

SPEECH BY

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ON THE OCCASION OF

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Your Excellencies, Heads of States and Government

Your Royal Highnesses

Secretary General of the United Nations

Secretary Generals of FAO and other UN bodies

AU Commissioner

Honourable Ministers

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

ECOWAS Commissioner of Agriculture

Representatives of International Organizations

Representatives of International Financial Institutions

Representatives of Non Governmental Organizations

Distinguished Delegates

I feel honoured to be invited to address this important summit on the world food security. I would like to further thank the Director General of FAO Mr. Jacques Diouf for extending an invitation to me which affords me the opportunity to share my thoughts on the theme of this Summit.

The Gambia as predominantly an agricultural country with over 70% of its population largely depends on farming for its economy. Our agriculture has gone through a number of stages and strategies, by virtue of the country's historical realities, and changes in the global economic climate.

Agricultural production is characterized by a highly rainfall dependent subsistence production of food crops, grain legumes, fiber crops, traditional livestock

production, fishing, and horticulture which have not been able to address the food needs of the Gambian population.

Livestock contributes about 20 percent of total agricultural output, and slightly less than 5 percent of the GDP. The livestock and poultry sub-sectors still need further improvement. Small ruminants, in particular, are in high demand as sources of animal protein for religious and cultural ceremonies. Furthermore, an improvement in the sub-sector would benefit from a horizontal linkage with tourism given that the sector presently imports most of its requirements for meat and dairy products.

Private and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been very active in promoting poultry farming as an alternative income generating activity in the rural areas around the country, as a way of enhancing their livelihood.

The fisheries sector contributes 12% of GDP and seeks to achieve increased sustainable production of fish for food security, income, and

trade on high-value domestic and foreign markets.

My Government has been supporting the implementation of key projects particularly, the value chain of the fisheries sector through small holders. Integrated projects that supported fish production, post-catch handling marketing were introduced. As a result, the income and employment of small scale agents and indigenous investment in the sector increased.

Shortfalls in farming technology, notably the absence of widespread artificial irrigation, has meant that only about 40% of the total arable land area of 558,000 Ha is put under cultivation. Furthermore, the low soil fertility levels, aggravated by rapid saline intrusion into swamp areas, soil acidification, bushfires, the low usage of inputs are all important factors that have contributed to the reduction in production and productivity in Gambian agriculture.

The major constraints of the agricultural sector include limited access to credit, inadequate water supply and availability of other essential inputs, inadequate infrastructure, disease epidemics and low farm incomes. The

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growing rural poverty and household food insecurity is accelerated by rural-urban drift and rapid environment degradation.

Despite these constraints, the country has great potential for increased production and productivity through the use of high quality seeds, organic and inorganic fertilizers and other improved technologies. The country is furthermore endowed with the River Gambia, almost half of which is freshwater, and large reserves of underground water suitable for irrigation on an all year round basis.

Your Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

On food Security and Poverty Reduction

During the colonial period, agricultural policies were aimed at developing select export commodities to satisfy the demands of the colonial industries. Groundnuts production was the focus of the colonial government policy.

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In the past 4 decades agricultural policies have undergone many changes. The first decade had witnessed the emphasis in general food production and increase in irrigation. Focus later shifted to achieving food self-sufficiency in the 1970s. The structural macro-economic adjustment programs of the 1980s however, compromised the country's ability to sustain the food production gains of the 1970s.

The 90s saw a shift towards a more robust response to the decline in agricultural production during the 80s. Furthermore, the attainment of food security and diversification of the export base become over-riding themes during this era.

Prior to 1994, agricultural production was extremely low as a result of low area under production despite the availability of over 558,000 hectares of arable land.

That era was characterized by the unavailability of improved varieties and other inputs, lack of agricultural machinery, lack of national experts and the motivational organization for the extension services. To compound it all, not only was there the absence of a vision but also a poor attitude to

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farming in general. The total area under production was therefore, never above 200,000 ha.

