

**Speech by Dr. Akinwumi A. Adesina, President of the African Development Bank, Recipient of the "2017 Gene White Lifetime Achievement Award for Child Nutrition" from the Global Child Nutrition Foundation, Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill, Washington DC, June 13, 2017**

Your Excellencies,  
Former President Joyce Banda of Malawi, President and Founder of the Global Child Nutrition Foundation, Gene White,  
Senators, Congressmen,  
my dear wife, Grace - the beautiful lady who inspires me each day and without whom I wouldn't be who I am today - our two sons, Rotimi and Segun, family members, dear friends, colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. Thank you all for being here to honor me today. I am especially grateful to Gene White whose life commitment to the cause of nutrition has always inspired all of us. And to receive the Gene White Life Achievement Award from the Global Child Nutrition Foundation is a great recognition and honor indeed.
2. Thank you very much, Board members of the Global Child Nutrition Foundation, for this truly special award. Your generosity and motivation are remarkable.
3. Honor comes when one is surrounded by true friends, when one is recognized by those who have blazed the trails before, when one's humble contributions to make a difference in the life of the voiceless are noticed - and a nod is given to go out and do even more. And there's still so much to do and more territories to conquer for the poor, for the rest of my lifetime.
4. I grew out of poverty myself and I know one thing for sure: poverty is not pretty. And for the poor, access to food is the most important, for they spend most of their incomes just to feed themselves.

5. And nothing breaks a Mum's heart than for the child to say "Mama, my tummy is hungry". My life mission is to give hope and opportunities to millions of the poor, to champion their cause and to build a better future for them and their kids.
6. And there's no future without access to good quality and nutritious food. Yet today about 250 million Africans go to bed hungry, malnourished - majority of them children. That's just too many hungry stomachs!
7. There is no reason why our world or Africa, my continent, should have problems of hunger and malnutrition - not in a world that is full of surplus food and over-consumption. Food losses in developed countries are estimated by the Food and Agriculture Organization at \$680 billion per year while nearly half of that - \$310 billion – is attributable to developing countries.
8. Food losses occur on the farm, off the farm, in storage, transport, delivery processing, distribution, retail, and preparation. Quite a few losses occur when you leave food on your plate (so don't do that today, I'll be checking!). But simply put, there's enough food to feed everyone in the world.
9. The figures are compelling: food wasted in Africa can feed 300 million people. In the case of Africa, 250 million do not have enough food each day. So, just eliminating the food losses can more than feed them all. We must do a better job in reducing food losses along the food chain, improve food distribution and target supplementary food supplies to poorer households.
10. The supplemental food program in the USA deserves commendation and needs more support not less. As a young graduate student at Purdue University in the early 1980s, I saw how food stamps helped poor students and their kids. I saw how it allowed Americans to avoid the indecency of going hungry in the midst of plenty.

11. Food stamps or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program help give hope to 45 million people living in poverty to support themselves, half of them children.
12. In terms of policy, it's not that difficult. We should love our neighbors as ourselves. No child should ever suffer the pain of an empty stomach. God created stomachs to be filled not to be empty.
13. While eligibility could of course be made tighter, we should not tighten the stomachs of kids. Hungry kids don't learn. Kids without the right nutritious foods are unhealthy and diseases from malnutrition are serious.
14. Undernutrition remains the single largest contributor to child mortality and nothing sums up more precisely the appalling tragedy of unfulfilled human potential than a stunted child.
15. Investment in ramping up infrastructure is important, and this is a major area of work for the African Development Bank. But the most important infrastructure to build is "grey matter infrastructure"; the infrastructure that makes brains to grow from better nutrition, the infrastructure that builds the healthy and productive workforce of the future. We can repair physical infrastructure such as rail, road, bridges and power stations but stunting cannot be repaired or reversed.
16. Governments across the world must invest in grey matter infrastructure. That's why as a member of the Global Panel on Food Systems and Nutrition I established the "African Leaders for Nutrition", with other world leaders such as Bill Gates, Aliko Dangote, Jamie Cooper, Kofi Annan and ex-President of Ghana, John Kufuor.
17. For leaders must be held accountable for malnutrition. We are developing an "Africa Nutrition Accountability Index". The index will

transparently rate countries on their progress in addressing malnutrition and building grey matter infrastructure.

