

**Talking point for FARA ED Opening Remarks at
5th Africa Soil Partnership (AfSP) Plenary meeting
6th - 7th July 2021 By 1000 hours GMT**

- The Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, and Sustainable Environment (DARBE), H.E. Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko;
 - Dr. Abebe Haile-Gabriel the Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Africa;
 - Mr. Eduardo Mansur, Director of the Office of Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environment at the FAO
 - Prof. Victor Chude, the Chairman of Africa Soil Partnership (AfSP).
 - Distinguished Scientist, here present
 - Ladies and gentlemen.
1. I bring warm greeting from the FARA secretariat and I want to express my excitement about this gathering. It is another opportunity to examine the progress made on the issues of soil management in Africa.
 2. The title of this gathering, “5th Africa Soil Partnership Plenary Meeting” triggered a reminder of the central mission of the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) since the commencement in 2012. The mission is *“to develop capacities; build initiatives on best available science; facilitate the exchange of knowledge and technologies among stakeholders; facilitate the implementation of the existing multilateral environmental agreements; stimulate action among the technical and scientific bodies for sustainable management of soil resources at all levels, with a view to enhancing food security and protecting the ecosystem services”* I reckon that by association, these also stands as the mission of the Africa soil partnership
 3. The subject of soil health and management is central to the crave to achieve a sustainable food system in Africa. This assertion is premised on four important facts; (1). Africa soil is the core resource the continent holds to build sustainable agriculture; smart agrarian livelihood, and economic prosperity. (2). Africa has 60% of the unused arable land in the world and that constitute a veritable asset for global food and nutritional security; (3). Africa soil is rich but also fragile; as such it requires good handling to sustain the production of food and fiber; (4). Research and policy attention to soil health, control of land degradation and sustainable land use is sub optimal in Africa.
 4. These four pillars underscore the importance of the discussion we are having in the next two days; and the need to take the outcome of this discussion forward into the policy circle for necessary institutional arrangements and technical action.

I want to re-iterate the word “technical action” because the tendency to consider this discussion as an end itself is high; and we have had many of such talks but less action. I think Africa would have gone a million miles ahead if we ensure that all talks lead to action of some sort.

5. Specifically, on the issues of land degradation in Africa, recent statistics is a lot frightening, the analysis by Nkoya *et al.*, (2016) on the economics of land degradation in Africa indicated that the annual cost of land degradation due to land use/cover change is about 300 billion USD. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) accounts for the largest share (22 %) which is 66 billion per year. The study further indicated that the cost of action against land degradation is much lower than the cost of inaction, and the returns to taking action are high. On the average, one US dollar investment into restoration of degraded land returns five US dollars.
6. The proposal to develop a soil initiative for Africa is built on series of recent efforts that garner the support of regional and sub regional bodies with mandates for coordination of agriculture in Africa. An initial document was prepared by David Nielson, titled: “Considering a Soil Initiative for Africa” and published in January 2020 by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. This is followed by various discussion held during the “5th Annual Workshop of the Global Community of Practice on Scaling Development Outcomes” held between October 19 – 30, 2020. A side event was held on “Developing a Soil Initiative for Africa” at the Alliance for Green Revolution Forum (AGRF) 2020 and another at the World Food Price forum side event on “Scaling Soils Restoration: A Roadmap to Action”.

The Africa Union Commission (AUC) has explicitly called on FARA to develop and launch a Soils Initiative for Africa along the lines suggested in the Chicago Council paper. The task team drawn from the key stakeholder’s group in Africa agriculture including, FARA, the SROs, AFAAS, AfSP and other CSO has commenced action in developing the initiative.

7. Central to this initiative is the coordination of multiple actions scattered across the continent. Systematic alignment of the various initiatives with the overarching framework for the development of agriculture at the continental level to ensure effective reporting and policy development. The initiative will also run a technology cataloging and knowledge management for dissemination. It will run advocacy to halt the spate of land degradation, foster soil fertility maintenance and respond actively to issues of soil health among others. The partnership of AfSP and others is vital to make this initiative a spring ball to lasting success. On the note of partnership for a virile soil initiative for Africa, I will propose the development of a synergy between the *AFRISOIL* and the upcoming *Soil Initiative for Africa (SIA)* if possible.
8. It is then imperative to continuously advocate for investment in agricultural research and technology generation. The good efforts of CAADP in asking the countries to invest 10% budgetary allocation to agriculture is commendable; same way the more recent proposition by the Commissioner of DARBE for 10% of the committed funds towards

COVID to be used for funding agricultural research is lofty. Requesting this and getting the countries that are sovereign entities to comply is a different ball game.

- 9. FARA has given lots of efforts into systemizing the contribution of science to agricultural development in the Science Agenda for Africa Agriculture (S3A). Mainstreaming the S3A into the country processes suggest that the S3A will be a tool for agenda and priority setting; it will be the tool for policy coherence and an instrument for resource mobilization. We must continue our advocacy for increased investment and commitment to technology generation based on demand and this is the way to go.**

- 10. All roads lead to the UN Food Systems Summit, come September. FARA is of the opinion that the Africa partners must have one voice and has advanced the development of the “One Africa Voice”. The development of this message involves the engagement of all stakeholders in Africa agriculture to lend a voice. The action involves series of consultation and discussion to develop the agreed policy briefs to be presented. On-going now is a side event convened by FARA as part of the Science Days of the UNFSS. The Panel-6 led by Dr. Kanayo Nwanze is facilitating a high-level panel on “Sustainable Financing of Research and Innovation to Improve the Performance of Africa’s Food System”. Apparently, FARA has ensured that the issues of soil management, soil health and halting land degradation secured a prominent place in the policy brief.**

- 11. Permit me to congratulate the organizers for a putting together this lofty partnership webinar. With this kind of cooperative spirit, Africa agriculture will soon experience the desired transformation.**

- 12. Thank you**