




Launch of
The African Agricultural Technology
Foundation (AATF)

Nairobi, Kenya –16 June 2004

Comments by Dr. Eugene Terry
Outgoing Implementing Director – AATF

Honorable Minister, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The AATF like the business of technology transfer, is a multi-stakeholder enterprise, I would therefore crave your indulgence to allow me spend some time to recognise and express my appreciation to a wide range of partners who have and will continue to be an integral part of this initiative.



Sometime in the latter part of the year 2001, while I was still working in the Rural Development Department of the World Bank, I received a call from Peter Matlon enquiring about the time frame for my retirement from the Bank. He then mentioned casually that he might have an interesting proposition about an initiative that the Rockefeller Foundation was considering, and that we should talk about it sometime once my dates for leaving the Bank were confirmed.


Thus started what has now turned out to be quite an exciting “Voyage of Discovery” as Peter himself described this initiative at the first meeting of the Design Advisory Committee (what we then called the DAC) held here in Kenya in June 2002. That was just after I had taken on the assignment as the Implementing Director of the AATF.

But perhaps today marks one of the landmarks of that voyage, even though in many ways the voyage has just begun.

This is a fitting occasion for me to express my very sincere appreciation and thanks to Gordon Conway, the RF President, for having given me the opportunity to help create this organisation. My thanks to Peter Matlon also, especially for persuading me to take on this challenge.

I truly want to say how much I have enjoyed providing the leadership for this organisation’s first tentative steps. As you know, a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step, and I am happy to say we have taken that first step. But let me warn you this is going to be a marathon, and not a sprint!

I want to thank all those who in one way or the other assisted me in the myriad tasks I had to undertake for the start-up of this organisation.




I must personally and warmly thank Jacob Quaye, who responded to my call to come and join me in this exciting and challenging task, as a consultant Administration and Finance Manager.

Some of you may know that from March to November 2003 when the AATF appointed its first senior management staff, Jacob and I represented the entire staff of the AATF. But, let me tell you that before Jacob, while I was still operating out of the Meridian Institute's offices in Washington DC, I had the good fortune to have had Joan Joshi. Joan therefore was the first interim Administration and Finance Consultant.


I must say a huge thank you to Idah Sithole-Niang and Patrick Rubaihayo who were among the first set of consultants I engaged to assist with defining the criteria for the selection of the problem areas for AATF's interventions.

I must register my very sincere thanks to Carlos Seré, Bruce Scott, Kumar Tumuluru, and Getachew Engida (who is not here today) and all the other ILRI personnel too numerous to mention by name, who went even beyond the call of duty to assist us in setting up the AATF facility here.

Without your help, understanding and generosity it would not have been possible to make such rapid progress in such a short space of time.



I want to personally thank Dr. Romano Kiome for his valuable assistance and counsel in the matter of the host country accord, and also Mr. Joseph Kinuya, the PS of the Ministry of Agriculture. My special thanks to you Honourable Minister arap Kirwa for all your efforts and assistance, and for your kind considerations in granting the AATF host country status.



I must also thank the staff at the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute who have in various ways assisted us, and especially the scientists who have shown their willingness to partner with us in a range of project implementation activities.

Although we have only just begun to strengthen our partnerships with all African national and regional agricultural research and development organisations, we already have encouraging signs that there is mutual interest in working very closely together indeed. It is our intention to make use of the strong relationship already developed between these national and regional entities and the hundreds of thousands of farmers in their countries.

Since we cannot reach most of these farmers directly, we intend to use the knowledge, contacts and best practices developed by these NARs and SROs for the benefit of the beneficiaries of our efforts – the African farmer. In this context I tender my sincere appreciation to Africa Harvest for assisting with the field trip to farmer fields in Murang'a to see tissue culture banana orchards.

We all owe a debt of immense gratitude to the Rockefeller Foundation, the United States for International Development (USAID), and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) for investing so generously in the AATF and for taking on the responsibility for the financing of the start-up of this very important initiative.

I want to make a special comment about the enlightened approach that these three core donors have taken in making their valuable investments in the future of the AATF. I can



testify that I have enjoyed the full confidence of these partners to the extent that they have simply ensured that the leadership was in good hands, and they proceeded to provide the funds without many of the unnecessary strings attached.

Indeed, I have expressed these sentiments to Gordon Conway, and have stated that it is heartening to see an enlightened set of donors with the good sense to simply provide some guidelines and then simply let go and let some very able Africans get on with the job.

I am pleased to see that this is happening more often these days. As you can see, the AATF personnel are all nationals of sub-Saharan Africa, and I have the greatest confidence in them, and the promise they hold.

I realize this is indeed a challenge, but I know they will meet that challenge.

I want to say a word of special thanks to our colleagues in the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, and here I include all parts of the system. I am especially indebted to those who have demonstrated that they share our goals and aspirations.

I am particularly happy that we share with the centers in the CG the commitment to link our resource-poor farmers to all that advancement in science and technology can bring to the solution of their food security and poverty challenges.

A very special thanks to our International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) colleagues. Those who have studied the AATF projects' portfolio closely will note that in some of the key problem areas we have enlisted the cooperation of CIMMYT.

I want to thank our partners in the local and international private sector, especially those holders of advanced technology who have been engaged with us in negotiations for access to their technologies. Thank you for your investments in the future of Africa that we all expect to be bright.

