



Launch of The African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF)

Nairobi, Kenya –16 June 2004

Speech by Hon. Kipruto arap Kirwa, MP Minister for Agriculture, Kenya

Your Excellencies the Ambassadors of Canada, Belgium, Malawi, South Africa, China and Uganda, Dr. Gordon Conway, President of The Rockefeller Foundation, Donors and Investors of the AATF, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), Farmer Representatives, Members of the AATF Board of Trustees, Invited Guests, Members of the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great honour and privilege for me to have been invited to be with you today as you mark this auspicious occasion of the official inauguration of the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF).

Let me join those who spoke earlier in welcoming you all, and in particular those from outside Kenya, to our capital city of Nairobi. As we say in our national language, Kiswahili, Karibuni Kenya, and feel at home.

I have had the opportunity to read through the brochure on this Foundation, which explains clearly its aims and objectives; expected benefits to our people; its mission and mandate, and where it fits into the agricultural revival of the continent. I must say I am encouraged by the possibilities ahead for the sub-Saharan Africa in general and the smallholder farmer in particular.

Role of Agriculture

The role of agriculture in the overall economic development of Kenya and indeed sub-Saharan Africa cannot be over-emphasised. The reforms in agricultural practices to boost production are, therefore, central to economic progress in many of our countries.

In Kenya, agriculture is recognised as one of the pillars necessary to support economic recovery. The country's socio-economic and political development is heavily dependent on agriculture. Agricultural growth is indeed a catalyst for growth in other sectors.

Kenya's Economic Recovery Strategy

This is why the Kenya Government, in its Economic Recovery Strategy Paper, is giving priority to the revamping of agriculture for our country to reap real economic benefits. The government sets out to address through institutional and legislative reforms the

challenges currently facing the sector, among them being inappropriate technology and inadequate funding for research and extension services.

Empowerment, a democratic political atmosphere, freedom to engage in productive activities to build our nations, and improvement of living standards, are some of the people's expectations and promises contained in our different countries' development plans. But it is important to perhaps put a little weight on an over-used cliché – that “a hungry man is an angry man” and take note of the basic function that agriculture plays in achieving some of the goals that will help governments fulfil its people's expectations.

When people are hungry and poor, their family, their region, their country and continent suffers. Villages and regions become socially unstable. Basic tenets of freedom and human rights cannot be sustained. Everyone everywhere pays and the most vulnerable, especially women and children, suffer the worst consequences.

Kenya's Commitment to Agricultural Revival

The question we need to ask ourselves is how committed we are as individuals, organisations, development partners, and policy makers in effecting the strategies laid out in our countries' development plans for the benefit of the most vulnerable segments of our society.

As Minister for Agriculture, I confirm our government's commitment towards the country's agricultural development. It is for this reason we found it necessary to develop a comprehensive sector strategy, the “Strategy for Revitalising Agriculture”, which articulates our long-term vision and direction the sector should be going to in the next 10 years.

In line with today's event, I wish to reiterate the Kenya Government's commitment to promoting new agricultural technologies and information as the basis of a thriving agricultural system. My ministry is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that we have the necessary mechanisms to encourage the application of new approaches in science and technology; either developed here or acquired from elsewhere.

Indeed, my presence here today and the Kenya Government's acceptance to host the African Agricultural Technology Foundation in Kenya, should serve as further evidence of this commitment. It is my belief that this confirmation of commitment by Kenya is in solidarity with other African Governments who have recognised the importance of agriculture in the overall development of the continent.

The AATF Model

It is recognised that the value of any strategy is the level of legitimacy and ownership built around it by its people. I have had the privilege of holding lengthy discussions on the AATF model of operation and I can confirm that this Foundation is committed to fulfilling its mission and making a difference to the lives of sub-Saharan African smallholder farmers.

The AATF is a well thought out initiative whose aims and goals address the African farmers' problems from an African perspective. It is clearly a legitimate organisation for Africa's needs.





The leadership and management of the Foundation is by Africans who have proven their capabilities in different fields and in whose hands the African farmer would be most comfortable.

It is worth noting that the areas of intervention the Foundation has selected to concentrate its effort in are areas that will bring direct results to the farmers on the ground. I note with satisfaction that these problem areas have been identified through a participatory process that originates from the farmer.

Let me comment in particular on the weed and pest control interventions that have been identified. I understand the interventions, which have pre-occupied our scientists for a long time, are now ready for use by the farmers. These interventions hold great promise for the farmer and our countries. The project on *Striga* control in maize is expected to impact the lives of over 100 million people in sub-Saharan Africa whose productivity has been affected by the weed. The *Striga* problem is reported to cost the continent over one billion US dollars annually in lost yields.

