

# Message from the Board Chair

In 2008, global production of major cereal crops set a world record of about 2.15 billion tons. The harvest was large enough not just to meet world demand for food and feed but also to rebuild dangerously depleted global grain reserves.

And yet Africa still struggles to feed its people. In fact, hunger on the continent has never been more rampant, with nearly 220 million Africans lacking enough food to eat each day. Food prices across Africa rose more than 60 percent in 2008 and, while the global recession contributed to a pull back in commodity prices later in the year, they will undoubtedly rise again as an economic recovery takes hold.

It is a sad fact that Africa has faced widespread hunger for decades. Yet surging fuel prices in 2008, higher demand for food due to rising incomes, the diversion of food crops to biofuel production, and extended droughts in some regions combined to create the crisis we now face.

But there is another, more fundamental cause: the long-term neglect of African agriculture, both nationally and internationally. In part because of the success of the Green Revolution in Asia, the portion of OECD Official Development Assistance for agriculture has declined from 16 percent in 1980 to less than 3 percent in 2008. The financial taps for sustaining agricultural research and development have been running dry.

At the same time, African governments neglected agricultural development, often in an effort to comply with misguided policies of bilateral donors and multilateral financial institutions, such as the structural adjustment programs. This affected every aspect of food production in Africa – from agricultural research and development, to the construction of roads connecting rural areas to markets, to the provision of basic services to farmers.

The cost of this neglect has been high. African food production per person has actually



AGRA Chairman, Kofi A. Annan, discusses new opportunities for maize improvement in West Africa with Professor Eric Danquah, Director, West Africa Centre for Crop Improvement at the University of Ghana.

fallen by 12 percent since 1980, and Africa is the only region in the world where per capita food production is still in decline.

## Africa Must Feed Herself

Clearly, global abundance is not enough to ensure that Africa eats. To feed the continent's 900 million people, Africa must achieve its own food security. To do that requires nothing less than a complete transformation of the agricultural sector. As Asia did in the 1960s and 70s, Africa needs a Green Revolution of its own. But our Green Revolution must be grounded firmly in present-day African realities, while drawing lessons from the positive and negative experiences of the past. It must recognize smallholder farmers as the key to increasing production, promote change across the entire agricultural system, and put equity and protecting the environment at its heart. Indeed, we need a uniquely African Green Revolution.

More so than Asia, Africa has a great diversity of crops and crop varieties, which we must conserve. This diversity is a result of the great variety of landscapes, soils, climates and cultures. Africa needs dozens, if not hundreds, of improved varieties of our indigenous staple foods – crops better able to cope with climate change, and to endure recurrent drought and attacks by insect pests and diseases.

Also unlike Asia, farming in Africa is largely done under rain-fed conditions. Less than 5 percent of our farmland is irrigated, compared to some 40 percent in South Asia. We need to scale up wise water resource management through a variety of innovations and reduce the continent's dependence on increasingly erratic rainfall.

We must also revitalize Africa's soils. Continuous farming, without replenishing nutrients taken up with each crop, has left our soils the poorest in the world. We need to encourage integrated soil management practices and the increased use of fertilizers, which in Africa are scarce and expensive, and we need to ensure that our farmers understand how to deal with soil health problems in efficient and environmentally sound ways.

### AGRA's Evolving Strategy

AGRA is working with its partners to bring about a uniquely African Green Revolution that will unleash the continent's agricultural potential. Towards that end, we are evolving a strategy designed to deliver both near-term and longer-term results. This strategy, which was reviewed by the Board at the end of 2008 and will come fully on line in 2009, rests on the idea that AGRA's resources and its efforts with partners should initially focus on where they will have the highest payoff – in Africa's high-potential 'breadbasket' areas.

These are land areas of significant size with relatively good soil, reliable rainfall, a

basic infrastructure already in place, and active smallholder farmers. They are also located in countries with a commitment to agricultural development. By focusing our investments in these areas, and by taking a comprehensive value-chain approach, we can reverse decades of rising hunger and achieve a 'demonstration effect' that will spur the scaling up of such investments in other countries. Without such concentration, our resources will eventually be spread too thinly and fail to bring about the rapid change that is desperately needed.

As in the rest of the continent, developing Africa's breadbaskets depends on improving the productivity, profitability and sustainability of smallholder farmers. This army of small producers – the majority of them women – grows most of Africa's food. And they do so with limited government support, minimal resources, poor quality seeds and a lack of fertilizer to improve the quality of their soil. They also now have to cope with the emerging impacts of climate change.

### A Global Reawakening

Today, in part because of the global food crisis, the world has reawakened to the importance of agriculture. African governments are reasserting their commitment to agriculture. In 2003, the African Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) produced a Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program, which aims to achieve a 6 percent annual increase in agricultural productivity. The African Heads of State and Governments endorsed the Program and governments have committed themselves to investing at least 10 percent of their annual budgets in agriculture. AGRA strongly supports the CAADP agenda and will work closely with NEPAD to ensure that Africa's Green Revolution helps to achieve the targets that have been set.

Multilateral funding is increasing from the African Development Bank, the International

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Kofi A. Annan, Chairman



MOU signing between AGRA, WFP, FAO and IFAD at the FAO High-level Conference on World Food Security. In 2008, AGRA established a formal partnership with UN Rome-based agencies working on agriculture. From left to right: Kofi A. Annan, AGRA Chairman; Josette Seeran, Executive Director of the World Food Program; Jacques Diouf, Director General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization; and Kanayo Nwanze, Vice President, International Fund for Agricultural Development.

Fund for Agricultural Development, and the World Bank. In particular, the World Bank is reappraising its policies, and its *World Development Report 2008* was dedicated to the state of world agriculture and how to move it forward. Yet in many cases, bilateral assistance from developed countries still lags behind. In July 2008, the G8 committed over USD 10 billion to near-term food aid and longer-term agricultural development, and we are hopeful that, despite the global economic downturn, these pledges will become reality. For in truth, government-led farm support is happening in every region of the world – except in Africa.

We must reverse the policies of abandonment. We must help Africa’s smallholder farmers attain what has eluded them for so long – fully productive and profitable farms, adequate food, and a healthy living environment. Feeding the majority of the poor and vulnerable populations in Africa, while preserving the natural resource base

and the environment, is one of the most pressing development challenges of the century.

Resilient and flexible partnerships such as those being developed by AGRA are key to success. Indeed, all of our work is carried out through partnerships: with African governments, universities, scientists, NGOs, civil society, farmers’ organizations, development partners, private companies, and innovators across the food value chain. Together we have begun to make demonstrable progress, and we invite all interested organizations, large or small, public or private, to join us in this endeavor to improve African livelihoods and food security.

Kofi A. Annan, *Chairman*