

Speech at the opening of the International Conference "Team up with African agripreneurs"

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How can we help African farmers and agripreneurs to provide their urban population with fresh and healthy food, such as vegetables, fruit, poultry, dairy products and meat?

Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

that is the core question that brings us together. We consider that supplying the booming urban markets in Africa with fresh and healthy food is to be seen as both a challenge and a vital opportunity for young African farmers and agripreneurs. What is needed so that they are up to the challenge and can effectively take advantage of this unique opportunity?

And what is it that we from our side can contribute – in terms of innovative technologies, agrolistics, hardware, software and orgware, especially in the post-harvest farm-to-market trajectory?

We, that is the Dutch Diamond Actors – government, research institutions, business and civil society organisations. How can the Dutch Diamond Actors connect to the challenges and opportunities, establishing partnerships for reinforcing rural – urban linkages and developing the fresh food chain?

Of course, this challenge is related to a great number of hot policy issues. Think of hunger but also of obesity, think of youth unemployment and migration, think of conflict and climate change – all highly important issues, and all directly related to the theme of our conference. But in this conference we want to go beyond the usual policy analysis and statements, and beyond politically correct intentions.

We would rather see this conference as a Call for Action. What is needed, what can we contribute, what are the opportunities, how do we organise it. Sharing of experiences, get businesses and organisations to invest more in Africa, develop partnerships for joint activities, here and now.

Team Up with African farmers and agripreneurs so that they can develop the fresh food chain and provide their booming urban markets with healthy food!

We are happy to welcome many eminent African guests here today too. Especially Mrs. Josefa Sacko, the Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture of the African Union. This conference is also about their experiences, the opportunities and challenges they see. You, dear guests from Africa, you know best what works and what does not in your countries' specific settings. So let's listen carefully and start working together.....

We are happy to welcome also eminent representatives of the multilateral institutions, especially the Director-General of FAO, you Dr. Graziano da Silva, and President Houngbo of IFAD.

We are grateful for the overwhelming presence of the numerous representatives of the foodFIRST Coalition and other interested persons from The Netherlands, from Africa, from Europe.

This is the third conference in eight years' time. At the end of the second conference, the Vice-President of the Rabobank, Berry Marttin, conveyed to me: "well, this was good, but next time even bigger and more impact".

Well, Berry, we tried to keep our promises and we thank you, the Bank and the Rabo Foundation for their hospitality and cooperation.

As we are grateful to the other contributors to this conference, the Food & Business Knowledge Platform, ECDPM, the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Agriculture, Agriterro, AgriProFocus, ICCO, Wageningen University, all the members of the Coalition.

But your interests in this event, dear participants, has also something compelling:

- the first conference, nearly ten years ago, tried to put agriculture and food back on the agenda of international cooperation and Dutch politics. That succeeded with help of many and I want to thank Ambassador Hooegeven here present who has been of great help all these years as he is today.
- the second conference, already mentioned, tried to underscore the indispensability of family farming in Africa and connect its potential with broad international cooperation with and beyond just a governmental concern.
- today should be different: the time of just highlighting, stressing the importance is over. In these three years after the second conference exciting developments and insights have taken place; to start in Africa itself, on the level of AU/EU dialogue, the multilateral agreement on SDGs, the Paris Convention on Climate and the recognition that demographic developments and this fatal circle hunger-conflict-migration should be broken, and most of all that the fastest growing urban population of all continents should and can have access to healthy and affordable food.

Fortunately a number of European leaders followed the observations and conclusions of their African counterparts and they proposed to put the challenge central to their policies of international cooperation.

Fortunately the Netherlands Government followed suit in its new Coalition Agreement which reinforced focus on investments in and assistance to African agriculture and with highlighting these priorities at the forum which our temporarily membership of the Security Council offers us.

Therefore our conference today should be on operationality, on starting new initiatives and strengthening the many already existing practices.

That will determine in the months and years to come the success and the justification of all your efforts and those of our Coalition.

In this sense and with regret about the absence of my successor, Dr. Veerman – because of illness – I wish you a very fruitful day.