



Speaker Summary Note

Session: Welcome Remarks

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Title: Leveraging Agriculture for Improving Nutrition and Health

Your Excellency, Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of the Republic of India; Your Excellency, Mr. John Kufuor, Former President of the Republic of Ghana; honorable ministers; distinguished guests and colleagues:

We are standing face to face with some serious challenges: hunger, malnutrition, and poor health are denying billions of people the opportunity for a healthy, well-nourished, and productive life. Agriculture, which played a key role in feeding billions of poor in the world in the past, faces more volatile growing conditions due to changing climate and scarcer resources because of urbanization and population growth.

These challenges are connected in a web of interactions. For example, when we change a farming practice or launch a new investment in agriculture—we trigger changes not only in crop or livestock harvests, but also fundamentally in the health and nutrition of farmers and consumers. All of our efforts—whether in agriculture, nutrition, or health—are inextricably linked. We are more likely to succeed in addressing the challenges if we understand these links and put them to work for people’s benefit. New attention to agriculture on the global stage means that we now have a unique opportunity to look carefully at our agricultural system and to determine how to make it function more effectively for people’s well-being. That is why we are here.

This conference is the centerpiece of a policy consultation process on “Leveraging Agriculture for Improving Nutrition and Health” facilitated by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and its 2020 Vision Initiative. IFPRI is one of the 15 centers of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), a consortium committed to applying science to the task of achieving food security for all.

Our current understanding suggests that we will need to take action in a number of areas. We will need to fill gaps in our knowledge by learning how different patterns of agricultural growth affect nutrition and health, and by investing in research and education systems that can integrate knowledge from all three sectors. We will need to work to minimize the risks that agriculture poses to human health. We must scale up innovative solutions; incorporate nutrition into the agricultural value chain; and design agriculture, health, and nutrition interventions with cross-sectoral benefits. Finally, we must create an environment in which cooperation can thrive, making use of partnerships, strong communication, and mutual accountability.

Our deliberations here will point the way toward entry points for action to maximize the positive synergies and minimize the negative links among the three sectors. Beyond this conference, our hope is that concrete steps will be taken to leverage agriculture for health and nutrition and that the conversation between us will continue.

It is now my privilege to introduce Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who has very kindly consented to give us his own perspective on the issues we will discuss here. Several years ago, Prime Minister Singh called upon IFPRI to provide research-based evidence on efforts to tackle malnutrition around the world. Today we are in New Delhi to bring to light new evidence and insights that will help not only India, but also other countries, to conquer malnutrition and poor health. We welcome you, Prime Minister Singh.