

OFFICE OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR



8TH ANNUAL RENAPRI STAKEHOLDER CONFERENCE

THEME:

TRANSFORM: TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE & RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

ADDRESS BY:

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VICE – CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

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ISSER CONFERENCE ROOM, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

PROTOCOL

The Hon. Minister of Food and Agriculture, Dr. Owusu Afriyie Akoto; ably represented by the Director of Crop Services, Mr. Seth Osei-Akoto.

ECOWAS Representatives;

Representatives of Development Agencies;

Nana Ekua Edugyanmaa I, Nyifahenmaa, Gomoa Akyempim

Traditional Council;

Chair of the ReNAPRI Board; Dr. Miltone Ayeiko

Ag. Pro Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Student Affairs and

Provost of the College of Humanities; Prof. Dan Ofori

Director of ISSER & Host; Prof. Peter Quartey

Deans, Directors and Heads of Department;

Faculty, Staff and Students;

Members of Civil Society;

The Media;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

INTRODUCTION

It is with great pleasure that I welcome all participants to the opening ceremony of the 8th Annual Stakeholder Conference of the Regional Network of Agricultural Policy Research Institutes (ReNAPRI). I welcome you all warmly to the premier university in Ghana. The Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER), one of the formidable research institutes, policy think-tank and advocate in this country and on this continent, is proud to be hosting this year's conference under the theme; **"Transform: Towards Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems in Africa"**.

Agriculture, as we all know, is pivotal to our very existence and well-being. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of agriculture to our lives; it provides food, supplies raw materials for industry, and is a source of employment to a significant proportion of our population. According to a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization, FAO (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic occurred at a time when several countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) were recovering from drought, floods and locust invasion. As

we reflect on how to achieve sustainable and resilient food systems in Africa, there are key issues that I believe, if considered, will enable us place the conversation in the right perspective.

WHAT IS THE STATE OF AFRICA'S FOOD SYSTEM?

The FAO has indicated that “food systems encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities for the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture.”

Senegalese farmer and activist Mariama Sonko who chairs the ***We Are The Solution*** international movement has broken down Africa's food systems into three main elements – production, distribution, and consumption. I would like to touch briefly on each of these three elements:

Production

Movement restrictions occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic in many countries of the world heavily affected sectors that rely largely on imported inputs.

In most parts of Africa, the agricultural sector's most significant inputs such as fertilizer, seed, and agrochemicals are imported from outside the continent. The COVID-19 related movement restrictions disrupted the supply chain of agricultural inputs which led to a decline in their supply, increase in prices, and reduction in domestic purchasing power. In Ghana, for example, a release by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture in July 2021, indicated that "Following the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the prices of general goods and fertilizer, in particular, have significantly increased on the international market." The Ministry's statement further indicated that this increase in prices made approved prevailing prices uncompetitive. The Ministry, therefore, effected a 10% to 11% increase in the price farmers paid to acquire fertilizers.

In Senegal, households experienced limited access to inputs such as seeds and fertilizers (IPAR, 2020). Agro-dealers also reported a decline in the number of customers as most farmers saw a dip in their incomes and thus fewer resources with which to purchase agricultural inputs. There was a further report that suppliers of inputs increased wholesale prices, which compelled retailers to hike their prices. Farmers in Nigeria who purchased inputs also

noted a surge in prices. The full effect of the disruption in supply chains is yet to be experienced.

Regardless of these challenges, most harvests were unhindered by COVID-19 in 2020. This is largely because, in many countries particularly those in East Africa, farmers had prepared their lands for planting before the emergence of the pandemic. In Ghana and other West African nations where partial lockdown regimes were put in place, planting could still take place since areas where most of the farms are situated were not affected by the directive. Moreover, agricultural activities were considered essential services, so stakeholders were free to conduct their business even if they were in cities where lockdown measures were in force.

Going forward, we need to be more aggressive about promoting large-scale commercial agriculture through increasing the application of technology-driven measures throughout the entire food chain system. Significant integration of technology and digital measures into agricultural production will transform it from a subsistence practice to a modern economic endeavour.

