched ambitious programs to revitalize agriculture. Local seed and fertilizer companies, new food processing businesses are opening economic opportunities. Farmers' organizations and civil society are on the ground, pointing the way to the most effective interventions.

And African governments are stepping up to the challenge of developing national agricultural programs. We have long called on African governments to break from past practices of underfunding agriculture and curtailing the development of the private sector.

Now this, too, is happening.

Africa governments are making changes, and I am excited by the impact this is having.

Here in Ghana, agriculture has grown at an average of 5% a year for over 10 years. Malawi transformed itself into a net exporter of maize for four years running. Rwanda increased its food production by 15% in 2007 and 16% in 2008. In Tanzania, a government program supporting farmers through vouchers to purchase seeds and fertilizers enabled 700,000 smallholder farmers to produce five million tons of maize. And Mali now dedicates 14% of its national budget to agriculture in a concerted effort to change the future for its farmers.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, 19 countries have put in place plans to accelerate their annual agricultural growth of 6% a year, a goal agreed to under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program, or CAADP.

CAADP was initiated by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), another organization leading the changes in agriculture. AGRA works closely with NEPAD, recognizing that an African green revolution is the key for achieving CAADP's goals.

Let me say it again: Partnerships are crucial to success.

Take the challenge of developing Africa's breadbaskets and transport corridors. Breadbaskets are areas endowed with the many of the natural assets and human resources needed for agriculture to thrive. Yet they are underdeveloped and isolated from major markets.

They need massive investments. That is because Africa today has a lower density of critical agricultural infrastructure than Asia had in the 1960s. Experts estimate that Africa will need \$32 to \$39 billion annually to achieve the full economic potential of its farm sector, not including the cost of climate adaptation.

These funds must come from a combination of sources: African governments, overseas development assistance, foreign direct investment, philanthropic contributions from within and outside Africa, and Africa's private sector.

This is the time to scale-up progress to achieve a uniquely African Green Revolution. So much is at stake, and the time is ripe. Today, as never before, the world cares about food production. It cares about water, it is concerned about climate change.

And Africa offers solutions—we have the land, the farmers, the know-how.

The time is right to invest in African agriculture and our smallholder farmers. They are poised to deliver long-term solutions to hunger and poverty, and to propel our continent on a path to prosperity. But they need supportive policies; better access to sustainable, productive technologies; to finance and to markets; to crop storage and transport; and the means to adapt to climate change. Countries need national investment plans that drive change across the food value chain in support of smallholder farmers.

As a group, we have voiced our commitments and now we must follow through. Working in partnership, the private and public sector, with direct engagement of farmers' organizations and civil society, can unlock the full potential of agriculture as a driver of economic growth and stability for Africa and the world.

Let us leave this Forum with determination to transform smallholder farms into productive, profitable businesses and to help ensure an Africa, which is food and nutrition secure and prosperous. Let's get on with it!