

## Africa can feed itself: green revolution takes root.

Today's celebration of World Water Day is a call for action over one of the greatest challenges we face – ensuring a growing population has access to clean and sufficient water so that it can feed itself. Increased pressure on already scarce water supplies in many parts of the world is a prime cause of famine, disease and, increasingly, conflict. Climate change is already worsening these pressures. Its impact will only increase, with catastrophic consequences.

This is particularly true in Africa which experts predict will suffer most from rising temperatures, prolonged droughts and other extreme weather events. The changes already underway are making vast areas of once productive land no longer fit for traditional agriculture. Land is being abandoned, forcing mass migration.

These new pressures add to long-standing problems with Africa's agriculture. The soil in many areas is poor. Yet farmers, often because of poverty or lack of access, use far less fertilizer than their counterparts around the world. New techniques, which revolutionized Asia's agricultural productivity, have – at least until recently – passed by the continent's farmers. There is very little use of irrigation even where water is plentiful.

The result is that Africa is the only continent unable to feed itself. Agricultural productivity has failed to keep pace with a growing population. Hunger has never been worse. Around 300 million people will not have enough to eat today. Despite millions of hectares of unused cultivated land, Africa spends \$20 billion dollars each year buying food.

This is simply not sustainable, economically nor politically. It is the cause of terrible human suffering and is a catastrophic brake on Africa's development. But this is not, I am delighted to say, the all-too-familiar call for the rest of the world to come to Africa's aid. Out of the headlines, a quiet – and green – revolution is already underway, led by Africa's scientists, farmers and politicians.

African scientists are developing new and improved crop varieties. The continent's farmers are enthusiastically putting into practice techniques like drip irrigation to make the best of every drop of water. African Governments are making transforming agriculture a top priority.

These efforts are being supported by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), which I am honoured to chair. Hundreds of millions of dollars in grants are being provided to raise agricultural productivity, promote the use of sound soil management techniques and good water husbandry. National research institutions are being funded to develop new crop varieties for diverse soils including staple food crops such as millet, sorghum, maize, cassava, rice, sweet potatoes and pulses.

Across Africa, we can see the results. In Tanzania, the farmers in the southern highlands now plant early-maturing maize to escape the damage caused by an increasingly unreliable rainy season. Over 300,000 farmers in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger are being helped by AGRA to use micro-dosing techniques which greatly increase yields and save enormous quantities of fertilizer. For the last four years, Malawi has not only met its own food needs, but has also become able to export to its neighbours. Rwanda's agricultural production has grown by 13 percent and 17 percent in the last two years.

We now need to build on this progress and spread best practices across the continent. Farmers need help to manage water more efficiently, through water harvesting and small scale irrigation. To rapidly increase productivity, farmers will also need better access to fertilizers and education and practice conservation agriculture where technically and economically feasible.

But helping Africa feed itself must go far further than what happens in the fields. It requires farmers to be able to sell their crops easily and for a fair price. In Uganda, improved banana marketing systems have helped to connect 20,000 farmers to markets, increasing their farm gate prices by 30 percent, earning them some \$3.5 million in incomes.

Farmers and the small businesses which serve them need better access to finance. Agriculture accounts in many African countries for as much as half of GDP and seven out of every ten jobs. Yet less than three percent of total private sector financing go into agriculture with smallholder-based farming taking an even smaller share.

Loan guarantees provided by organizations like AGRA have encouraged some of Africa's leading banks to provide tens of millions of dollars of new and affordable finance. Farmers are now using this funding to expand their use of improved seeds, fertilizers, small scale irrigation and improved storage facilities.

Rapid progress is now needed in four main areas. We need to target investment in Africa's breadbasket areas which have the potential to grow huge amounts of food. Rural infrastructure - especially roads, ports, rails and storage - must be improved.

Barriers which prevent regional trade such as tariffs must be removed. Farmers must be helped to adapt to the additional challenges they face from climate change.

In shaping Africa's Green Revolution, we must especially focus on the small-holder farmers who form over 70 percent of the continent's agricultural producers. Foreign investment in agriculture and land must not displace small-holders whose families have farmed the land for decades. We need to use their knowledge, not discount it, if we are to end food shortages and transform life in rural areas.

Indeed partnerships – whether with local farmers' associations or international institutions such as the World Bank and African Development Bank – are the key to ensuring the Green Revolution takes root across the continent and unlocking Africa's enormous agricultural potential. Feeding Africa is one of the major development challenges of our time, but it can be done.

**Kofi A. Annan**

Chair of the Board

Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa