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**STATEMENT**  
**OF THE**  
**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR GENERAL AND FAO REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE**  
**FOR AFRICA**

**Mr. OLOCHE EDACHE**

**AT THE**  
**FAO Technical Meeting, Libreville, Gabon**  
**27 November 2006**

*Mr. Chairman,*  
*Honourable Minister,*  
*Excellencies,*  
*Distinguished Guests*  
*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is an honour and a great pleasure for me to thank you on behalf of the Director-General of FAO, Dr. Jacques Diouf, for coming to this important meeting. The meeting has been organized to focus on concrete steps towards solving the problems that impede the achievement of sustainable food security and agricultural development on our continent.

FAO is grateful to His Excellency Omar Bongo, President of the Republic of Gabon and his government for hosting this meeting that brings together African technical experts. I am also pleased to acknowledge the financial support generously provided by the Government of Italy. I would like to congratulate the National Organizing Committee for its dedication and professionalism and express my appreciation for the inputs provided by our development partners in general, especially the African Development Bank, in finalizing the documents for this meeting.

Mr. Chairman,

Africa is often in the headlines of global mass media; all too frequently for the wrong reasons. Hunger and malnourishment remains widespread. The number of the undernourished people is increasing while significant reduction is observed in Asia. It is said that Africa is the only region not on target to meet any of the Millennium Development Goals.

According to a recently published FAO study, in 2003-2004, out of the 35 countries in the world that faced serious food emergencies 24 of them were in Africa. In East Africa alone the lives of 13 million people were under threat. Since 1998, the continent has been faced with some 20 cases of food emergency every year. The indicators of doom are numerous, but I shall not bore you with figures that I am sure you know all too well.

I am an optimist and I believe that the war against hunger, malnourishment, and poverty can be won on African soils. FAO statistics show that the food security situation is improving in a number of countries, albeit to a varying degree. In 24 countries, the year-on-year improvement has been significant. The number of countries with a food availability of more than 2330 Calories/caput/day has increased from 7 in 1990 to 11 in 2003. This is small, but these countries deserve a pat on the shoulder.

What encourages me most is that countries such as Ethiopia who are well known for their food insecurity and undernourishment are among those who are making tangible progress in their fight against hunger.

Agriculture on the continent is also not performing as badly as is generally reported. The average growth rate in recent years has been higher than during the period from mid-1980 to mid-1990. There are many bright spots, or shall we call them success stories, that give reason for hope. If they are systematically up-scaled within the same country and replicated in others, then we will have cause to celebrate. I could give a number of these stories of hope, but suffice it to say that the NEPAD Secretariat has compiled a portfolio of success stories and I understand that the Abuja Summit will deliberate on the design of mechanisms to facilitate their up-scaling and replication.

The adoption, in 2003, by African Heads of State and Government of the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme as a vehicle for agricultural growth and poverty alleviation, heralded a sense of optimism. There was added hope, when in approving CAADP in Maputo, African

Leaders committed to increase budgetary allocation to agriculture development to 10% of their national budgets. We all believed this signaled that our leaders were according agriculture the priority it deserves.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to reinforce to you that FAO remains a committed and loyal partner of the African Union and the NEPAD Secretariat in the CAADP process. It has responded to requests from 51 African countries to prepare National Medium Term Investment Programmes and Bankable Investment Project Profiles. These form a basis for accelerated implementation of the CAADP programme. They were prepared through consultative processes involving many national stakeholders in line with the spirit of local ownership and leadership that NEPAD advocates.

I am pleased to inform you that as of the end of October 2006, the preparation of the investment programmes and project profiles is completed in 48 countries, and it is at an advanced stage in the remaining three. There are now 192 project profiles ready for funding, with a total budget of close to US\$10 billion. About 70 percent of these are targeted at water control and infrastructure development, which underlines the critical role of water control and infrastructure in the struggle against underdevelopment and poverty on the continent.

Unfortunately, the news I receive in terms of achieving the CAADP targets at national, regional and continental level is not always encouraging. I understand that many countries have incorporated their project profiles in their national development framework and a few countries have started implementation. They are either using their own resources or working in collaboration with development partners.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

The continent's development partners have expressed their willingness to assist in the implementation of CAADP, as we have observed in the declarations of the G8 Summits in recent years.

The Government of the People's Republic of China is planning to double its development assistance to Africa by 2009. The Government of Japan indicated its commitment to assist Africa in the framework of the Tokyo International Conference for Africa Development which it has hosted every five years since it was launched in 1993.

Today's meeting is being held against the background of slow progress in CAADP implementation on one hand and a favourable external environment for attracting development assistance, on the other.

But, dear friends, we must acknowledge the growing criticism that African leaders and technicians are spending most of their time in meetings, which leaves no time to apply solutions to the actual problems.

Mr. Chairman,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have two major challenges in this meeting.

The first is to make this meeting different. It should remain focused and deliver a small number of strategic recommendations. The success of this meeting will not be judged by the number of recommendations made, but by the concrete steps taken to implement solutions.

The stage has been set by limiting the agenda to two topics: the first is *agricultural water control and rural infrastructure development* and the second is *Improvement of intra-African trade*. These are a priority among priorities. As long as these issues are not addressed, agricultural development and food security will remain as elusive as it has in the past.

The second challenge is to take full advantage of the pathway to the AU Summit which will take place in Abuja next week. The strategic recommendations produced by your deliberations today can go forward to your Ministers later this week and then onto Abuja next week. I urge you not to squander this unique opportunity to have your recommendations endorsed in such a short space of time.

Mr. Chairman,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning and I wish you well in your deliberations.