



Launch of The African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF)

Nairobi, Kenya –16 June 2004

Speech by Professor Jennifer Ann Thomson Chair, AATF Board of Trustees

I will start by saying this is a very important day in the calendar of my country, South Africa. When Nelson Mandela became president, he declared the 16th of June youth day and a public holiday.

I thought it would be useful to use the youth motif to launch my talk because youth dare to challenge the authority, they dare to challenge expected mores and they dare to do what other people might think is undoable.

And what the AATF is planning to do some people might think is undoable. But I don't believe it is undoable with this wonderful powerful team we have.

There are many different organisations whose aim is to spread biotechnology applications in Africa. As we carry out our work, we must prevent overlap and instead stimulate synergism – make sure that we know precisely what our role is as AATF in this delivery continuum. And we must never forget to whom we are delivering, and that is the resource-poor farmers.

I just came last week from a board meeting of the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) in Italy. It also started out with the aim of transferring intellectual property from multinationals to people in developing countries. They have largely concentrated in South East Asia although they have moved into East Africa. They were interested to hear from me what was going to happen at AATF. Two of the Board members know the new Executive Director and they said: "you have made a seriously good decision in appointing Dr. Bokanga as the Executive Director." And I think all of us will agree from that outstanding presentation we just heard from him.

A very special person in my life in this organisation is Eugene Terry, the Implementing Director. He recently sent all AATF board members the status report and one of the things I really appreciated from the paper was the synergism that he proposes with various organizations. The role of AATF is specifically spelt out as identifying intellectual property management needs and intellectual property resources, negotiating royalty-free access, and technology transfers with freedom to operate. So you see we have a very important niche to fill when we link up with all these other organisations.

One of the high priorities for AATF intervention (one that is very important for Kenya in light of the recent reports of deaths due to mycotoxin poisoning in parts of the



country) is mycotoxins in food grains. Another that is very close to my heart and to The Rockefeller Foundation is the development of drought-tolerant crops for use in Africa.

Our next step is implementation and we have to move the ideas from paper to the practical phase. We are going to have a business plan for each project and that is going to be under the direction of Phelix, our Projects Manager.

I have a challenge for all personnel of AATF who are involved in the projects. You must be able to explain to anybody who asks what difference we as AATF are going to bring to the implementation of the particular project and how it is going to help resource-poor farmers. You must be able to do this in not more than three sentences, and to do this you must be sufficiently clear of the role of AATF.

I am very excited about the timing of this launch. The time is right for AATF to come into play and become a major force for agricultural sustainability on this continent with a mixture of projects that are pragmatic.

Finally and the most important part of my speech is to Eugene Terry. He has been the most amazing guide to the Board and to me as the Chair.

I want to formally thank Eugene for being such an inspirational Implementing Director and for helping us all get to this stage.

Thank you.

