



REMARKS OF HER EXCELLENCY MRS JEANNETTE KAGAME

AGRF Special Event

"Grow, Nourish and Reward - Bold Actions for Resilient Food Systems":



- **Excellency Hailemariam Dessalegn,**
- **Rt. Honourable Patricia Scotland QC, Commonwealth Secretary General,**
- **H.E. Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, African Union Commission**
- **My dear sister, Excellency Mrs Roman Tesfaye,**
- **Dr Agnes Kalibata, President of the Alliance for A Green Revolution in Africa,**
- **Honorable Dignitaries,**
- **Distinguished Guests,**

Good morning

Allow me to begin by congratulating the organisers of AGRF, the premier platform, for the disruptive leadership around agriculture as an enabler of integrated, equitable and sustainable growth.

This stage is the ideal setting to discuss, an issue so pivotal to Africa's accelerated economic growth, to the development of our continent, and, I dare hope, the future of Africa's green revolution.

It presents a prime opportunity, to effect ground-breaking and lasting change.

The truth is, the facts are alarming. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, political instability and conflict, climate change and widening wealth gaps, food security has deteriorated, rather than improved, around the globe, over the past couple of years.

I say alarming, **Esteemed Guests**, but not damning; budget reallocation, strategic policy adjustments, and determined advocacy, could put us on the right track to meeting, our global 2030 “Ending World Hunger” goal.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This 12th AGRF Summit under the theme "Grow, Nourish and Reward - Bold Actions for Resilient Food Systems: " is very well chosen, to address AU Agenda 2063, and the 5Ps of Sustainable Development within Agenda 2030, namely: **People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership**. Indeed, this theme is ideally situated, to reinforce the African Union’s Year of Nutrition.

In matters of health, individual and social progress, and indeed overall welfare, nutrition is the inception point.

Good nutrition is the cornerstone of health, peace, holistic wellness and prosperity.

It is well known that people with healthy eating habits and patterns, avert obesity and Non-Communicable Diseases, notably heart disease, diabetes, and even some cancers. Therefore, to champion for good nutrition across the world, is a necessary feature, of any responsible leadership.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you all know, the sixth edition of the Global Report on Food Crises came out in May this year.

It gives valid reasons for concern. According to this report: “ *...the alarmingly high incidence, of acute food insecurity and malnutrition, starkly exposes the fragility, of global and local food systems, that are under mounting strain, from the increased frequency and severity, of weather extremes, the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing conflict and insecurity, and rising global food prices.*

The interconnectedness of drivers, is further laid bare by the unfolding war in Ukraine, which not only compromises the food security of those directly affected by the war, but compounds existing challenges, faced by millions of acutely food-insecure people, worldwide”. End of quote.

Honourable Guests,

We are told that a projected 660 million people, may still face hunger by 2030, half of whom, will be on our continent!

This reiterates, why peace and security, are non-negotiable. One of the main drivers of food insecurity in Africa, is conflict.

Conflict, creates internally displaced persons, who are no longer able to till their lands, and maximise production. Other factors include the high cost of food – where it is available – income inequality, and climate variations.

As the African Union has raised before, there exists on the continent, two polar nutritional problems, and a shrinking gap, between these two.

We are now suffering, from both undernutrition and obesity.

I shall not venture into explaining to the experts in this room, why obesity, is less distant from undernutrition than we might think, and why a lot of the modern manufactured diets we espouse, may well leave us both lacking in nutrients, and at the same time alarmingly overweight.

How do we achieve healthy, balanced, farming and fishing-based diets?

We must draw wisdom, from the global trend of a return to indigenous agricultural practices, greater consumption of bio foods, and regular exercise, to purge lifestyle-related diseases.

Esteemed Guests,

The ARNS targets a 40% reduction in stunting, in children aged under 5, by 2025. The strategy commends Rwanda, and our sibling nations, Senegal and Ethiopia, for the significant reductions, achieved in our respective countries, over the past few years. But we still have a long way to go.

Esteemed Guests,

Allow me to share in the few minutes remaining, a few facts regarding innovations in Rwanda that address the issue of food insecurity and nutrition.

On a side note:

I do not wish to overwhelm you with detail, this early morning - but hopefully, the Rwandan coffee you had with your breakfast, was strong enough, to make the next few illustrations engaging!

- The first is the Rwandan focus on Beans as a Superfood: in our land of a thousand hills, over 90% of rural households grow beans, across all agro-ecological zones, contributing to 32% of their calories intake, and 65% of their protein intake. This leads to less reliance on red meat, which is growing less affordable, is widely linked to diseases such as gout, and is known to increase greenhouse emissions.
- Rwanda has also strived to diversify, its approaches to combating child stunting, as earlier mentioned, under nutrition-sensitive development frameworks.

It has been unrolling successful models across the country, such as our Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDs); a partnership between the Government of Rwanda, Imbuto Foundation, which I have the honour to Chair, and UNICEF. ECDs prioritise healthy nutrition and healthy habits, for children in and out of school.

- The Rwandan Government has instilled, and actively monitors the implementation of food-related policies, enriching the most consumed condiments: maize flour, wheat flour, oil, sugar and salt.

Rwanda has instilled a one cup of milk per day per child policy, which complements the country's attribution of over 400,000 cows to families in need.

Similarly, locally instilled practices, are school-feeding for children, and our 3 fruit trees per home campaign.

Last but not least, to complement the attempt to good nutrition, community friendly practices have been instilled, such as a monthly *Umuganda*, for a clean environment, and a bi-monthly car free day, for exercise in public spaces.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Rwanda is obliged to employ homegrown solutions, both as a geographically small country, and as one whose survival and progress have been rooted in self-protection and self-sustainability.

Nutrition-wise, this has meant investing in land consolidation and crop intensification programmes, local production of improved seeds, making farmers less dependent on imported seeds – access to which was heavily compromised during the pandemic, and excessively financially burdensome throughout the years. 80% of the improved seeds used in Rwanda, are now sourced in Rwanda.

We believe that these practices are aligned with the AU's ambition of increasing productivity, accessibility, desirability, affordability, and sustainability in our food systems; a mirror to our own National Strategy for Transformation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Rwandans, we are delighted, to have been named by the African Union Commission, as the best country overall in implementing the Malabo Agricultural transformation policy framework, for the third year in a row.

Honorable Guests,

I applaud the commitment you have shown, in championing good nutrition, for the citizens of your countries.

We must never tire, in using our respective public platforms, our resources and our access, to advocate for nutrition and agricultural research, and to implement our own programmes in the fields of agriculture, nutrition, climate resilience and wellness.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for taking a risk, trusting First Ladies to make the commitments needed, and for offering me this opportunity, to express my passion, for health and good nutrition on our continent.

Until next time, let us never forget, that the citizens of our countries, are owed a healthy planet, healthy nourishment, and a healthy life.

Thank you all!