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Needed Actions for Africa's Development

I would like to thank the organizers for selecting me to participate in this very important meeting. I also would like to express my appreciation for giving me the opportunity to say a few words on my perspective for promoting food systems for Africa's development. Food Systems is simply defined as all the processes that will ensure availability and affordability of food to feed a nation. For example, growing crops or raising livestock, harvesting, value addition/processing, packaging, transportation, marketing and consumption. I will concentrate this presentation on the agricultural aspects that will cover all these processes.

African Agricultural Context

- Agriculture is the largest sector of the Economy in Africa contributing about 35% of the GDP and employing about 60% of the labor force. Hence, agricultural continued growth is essential for Africa's development.
- Production systems are very diverse and dynamic and over 40% of the World's uncultivated arable land is in Africa.
- In most places, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, the land scape is a topo-sequence stretching from the upland through the hydromorphic to the lowlands.
- Potential for increased Agricultural production and productivity is high with generally high rainfall, rivers, adequate solar energy and enthusiastic work force.
- But for many decades' agricultural production and productivity are low and have remained stagnant or declining until in recent years but Africa still lag behind the rest of the world due to the following reasons:

1. Africa's Agriculture is Predominantly Subsistence Farming

- Agriculture is predominantly small-scale as over 65% of Africa's population relies on subsistence farming with limited use of improved inputs, inadequate uptake of new agricultural technologies.
- Inadequate public and private sector investment in agriculture. Majority of countries invest less than 10% of national budget on agriculture.
- For four decades between 1960s and 1990s, African agriculture was characterized by low, stagnated and declining agricultural productivity. During that period Africa lost on its share of the World Trade from 3.5% to 1.5%, an equivalent loss of 70 billion US dollars annually.

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- Our economic growth improved slightly for about a decade from 2000 or so and GDP was sustained at high level of 5.4% on average due to good governance, reduced civil conflicts, better micro economic policies and increase in prices of commodities. Since then economic growth has been slow until 2020/21 when an increase of 3.5% GDP growth was recorded.
- However, there is still limited access to regional and international markets so that Africa still:
 - Imports US\$44 billion worth of agricultural products
 - Exports US\$25 billion worth of agricultural products
 - Net imports of US\$19 billion per year
- A major persistent problem is the weak policy and poor institutional environment

2. Develop Better Policy Environment

- Effort should be made to promote and facilitate policy analysis and institutional environment necessary to boost productivity, promote market access, create wealth and improve livelihoods. African institutions should always gain access to evidence-based policy information for informed decision-making and improved broad-based inter and intra-regional market performance.
- African institutions such as the AU, CAADP, AGRA and FARA should dialogue with the national Governments to commit to creating such favorable policy environment for sustainable agricultural food systems and rural development in Africa, aimed at developing strategic decision-making options for policy, institutions and markets.

3. Promote Agribusiness: The Driver of Economic Growth and Development

- Agribusiness added value to the value chain is low at 38% and Africa need to close the gap with food production farming.
- Of \$63 billion of intra and extra African trade in 2017 only \$12 billion was classed as processed goods. Africa should reduce, to the minimum, export of unprocessed agricultural and other products. Africa should shift emphasis from primary commodity production to value addition.
- As much as Africa has 60% of arable land, it has 90% of raw material reserves; 40% of global gold reserve, 33% of diamond reserve, 80% of global reserve of coltan and 60% of global reserve of Cobalt. It also has huge deposits of iron ore, rutile, bauxite, oil, gas and other minerals of economic interest to the world. Africa should use these as bargaining power to add value here in Africa to these products and sell to interested parties at profitable level. Funds from these mineral sales can be channelled to further develop agriculture and other sectors of the economy to boost overall growth and development.

4. Capacity Building

- Africa should develop capacity to promote its objectives to attain food and nutrition security and play an active role in regional and international marketing and trade. Therefore, with lead from the AU, CAADP, RUFORUM, AGRA and FARA, Africa should promote its capacity to coordinate and share information on

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food systems and agricultural development, advocate to national governments the need to conserve natural resources, protect the environment, reduce and address the causes of climate change, stimulate development and disseminate new technologies in the fields of natural resource management, genetic resource management, biotechnology, policies and market development.

- RUFORUM, AGRA and FARA are to take the lead to identify important and not too commonly thought of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to capacity building and African food security and marketing of its products. RUFORUM, AGRA and FARA should then provide innovative high-impact ways of addressing these issues through scientific cooperation under the following headings:
 - Taking advantage of the strengths
 - Strengthening the weaknesses
 - Seizing the opportunities
 - Dealing with the threats

Key Actions to Strengthen Food Systems in Africa

- Promote value chain approaches and ensure development of agribusiness/agro-industry as the key lever to transformation of African economies and subsequently to development.
- Pursue increased productivity alongside competitiveness and strengthen the position of men and female farmers along the value chain and their working and living conditions.
- Achievement of Africa's aspirations for ending poverty and hunger and achieving sustainable development is down to long-term vision, political will and policy environment, leadership and human capacity.
- African Government should set up National Food Security, Manufacturing and Marketing Coordinating Committee with the political clout to meet with and brief the Presidents regularly to seek their advice and approvals. The NFSMMCC should advocate and bring together, as necessary, policy makers, politicians, Ministry officials, the private sector and other key stakeholders, including renowned scientists, researchers and master farmers to plan the national programs.
- African Government should also establish a Dedicated Technical Team to support the NFSMMCC to manage processes such as gathering feedback from the non-state-actors, aligning project to strategy and capturing learning.
- Africa should solicit assistance from the international community (i.e. UN, development partners, philanthropists, friendly Government, foundations and Companies). African Government should foster public and private investment to the agricultural sector to improve productivity, strengthen value and distribution chains and enhance access to local, regional and global markets. Any proposed funding will provide Africa a solid base from which to identify additional sources of funds and build on the achievements to date.

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This is our second issue in a series of articles we are releasing as part of our RUFORUM Thought Pieces on the Pre-UN Food Systems Summit 2021. This Thought Piece is part of the discussion Issues presented by the author during “Selected Advocates for Africa’s Development Dialogue” held on 17 June 2021. You can get more information about RUFORUM at www.ruforum.org. You may also share your thought piece about the Pandemic with us by writing to e.adipala@ruforum.org and copying e.acan@ruforum.org

About the Author

Prof. Monty Jones is the Former Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security, Sierra Leone, and First Africa’s World Food Prize Winner. He established the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) as the First Executive Director and served the organization for 11 years. He was also the Special Adviser to the President and Ambassador at Large for Sierra Leone. He worked as a Breeder at the National Rice Research Station before joining the CGIAR as a Coordinator of the IITA/USAID Cameroon Rice Programme.

He was awarded the Japan Niigata International Food Prize. He was the Chairman of the Global Forum for Agricultural Research. He also received the Professor Extraordinary award from University of Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. He was named one of the hundred most influential persons of the World by the Time Magazine. He received honorary doctorate degrees (Honoris Causa) from five Universities in the UK, Belgium, Sierra Leone and South Africa.