Policymakers should work with the private sector to develop a framework that will shift the production paradigm from a

subsistence culture to a value-creation economic activity. Many people, especially smallholder farmers, see the practice of agriculture as an activity for survival rather than a viable business or economic enterprise. While there is evidence that this narrative is changing, there is the need for a deliberate policy stimulus to quicken the pace of this paradigm shift. This will help create an environment where investors will be more eager to commit resources for the growth and sustainability of the sector.

Distribution

It has been said that when it comes to the food systems in Africa, one of the most challenging aspects of the value chain is distribution. Most of Africa's agricultural products are produced in rural areas, usually far from the city centres. Due to a multiplicity of factors such as poor road network, inadequate logistics, and high cost of transportation, hauling of agricultural goods from the production centres to market centres is often impeded. These bottlenecks in distribution ultimately affect the market prices of agricultural products and also, have implications for post-harvest losses.

To remove the barriers to distribution, there must be deliberate policy interventions to improve infrastructure in areas where agriculture is widespread. This will improve economies of scale, smoothen the value chain, enhance food security and economic growth.

Mariama Sonko also makes the point that food distribution requires that postharvest care, preservation, and processing must be upscaled to guard against deterioration and loss of nutrients. Safe transport and storage, effective packaging, labeling, and marketing enable households to have access to healthy food.

Consumption

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, consumption patterns in West Africa have seen a transformation over the years. In the past, people ate less meat and used more natural oils than they do these days. Mariama Sonko, again, observes that these changes in our eating patterns have given rise to certain pathologies that were previously rare or unknown in our societies. Given the centrality

of food and nutrition to our existence, we must reinvent and integrate old culinary practices into our modern lives.

REFOCUSING AGRICULTURE AS A TOOL FOR POVERTY ERADICATION AND WEALTH CREATION

Let me direct my remarks on how to refocus agriculture to serve as a tool for poverty alleviation and wealth creation. We are all aware of the tag about Africa as the 'poorest continent of the world'. Yet, it is the most endowed in terms of natural resources and precious metals. According to the World Economic Forum, 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land is in Africa yet the continent is a net importer of food. Its food security and agricultural production have been unable to keep pace with population growth in urban areas in the last 30 years. Sadly, Africa is the only place where the absolute number of undernourished people has increased over the last 30 years.

With Africa's population projected to be 2 billion by 2050, agriculture will remain central to the survival and nourishment of the population. We can transform agriculture to become a mechanism for social cohesion, boosting intra-Africa trade with

the inception of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This will allow us to increase exports, create jobs and provide sustainable incomes for many, while drawing them away from poverty and subsistence farming.

The Government of Ghana's ***Planting for Food and Jobs*** which is helping farmers enhance their production capacity by subsidising inputs for farmers and providing extension services, is similar to other agricultural subsidy programmes on the continent. To enhance this programme, there is the need to equip farmers with business development skills and corporate governance strategies which would eventually move them to a position where they would be financially stable and would no longer require subsidies.

Given the limitations on the Government's purse and competing developmental challenges, it is evident that the subsidy programme may not be sustainable.

This is why we must adopt an all-round approach that will equip the farmers to approach farming as a business that could offer them decent incomes and sustainable jobs. If we can equip and support farmers to do that, the sector will become attractive to

investor capital because investors will be assured of a reasonable return on their investment.

CONCLUSION

As an aspiring world-class research-intensive university, University of Ghana will continue to support the agenda for food security on the continent, through cutting-edge research, innovation and knowledge dissemination, using its research Institutes and Centres such as ISSER and the West Africa Centre for Crop Improvement (WACCI). WACCI is one of the World Bank Africa Centres of Excellence (ACE) for higher education and research, which is training the next generation of plant breeders and seed scientists needed for the transformation of Africa's agricultural landscape. Governments need to have better partnerships with such Institutes and Centres to improve our agricultural fortunes.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I believe this conference which has assembled key stakeholders from agricultural policy research institutes in East, Central, South and West Africa to engage in strategic dialogue, will contribute

significantly to achieving Africa's vision of food security and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2 and 3 which relates to zero hunger, good health and well-being as well as SDG 1 on eradicating poverty.

It is my hope that at the end of the conference, we will harvest great ideas that will inform policy on how to promote food security within the (post) COVID-19 era.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.

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