

Keynote Address delivered by Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank, at the World Food Prize, Des Moines, Iowa, October 13, 2016

1. Your Excellency President Joyce Banda, Professor M.S. Swaminathan, the Borlaug family, John and Janet Ruan, the World Food Prize Laureates, Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, and the future leaders in agriculture. I am delighted to be here with you all today. It is such a great honor for Ambassador Kenneth Quinn, President of the World Food Prize Foundation, to have invited me to be keynote speaker today. Thank you very much Ambassador Quinn, my dear friend; Professor Swaminathan; the Board members and staff of the World Food Prize Foundation, for all the great work you do. And congratulations as you celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the World Food Prize.
2. I applaud and congratulate the World Food Prize Winners of 2016, for their transformative work on developing bio-fortified crops. My most recent interaction with this team was two years ago, when Howarth Bouis and his team at Harvest Plus organized the Second Global Forum on Biofortification in Kigali, Rwanda. I was the keynote speaker. I was at the time, the Minister of Agriculture of Nigeria, where I had helped to massively push for large-scale cultivation of bio-fortified crops.
3. So impressed was I with the potential of this work, that I said to Howarth and his team “you deserve a World Food Prize”. So you can imagine how thrilled I was when Howarth and his colleagues – Maria Andrade, Jan Low and Robert Mwanga – were named as the winners of the World Food Prize for 2016.

4. Congratulations!

5. Today, I speak to you as President of the African Development Bank – the first person with an agriculture background to head a Multilateral Development Bank. So agriculture is a major priority for me: What else would you expect!

6. I wish my mentor, Dr. Norman Borlaug were here to hear how refreshing that is! After all, it was he who told me 10 years ago, “Go and score goals for agriculture in Africa,” on that memorable winter afternoon, as we walked together on the streets of New York to the Rockefeller Foundation, where I worked at the time. I would have told him, “Yes, Sir, the work has started and I now oversee resources to get it done!”

7. Ladies and gentlemen, like everyone in this room, every time the World Food Prize is given, it always reminds me of Dr. Norman Borlaug. He was the man who fed the world and started the World Food Prize. It also reminds me of John Ruan, Senior, the man who saved the World Food Prize. They are no longer with us today. They have gone to a better place in heaven. But they left the world a better place. We love and miss you both!

8. As I think about the nice meal we are having this afternoon, I think of the need to make that world much better, especially for millions who lack access to food. That is why focusing on agriculture and raising agricultural productivity, as a principal source of food, is critical.

9. Your choice of the theme for this year's World Food Prize, "Food as medicine", is so important in informing our better understanding of the intricate linkages between food and medicine.
10. Which is more important: food or medicine?
11. It reminds me of my own experience. My father, like many of his time, wanted me so desperately to be a medical doctor. At the young age of 14, I had passed my high school exams and sat for examinations to the university. My father always filled my forms, and his first choice for me was medicine, second choice veterinary medicine, and third choice dentistry. One way or the other, I would become a doctor!
12. Every time I took the exams, two years in a row, the universities would admit me for agriculture but not medicine. My father, who grew up poor as a farmer, never wanted me in anything near agriculture. Left with no choice, after two years of the same result, he gave up and said, "God must want you in agriculture." I went on to get my PhD in agricultural economics from Purdue University. The day I graduated, I sent my father a letter and said, "Dear Dad, I am a doctor now. You can leave me alone."
13. Years after, our first son graduated in the U.S. as a medical doctor. My father, aged 90 at the time, attended the graduation. During the event, he turned and said "Doctor". I thought he meant me, so I answered. He said, "No, I mean your son - the 'real doctor'!" We laughed. I told my dad, "Even medical doctors will tell you, take your medicines, but only after food! So agriculture is more important than medicine!"