I am also encouraged by the fact that the AATF is an initiative that recognises the various players in agriculture, both public and private, respecting their contributions and good practices. I note that the Foundation will seek to engage these sectors in partnerships and collaborations that will ensure and support delivery of the products to the farmers at affordable costs and in the most effective manner.



This kind of co-operative effort in development initiatives is encouraged by both the beneficiaries and donors as it promotes maximisation of effort and full utilisation of available resources. Indeed, it helps to reduce wastage and re-invention of the wheel. It is the kind of approach that motivates further support of donors and partners.

Issue of Poverty and Food Security

I would like to take a look at some figures that capture the urgency with which we should make agricultural revival for sub – Saharan Africa part and parcel of the overall development agenda.

Kenya's population currently stands at about 30 million and 70% depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Fifty-six percent (56%) of this population lives in poverty. Eighty percent (80%) of these poor people live in rural areas and they include farmers, workers and the unemployed. Women make up the majority of the poor in Kenya who also include smallholder farmers.

In the wider sub-Saharan Africa, it is recorded that one-third of the population, almost 200 million people, lack food security. One-half of the population live in extreme poverty, on less than one dollar per day. Seventy percent (70%) live in the rural areas and depend on agriculture, which accounts for 30% of the region's GDP.

The situation is made worse by the fact that our region continues to report a drop in agricultural productivity compared to other regions of the world such as Asia and Latin America.

From these figures, Ladies and Gentlemen, we can deduce that the poverty situation in sub-Saharan Africa and the dependence on agriculture for livelihood by the majority of our people is reason enough to give this sector all the support necessary. The place to



start, if we are to afford our people better living standards, democratic governance, and increased trade, is in ensuring our people are food secure.

Agricultural Technology

The issue of technology transfer always attracts debate at different levels. Most of you seated here today are quite comfortable with the term 'technology'. However, for a number of us and especially the smallholder farmers that the African Agricultural Technology Foundation seeks to assist, the word 'technology' conjures up an image of complicated science that should be approached with suspicion.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Of particular attention in the range of available technologies is biotechnology and specifically genetically modified organisms or what is often referred to as GMOs.

My stand is that technological solutions to human problems should be approached soberly and with as little emotion as possible. It is imprudent to make generalised statements on these issues. It may be beneficial to note that the car that we so much rely on, medical technologies such as your simple aspirin, and computers, all have risks and benefits.

These are all products of science. What we all need to do is to educate ourselves on these subjects, gather as much information as possible and share it with our people. This way we will provide an enabling environment within which to make objective assessments so as to enhance our understanding of the risks and benefits and to make informed choices accordingly.

Africans should be accorded the opportunity to decide what to do about some of these technologies. Some of the technologies have been tried, tested and results are available while some are yet to be put out for testing.

I believe our scientists and development partners are capable of furnishing us with sound advice. As policy makers, our role will be to put in place necessary regulations and laws that will support decision making, especially as regards environmental protection, health and food safety.

Speaking as a farmer in Kenya, I wish to appeal to the Foundation to take it upon itself to help educate our people about the need for science and know-how that is required for technology development and the risks and benefits involved. We wish to help our people and not to harm or alienate them. It is my hope that Dr. Terry and Dr. Bokanga have put in place processes that will provide information and communication that will effectively reach the farmer.

Development Partners

Let me at this point take this opportunity to sincerely thank those development partners involved in the African Agricultural Technology Foundation initiative. You have demonstrated your support for sub-Saharan Africa and recognised the need to step in and support our agricultural systems.





It is said that you can lead a donkey to the river but you cannot force it to drink. You have played your role in supporting us find a way to harness technology for our agriculture. Therefore, on behalf of all potential beneficiaries of your gesture and those present here today, I wish to confirm that we accept your support and we will work together to achieve our set goals.

I also wish to recognise Dr. Gordon Conway, both on an individual capacity and as President of the Rockefeller Foundation, for his active involvement in supporting various development activities in our villages.

Kenya is a major recipient of the Rockefeller Foundation's grants in Africa, totalling about UD\$ 29 million during the last six years. In agriculture, the Foundation has contributed to a range of development activities such as soil productivity, research and development, increase and development of new crop varieties and improving input and output markets for poor farmers.

The work of the Rockefeller Foundation has directly impacted on the livelihoods of many Kenyans. It is, therefore, encouraging to note that they are involved in the AATF initiative. We greatly appreciate your continued commitment towards enhancing our people's living standards.

Launch Announcement

With these remarks, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my pleasant duty to declare the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) officially launched.

Thank you and God bless you all.

