



Text of Remarks

Keynote Speaker: **H.E. John Kufuor**
Former President
Republic of Ghana

Title: **Leveraging Agriculture for Improving Nutrition and Health**

Dr Shenggen Fan, Director General of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Hon Ministers, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am honoured to have been asked to co-chair this important conference on the role of agriculture in meeting health challenges. Can I start by congratulating the International Food Policy Research Institute for launching this global policy consultation? It is a sign of the prestige in which the Institute and its work are held that so many distinguished experts on food, farming and health have travelled to India to take part in these discussions. We have already heard some typically inspiring and challenging thoughts from Prime Minister Singh. Few leaders have such a high reputation at home and abroad. Both India and the international community are fortunate to have such courageous, wise and principled leadership. Dr Singh, of course, leads a country which stands as an example of development throughout the world. This is both the world's largest democracy and also one of its fastest growing economic powers.

In Africa, we look at the progress of India, a valued partner, not with envy but with hope. We also see, in its determination to overcome challenges and to harness the talents of its people, a model for us to follow. One of the biggest challenges, of course, is how India can securely and sustainably feed its fast growing population. This is a daunting challenge faced in many parts of the world as well.

Ladies and Gentlemen, over a billion people throughout the world, the highest number we are told for the past four decades, will go hungry today and every day. Food prices, which are rising sharply, are likely to increase these numbers. And there are many hundreds of millions more who, while not hungry, suffer the damaging impact of consistently poor diets. For these families, there may be food on the table. But they have little choice over what they eat. This failure to provide sufficient and nutritious food has a devastating impact on health and development. This starts in the very earliest days of life. The physical and mental development of unborn children is badly damaged, often irreversibly, if their mothers cannot eat properly. Malnutrition stunts our children's growth, increases their vulnerability to disease, and reduces their capacity to learn at school. And, of course, all this feeds through into the wider economy with poorer productivity and performance. So the challenges you are addressing today are not just about survival or fairness but are at the heart of hopes for long-term social and economic development. Without the solutions you provide and the commitment from political leaders to put them into action, our ambitions for a fairer and stable world will not account for much.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have seen from Ghana and from the continent of Africa, the scale of the challenge we face—and also how, working together, with science and technology as the major tools, governments, research institutions, private sector and individual farmers can overcome it. For more than any continent, Africa stands in need of the solutions this august conference will proffer for tackling the myriad challenges

in agriculture, nutrition and health. Africa alone, of all the world's continents, does not grow enough food to feed itself. This is not because of lack of will or shortage of land. In fact according to an authoritative recent report, around 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land is in Africa. Rather the devastating food deficit on the continent is largely because of a lack of knowledge, resources and opportunity. The critical need is for the **Transformed Farmer**. Across Africa, farmers are still scratching a living from the land by hand like our ancestors used to do. Agriculture is back-breaking. There is no joy or reasonable reward in this type of farming to attract the educated youth of today. The revolution which has transformed agriculture around the world, including here in Asia, has largely passed Africa by. The average farmer in Africa has not largely shared in the advances in irrigation or improved crop varieties which have revolutionised yields elsewhere. Our agriculture is overwhelmingly still rain fed. If the rains fail, our crops fail. Even if the rains come at the time and intensity expected, our crops are at the mercy of pests and diseases. Post harvest losses remain heavy. There is little use of pesticides, machinery or fertilisers. Together with out-dated farming practices, this reduces the fertility of the land. It forces families to move on, slashing and burning, causing severe and lasting damage to our environment. The educated youth therefore escape and drift from rural areas into towns in search of non-existent jobs.

In Ghana, not long ago, virgin forests used to cover 40% of the country. Now it is as little as 7%. Sadly, our forests are still being felled indiscriminately to meet international demand for wood and timber. We are destroying our precious natural heritage. And yet again, we are exporting raw materials without adding any extra value for our citizens or country. And, of course, climate change is making these challenges even worse.

Africa is the continent which is going to be most affected by the impact of man's carbon emissions into the atmosphere. Already we are seeing the deserts in the north of Ghana creeping south. Extreme weather across Africa is becoming more regular. The rains are becoming more unpredictable. This failure of agriculture forces us to import food from outside our continent, stripping countries of the resources they need for development. But too often this food is itself of dubious nutritional quality. For example, chicken parts from Europe which can't be sold at home and poor quality rice from Asia are dumped in Africa, forcing down the prices for our home-grown crop. In sum, ladies and gentlemen, this is the unhappy story of agriculture in many parts of Africa today.

But distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the picture is not all gloomy. For the evidence shows that if our farmers are given the knowledge and resources which their counterparts in other parts of the world take for granted, they can quickly increase yields. I have seen this from my time in Government in Ghana on important cash crops like cocoa and in food production, generally. It also led to tremendous increase in the production of livestock and fisheries.

Ghana is one of the biggest exporters of cocoa in the world, in fact, the second biggest. But it was always clear that, with the right Government support and the spread of best practice, yields could be greatly increased. This is the path my Government followed. We adapted the latest knowledge from universities, agricultural institutions, experts and farmers across the world. The policy was underpinned with access to affordable credit to the farmer. Cocoa farms were sprayed with pesticides free of charge. The government provided fertilisers where they were needed. Importantly, government gave farmers a major incentive to expand production through enabling them to keep a much bigger share of the international export price from about 40% in 2002 to about 70% in 2004. The result was that, between 2002 and 2005, cocoa production doubled per hectare. From 350,000 tons in 2001, production jumped to 734,000 tons by 2005—an all time record in the over 100 years of cocoa farming in the country.

We successfully used many of the same techniques to improve production for food crops such as maize, yams and plantains as well. Government, for example, established the Grains and Legumes Development Board (GLDB) to supply quality seeds and planting materials to farmers as a strategy to improve the quantity and quality of agricultural produce. The outcome is that, despite the problems the nation faces, food is plentiful in Ghana. We have made sure as well that our children gain from this progress and has also caused a monumental increase in enrolment. The government launched an ambitious programme to give all kindergarten and primary school pupils a daily hot and nutritious meal made from locally-produced food. This is keeping the children in school and has also caused a monumental jump in

enrolment. Further, the farmer gets enriched while the child is properly nourished. The girl-child in particular is saved by this policy from such plights as teenage pregnancy. Into motherhood later and with education, she should be more responsible in raising her children with better feeding practices. Already, interesting results are showing as more girls than boys are being enrolled in schools and in many instances.

We invested, too, in wider rural development. It is little good increasing yields if crops cannot be stored safely or transported to market. So as well as supporting irrigation, improved seeds and crop diversification, government pursued an integrated Rural Development Policy in which it built feeder roads, silos and cold stores for horticultural crops and fisheries. Government also extended mechanization on soft loan terms to the farmers.

Reintroduction of strategically deployed Extension Services network was given oversight-ship in implementing the policy. Rural electrification, upgraded healthcare centres, potable water supply and quality schools are integral to the policy. By this policy, government extended support to six out of every ten of Ghana's population that still live in rural communities and helped to slow down the increasing drift of the youth into our towns and cities.

A further plank of this policy has been the introduction of the Youth in Agriculture Programme by which special measures are targeted at the educated youth to entice them to remain in farming. Happily, similar progress is being achieved in many parts of Africa. But there is so much more that could be achieved with the help of international institutions such as yours. Technical and financial assistance must be extended openly and generously to the countries which can most benefit. Thus, capacity development in beneficiary countries must be identified as priority. The objective must be for international bodies such as IFPRI to work together in partnership with research institutes and scientists of recipient states to focus on their peculiar agricultural problems. The role of IFPRI is absolutely critical here in helping agriculture in less developed countries—particularly in Africa—to become more productive to effect positively on the nutrition and health of these countries. This requires that IFPRI commits to sustained and purposeful advocacy to ensure that farmers and communities benefit from the breakthroughs made in research and development. In this era of the all-pervasive Information and Communication Technology, this should be achievable. To achieve all these goals, IFPRI and its partners have to help individual governments put their research outcomes at the heart of integrated national policy programmes. There must also be collaboration with important continental and regional groups such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development, the Southern African Development Community and the Economic Community of West African States.

Distinguished colleagues, there is no more basic need than the food we eat. It decides not just the health of individuals but also the health of communities. Yet it is because of shortages of nutritious food that millions of our fellow human beings are condemned to far shorter lives than those in more food secure countries. In the 21st century, this is a scandal which must shame us all. The forces of globalisation, if they are to be seen throughout the world as benign, must be harnessed to tackle this most basic of inequalities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it becomes obvious that to leverage agriculture means above all, **transforming the farmer**, who must be educable and empowered by society to maximize quality food output using scientific and technological means. Properly rewarded by rational social market policies, farming should be the occupation of choice for the modern-day youth. A healthy and happy future for mankind needs such a farmer.

I am honoured to be with you. There is, I believe, no more important gathering in our world today than this conference. I wish you well in your discussions. Thank You.