The sector however has limited technical capacity, access to finance, high operational cost and lack of proper equipment and machinery.

The 1996 World food Security Summit in Rome, heightened the focus on food security as a national overarching policy objective. A number of policy and program frameworks have been developed which define the goals and objectives of attaining food security. Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) were introduced as a macro-economic framework for sustainable human development and economic development and growth.

Since 2000, a number of programs aimed at increasing food security have been elaborated and are in various stages of implementation. In addition, government harmonized its sector policies and programmes with global and regional initiatives such as the Millennium Development goals (MDGs), the comprehensive Africa agriculture development Program (CAADP) of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the common

Agriculture Policy ECOWAP) of the Economic community of west African States (ECOWAS).

The sector has the potential to enable the country attain self-sufficiency in food production, and make significant contributions to employment and incomes particularly for women and youths, as well as for development and growth. For this reason, a new ANR policy has been elaborated to provide a framework for taking Gambian agriculture into the next century. The ANR policy thus aims for a “robust, market, oriented, commercialized...sector that is directly aligned with the macro-economic framework of the country”, and contributes to the attainment of a

“shared, inclusive and sustainable poverty reduction and economic growth in the Gambia”.

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished guests

In 2005, ECOWAS agreed on an Action Plan (2005-2010) to implement both the CAADP, and ECOWAP. ECOWAS was then mandated to implement the Action Plan, and consequently, the Regional Agricultural

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Investment Program (RAIP), which supplements national programs within the framework of the CAADP.

As I am speaking to you now The compact of the Gambia National Agricultural Investment Program (GNAIP) has been signed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All these changed with the establishment of a Vision. Vision 2020 as a blueprint for the Gambia’s future and is aimed at transforming the Gambia into a modern state. Agriculture has been at the forefront of my ambitions for the Gambia. **Farming is not an occupation for the poor but rather a lucrative business that is dignified and can bring food and financial security to any individual who is ready and willing to take the challenge.**

Gambians were called to go back to the land and this has given enormous dividend to the agricultural sector.

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Total area under production has increased from 237,000 ha. In 1999 to 356,000 ha in 2009. The greatest spectacular increase has been in rice production which has increased by 77.7% from 38,300 M tons to 64,500 MT in 2009.

Despite the floods that have affected lowland crops a bumper harvest in expected in food crops where area under production has increased by 27% with an expected production of 313,005 MT.

Although The Gambia was excluded from this year's nomination of African countries with food self-sufficiency, The Gambia's performance in Agriculture especially the quest for food security and self sufficiency since 1994 has been acclaimed by all agriculturalists. Our success story in this regard has been confirmed by the fact that The Gambia is the only West African country that did not receive food aid and in whatever form throughout the recent food crisis.

In addition, The Gambia was not among the countries where there were food riots and food shortages. In terms of efforts to ensure food security, I dare say that the Gambia is the only country in Africa where almost all

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public institutions including the military have heeded by Back to the Land call and have cultivated massive expanses of fields of various crops.

I wish to seize this occasion to thank the FAO for sensitizing world opinion on food security and bringing us all here. The political will to transform the Gambia to a better state is there, however, the assistance of friends of The Gambia is needed in our development efforts.

The Gambia National Agricultural Investment Program is one gateway to progress and an increase in aid by our international partners such as the

EU, IDB, ADB, and BADEA etc, will be indispensable to attain this progress will be indispensable. We all share a common ideal for a better world for everyone. It is in line with this commonality of our visions that we are making this appeal to the international community to join us in the implementation of this program.

The Gambia acknowledges the support and assistance received over the years from Japanese Food Aid, Republic of China on Taiwan, FAO, Islamic Development Bank, African Development Bank and The World Bank.

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We highly appreciate your support in the past especially during the soaring food crisis of 2008 and wish to express gratitude to your continuous and relentless support to our development efforts.

I thank you for your attention.