18. For we have to look at things differently. It is not just a social issue or just a health issue. Economic progress in the continent is being undermined by malnutrition which costs African economies around 11% of GDP annually - at least \$25 billion annually in Sub-Saharan Africa. Malnutrition leaves a lasting legacy of pain and loss. Stunted children today leads to stunted economies tomorrow.
19. 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. He said that his name was Antonio.
20. To my shock, Antonio said, he was 13 years old. We all looked at each other, frozen by shock and dismay. The problem of Antonio was stunting from malnutrition. He said to me he would like to be a medical doctor one day. My wife and I decided that we would adopt Antonio, and he is still with us and still wants to be a doctor. Africa and our world is full of many Antonios, who suffer from hidden hunger and malnutrition.
21. More than at any period in history we have all the tools we need to end malnutrition. One of the cheapest and most effective ways to provide nutritious food is through food fortification, for example adding iodine to salt, staple foods and cooking oil.
22. Bio-fortification - with orange flesh sweet potato, iron-fortified beans, golden rice and yellow cassava with added beta carotene - has excellent potential in rectifying micronutrient deficiencies. Bio-fortified crops now allow for nutrient-dense crops that meet the daily allowances for minerals and vitamins.
23. What's needed now is to get these technologies into the hands of millions of farmers, especially women farmers.

24. We know that breastfeeding is the surest way to build immune systems and brain development for babies and reduce susceptibility to diseases during those crucial first 1,000 days. Well-fed mothers will bring forth healthy babies, and birth a healthy nation.
25. That's why empowering women is crucial. No bird can fly with one wing. Equality for women is the key for a better world and a more successful Africa. We have taught our sons to respect women.
26. That's why at the African Development Bank we have launched the Affirmative Finance Action for Women (AFAWA), to leverage \$3 billion in financing for women entrepreneurs in Africa.
27. Boosting food and nutrition will improve health and wellbeing across Africa and our world. It will improve the quality of life for Africans. It's a debate we have in my family.
28. Just last week our son, Rotimi, who is here today, completed his residency program in pediatrics at the world famous Crozer-Chester medical centre in Pennsylvania. A few years ago when he finished medical school, I had an interesting discussion with him and with my own father.
29. You see, my father grew up as a poor farmer. And he never actually liked farming. When I applied to university, Dad filled in my forms. His mind was made up, I had to be a doctor. So my first choice had to be medicine, second choice veterinary medicine, and third choice dentistry.
30. Each time I sat for the entrance examinations, the university said my scores were short of what was needed to enter medical school, but they'd take me for agriculture. Dad did not accept this.

Three years in a row: same outcome. The third time my Dad exclaimed: God must want you in agriculture!

31. I eventually studied agriculture and later completed my PhD in agricultural economics at Purdue University, to become a doctor, so my Dad called me Doctor.

32. But when Rotimi finished medical school, my Dad, then 90 years old, travelled to the USA for the graduation. At the event, he saw me and Rotimi together and called out to us "Doctor!". I said "yes?" He said "not you, I mean the real Doctor".

33. I told Dad and my "real doctor son": well, even doctors will tell you to take your tablets three times a day, but always after food! So, agriculture is still more important than medicine!

34. As I receive this award today, over this lunch, I have to conclude with Hippocrates "Let food be thy medicine and medicine thy food".

35. Thank you very much for this award. I accept it because it will spur me to continue my passion and commitment to ending hunger and malnutrition globally and in Africa. To this I have dedicated my life.

36. I accept it because it helps me to light that path and even perhaps to show others the way.

37. I accept it because it helps me to stay optimistic, for I have become known as Africa's Optimist in Chief.

38. Now I have a pediatrician son to whom I can pass that passion, that dedication, that optimism - for his own lifetime.

39. I dedicate the award to my dear son, Rotimi, the real doctor!

Thank you and God bless you all.