Let me assure you that it is not an accident that the AATF has been mentioned in the G8 summit reports as one of the innovative institutional arrangements dedicated to fight some of the intractable hunger and poverty challenges.

The time is right and we are poised to assist in bringing to the African agricultural technology transfer enterprise what I hope will be significant infusions of human and financial resources, in addition to the role we will play in opening up access to advanced science and technology. We have the unique opportunity today to capitalise on the growing support first and foremost from within Africa, and certainly from the international community to do this right.

We all claim we are in business to bring solutions to resource-poor farmers, we now have the opportunity to double our efforts to do so.

For those who may be apprehensive about the prospects that the AATF will represent a potential drain on scarce R&D resources, let me assure you that our aim is to leverage financial support for us and our partners from new and different sources of funding, and to add value to what you are doing or intend to do.



I need to say a special thank you to the AATF staff, for your dedication and hard work in making the first part of the dream of AATF come true, which is its establishment. Your real and more daunting challenges are still ahead of you.

Let me take this opportunity to express profound appreciation to the AATF Board of Trustees for their immense contributions. We have on our Board an incredibly talented group of professionals from all over the world who have distinguished themselves in their own professional careers, and have been gracious enough to respond to our call for them to become the founding Board Members of the AATF. Thank you for your support and guidance, and for your trust and confidence in me.

And finally to all others whom I am sure will forgive me for not mentioning them by name, who have also in one way or the other contributed to the safe delivery of this precious new organisation, I say many thanks and express my gratitude.

In my reflections upon what will be appropriate to say at such an occasion, I was tempted simply to recite the many tasks I was assigned, describe my terms of reference when I accepted the responsibility for IMPLEMENTING the start-up, and announce that the job has been done. But that is certainly not the case. In reality we have simply taken the first tentative steps.

And, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, to fully operationalise this initiative is going to be a marathon and not a sprint.

If I were to be asked what I would like you and the world to consider as my legacy and contribution to the AATF, I would want you to make your assessments through the performance and calibre of the senior management and support staff I was instrumental in recruiting.

Let me emphasize that it is the quality, calibre and performance of the AATF personnel that will define to a large extent, my legacy and value to this organisation.

So let me now take this opportunity to introduce to you the excellent team we have assembled to take this organisation to the next level.

First the Leader of the team - Dr Mpoko Bokanga – AATF’s newly appointed Executive Director; Food Scientist/ Industrial Development Specialist; Mpoko will give you his vision for the AATF and his role in it later on in this program. Nevertheless, I must take this opportunity to say a few words about the person who is about to take on the leadership of this great new institution.

Many friends and colleagues have asked me why I was moving along and walking away from such an exciting assignment. I could have responded by telling them I was leaving “to spend more time with family”.

But as much as that fact is true, the truth is that we have identified and hired someone who has the qualifications, experience, knowledge and skills to take this organisation to the next level. Of that I am certain and was very pleased when the Board’s search committee selected him.

What is even more important, is that we need to send a clear message to Africa’s leaders that no one individual has the monopoly on leadership skills, and that there is always



someone out there whom, given the opportunity, will perform and deliver, perhaps more effectively than those who have gone before.

In other words, let us give opportunities to our bright, and emerging leaders, and create the right environment for them to perform. I promised Peter and Gordon that I will assist in setting up the AATF, and that I will regard that task as done when I help put in place the new ED of the AATF. On that score I hope I have delivered.

Let me introduce now the other members of the AATF senior management

Dr. Phleix Majiwa, our Senior Projects Manager – Molecular Biologist;
Ms. Nancy Muchiri, our Communications and Donor Relations Manager;
Mr. Richard Boadi, our Legal Counsel,
And Ms. Martha Tilahun, the Administration and Finance Manager.

The noble vision of the AATF cannot be achieved without the dedicated service of the AATF support staff – Nancy Okita-Odera, our Administrative Assistant, Peter Werehire, our Publications and Website Officer, Maina Gathu, who is our Accounting Consultant, Joan Abila-Oballa, the AATF Office Manager and Special Assistant to the ED, and George Njogu our indefatigable driver, and James Kamurwa, who does every thing else.

So for me it has been an incredible experience, and an exciting start to this incredible voyage, and the discovery has just begun. I envy those who will be more closely tied to the implementation of the challenging portfolio of projects that we have assembled.

I will be close enough to this organisation to be keeping an eye on its progress in my capacity as an AATF Trustee. I am moving on to other assignments, but I doubt they will be as satisfying as this one.

I thank you all for having being partners of the AATF during this formative period, and for your promise to continue to work with it for the short, medium and long-term. The real work starts now. We have an exciting portfolio of projects some of which are already being implemented.

The AATF has formulated ideas to address the constraints which continue to reduce our farmers' productivity, and have developed the appropriate partnerships and outreach linkages that will translate these ideas into interventions. We have made some progress towards ensuring that we have the financial and human resources to give us a good start.

The plight of Africa's resource-poor farmers are all too real, and the evidence of continuing food insecurity, hunger and poverty is incontrovertible. Even keenly aware that implementation of our projects will be a marathon and not a sprint, I do hope we can bring a sense of urgency to the tasks before us, because Africa's hungry children need to be part of that marathon, and they need to be fed to be able to play their role.

Thank you