14. Well, I must say, I now agree with Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, who said, “Let thy food be thy medicine and thy medicine thy food.”
15. These linkages all came back to my memory vividly, again, when I recently visited Madagascar, now as President of the African Development Bank. I visited one of the irrigated areas funded by the Bank. Seeing so many children and their mothers, I beckoned on the kids to come close. I noticed a very small boy among them. I was so sure he cannot be more than a five year old. His name is Antonio. To my shock, Antonio said, he was 13 years old. We all looked at each other, frozen by shock and dismay.
16. The problem of Antonio is stunting from malnutrition. He said to me he would like to be a medical doctor one day.
17. Africa and our world is full of many Antonios, who suffer from hidden hunger and malnutrition.
18. To eat well is expensive. Poor households, even when they can access food, tend to eat a lot more of starchy foods. This can help to reduce hunger, but does not necessarily lead to improved nutrition. The focus should not just be on filling the stomach. Focus should be on fueling the body with the right types of foods and nutrients needed for a balanced and healthy living.
19. Take the case in many parts of Asia. The Green Revolution was amazing. It raised caloric intakes for millions of poor households. However, despite all the benefits, malnutrition persisted. The same is true in Africa. Production of staple foods such

as tubers, maize, millet and sorghum has risen significantly. Yet, malnutrition persists.

20. Africa accounts for 20 of the 24 countries with stunting rates of over 40%. Furthermore, 22 of the 34 countries that collectively account for 90% of the world's stunting are in Africa. About 58 million children in Africa under the age of 5 years are too short for their age (stunted); about 14 million weigh too little for their height (wasted); and 10 million are overweight (obese).

21. Today, millions of kids go blind due to lack of vitamin A. They will not be able to attend school and have a productive life, all because of a basic nutrient like vitamin A. Similarly, millions of mothers die during birth from complications due to lack of vitamin A and iron deficiency.

22. Why should a mother die just for bringing a beautiful life to our world? And why must a child's future, in that world, be mortgaged for lack of basic nutrients for a healthy life? These things should not happen.

23. These are very disturbing numbers. And they are numbers we must change.

24. No child should ever go hungry – and no child should ever lose future economic opportunities or die early because of lack of nutritious food. We must do all possible for the children, from conception to their second birthday – the first 1,000 days – and beyond! And we must support better nutrition for their mothers. A healthy mother, who is economically empowered, will nourish her children.

25. Malnutrition impacts the economy. UNICEF has estimated the annual cost of under nutrition in Sub-Saharan Africa at \$25 billion. Africa and Asia lose 11%

of their GDP every year due to poor nutrition. The evidence is clear: *boosting nutrition boosts the economy*.

26. We must now change how we look at the problem of malnutrition. The greatest contributor to economic growth is not physical infrastructure, but brainpower, what I refer to as “*grey matter infrastructure*”. While it is obvious that a road or port can add to improved trade and economic growth, it is often not recognized that stunting shrinks the size of the brain and therefore compromises current and future economic growth of nations. *Stunted children today leads to stunted economies tomorrow*. It is that simple.
27. Therefore, we must redefine the debate around nutrition from one seen as a social development issue to one that shapes the path of economic growth and development. We must now invest in developing the *grey matter infrastructure* of Africa, by investing in better nutrition for its children, who are the future of the continent.
28. Access to food, in the right quantity and quality, is a basic human right. There is absolutely no justification that Africa, which has over 65% of all the uncultivated arable land left in the world, is unable to feed itself, spending \$35 billion per year on food imports – an amount projected to rise to \$110 billion by 2030 if the current trends continue.
29. Africa can feed itself – and Africa must feed itself! That is why at the African Development Bank, we have set “Feeding Africa” as one of our High 5 priorities. Working with governments and partners, our goal is to help Africa to achieve food self-sufficiency within 10 years. The African Development Bank will invest \$24 billion in boosting agriculture, food and nutrition in Africa, over the next ten years.

30. We know the technologies exist to transform African agriculture. But they remain, for the most part, on the shelves. We always remember what Norman Borlaug said: “Take it to the farmers.” To achieve this, the African Development Bank and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) have developed the Technologies for African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT) – a new initiative to scale up appropriate agricultural technologies from the CGIAR and national systems, all across Africa. The Bank and its partners plan to invest \$800 million in TAAT.
31. We will promote greater diversity in the production system. Our focus should be on food systems, not just food production. The key is to improve the capacity of the food value chain – from the field to the table – to produce and deliver healthy and nutritious foods.
32. Poverty is one of the major causes of malnutrition. Caught in poverty traps, many poor households spend most of their income on basic staples, leaving very little to even add basic nutritious diets. One of the cheapest ways to provide them with nutritious food is through food fortification. Greater efforts will be placed on boosting access to micronutrients for healthy living. Food fortification, especially adding iodine to salt, staple foods and cooking oil, is a cost effective way to get basic nutrients to households.
33. Bio-fortification should be strongly promoted. The remarkable success of Harvest Plus, in developing and disseminating bio fortified food crops is highly commendable. Orange flesh sweet potato, iron fortified beans, golden rice with high levels of beta carotene and yellow cassava, high in beta carotene, all have great potential in addressing micronutrient deficiencies. They are not just for poor

households. They should be promoted for the whole food system: for all of us! This will require addressing demand side constraints and promoting policies that encourage the private sector to incorporate these nutritious crops in processed foods.

34. As we raise agricultural productivity, we will pay greater attention to post-harvest losses, which are estimated at \$310 billion in developing countries. Over 65% of this occurs at the production and processing stages. Food losses alone per year in Africa is well enough to feed 300 million people, well over the 250 million that are malnourished. To achieve improved nutrition, we must reduce food system losses all along the food chain, from the farm, storage, transport, processing and marketing.

35. We will also address the huge problem of aflatoxin contamination of foods, a major source of food insecurity and malnutrition in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that a quarter of the world's food crops are affected by aflatoxins each year. Solving the problem requires a multi-sectoral approach, linking agriculture, health and food safety. Significant progress is being made in this area by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, which today produces *aflasafe*, which reduces aflatoxin levels by close to 100%.

36. The African Development Bank will support African countries to scale up efforts to solve aflatoxin problems, as well as expand private sector investments in *aflasafe* manufacturing companies. We need to complement all these with better food and nutrition policies, as well as greater levels of financing for nutrition.

37.The level of financing needed to address malnutrition is huge: estimated at \$7 billion a year for the next ten years. But it can be met!

38.To do so, I call for the establishment of “*Nutrition Social Impact Bonds*”. They will allow countries to raise money to support investments in better nutrition today. The bonds will generate greater social wealth in the future, through better health and education outcomes, a more productive work force, with higher income and tax revenues. Nutrition social impact bonds will allow nations to build smart economic future for themselves.

39.We must also equally push harder for political accountability on malnutrition and stunting. That is why I have called for an *Africa Nutrition Accountability Index*, which will rank countries based on progress on malnutrition and stunting. To push this, we have now established the *African Leaders for Nutrition*, which will include sitting African Presidents, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr. Dlamini Zuma; Dr. Graça Machel; former President of Ghana and winner of the World Food Prize, President John Kufour; former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan; Bill Gates; Aliko Dangote; Jamie Cooper; Director General of FAO, José Graziano da Silva Graziano da Silva; and myself.

40.I have just asked Ambassador Quinn, President of the World Food Prize, Foundation to join us; and I am delighted that he has accepted! We will carry the message from this World Food Prize on nutrition to Africa. We will be launching this formally at the African Union Summit in January 2017.

41.The imperative is to support children and their mothers!

42. I firmly believe that we will see greater success on malnutrition and stunting when we provide economic empowerment for women. To do this, the African Development Bank has launched what we call *Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa*, or *AFAWA*.

43. Through *AFAWA*, the Bank will help to mobilize \$3 billion towards supporting women entrepreneurs who do small business, including women farmers, who produce most of the food in Africa.

44. It is time we did big things for women in Africa! With higher incomes, women, mothers, will better feed their children, send them to school, and of course support better lives for their husbands!

45. *When we get the issues of women right, we will get nutrition right. When we get the issues of women right, we will finally get agriculture in Africa right.*

46. As we all celebrate the World Food Prize winners for this year, for their great work on “nutritious foods”, let us remember Antonio. Let us do all we can to transform agriculture, create new hope and opportunities for millions of kids, whose parents depend on agriculture for a living. Let us help ensure we eliminate malnutrition and stunting – and build grey matter infrastructure for our world.

47. Now, Ladies and Gentlemen....let me introduce you to Antonio. Here before you is Antonio with me in this photo we took together in Bas Mangoky, Madagascar. I sure hope he becomes a medical doctor to fulfill his dream. How wonderful would it be to invite Antonio to this same podium, in the future, to speak about

food and medicine! And it will be great to have my brother, Jim Kim, and I back for that!

48.Thank you very much for your kind attention.

49.God bless you all.