



Republic of Malawi

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

THE AFRICAN FOOD BASKET: *Innovations, Interventions, and Strategic Partnerships*

BY

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- **Excellency, Madam Callista Mutharika, First Lady of Malawi;**
- **Mr. Deval Patrick, Governor of the State of Massachusetts;**
- **Ambassador Charles Stith; Director, African Presidential Archives and Research Centre;**
- **Honourable Ministers;**
- **University Faculty Members;**
- **Distinguished Students;**
- **University Alumni Members.**

I am delighted to be with you this morning at this very important forum and share with you the vision for New Africa.

I am grateful to Ambassador Charles Stith, Executive Director of the African Presidential Archives and Research Center.

I bring to you warm and fraternal greetings from the people of Malawi and Africa.

THE ISSUES

I am here today to discuss with you not the African calamities and endemic poverty, but new African hopes and new opportunities. I want to discuss with you not widespread food shortages, hunger and malnutrition, but how Africa can produce enough food to feed its people and the rest of the world.

I have brought to you today the message of a new Africa, the Africa of a New Beginning. I have brought you news that Africa has shifted its mindset from Afro-pessimism to Afro-optimism.

I am saying this because hitherto, the Africa you have been made to know is the Africa of incessant calamities, the Africa of endemic diseases such as HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the Africa where many children die before the age of five years, the Africa of conflicts, terrorism and piracy, and indeed the Africa of underdevelopment and extreme poverty. This is the Africa you all know. This Africa does exist.

But I want you now to begin to know a new Africa. This is the Africa of new hopes and new opportunities, the Africa of increasing investment opportunities, the Africa where the above diseases are being brought under control and infant mortality is significantly reducing, the Africa where extreme poverty is being tackled head. The Africa's war on these is being won. Yes, this is the Africa I want you to know because that Africa also exists.

It is true that Africa and the rest of the world face several challenges in the quest to improve the lives and welfare of humanity. These challenges include wars, conflicts, terrorism, food shortages, escalating food prices, imbalances in global trade and prosperity, inequities in investment and development opportunities, climate change and environmental degradation, and endemic diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

These problems are real and retard economic and social progress.

There is now an emerging consensus that one of the biggest challenges facing humanity is how to feed over 9 billion people in the world today. In Africa, the challenge is also how to reduce extreme poverty and hunger facing millions of people.

THE AFRICAN FOOD BASKET

Therefore, I have chosen to introduce to you "**The African Food Basket: Innovations, Interventions and Strategic Partnerships**". This is a mega investment project that will involve all African countries and will envisage the purchase of tractors, agricultural implements, irrigation equipment, fertilizers and manures, improved seeds, cement for dam construction, water pumps, pipes and trucks for transportation. When implemented, this will create thousands of jobs and self employment business ventures at various levels.

I will start by stating that upon assumption of the African Union Chairmanship during the 14th Ordinary Summit of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in early February this year, I proposed, and the African leaders unanimously agreed that within a period of five years, **Africa must be able to feed itself**, and that **no child in Africa should die of hunger, starvation or malnutrition**.

I persuaded African governments to place the highest priority on agriculture and food security as the basis for economic transformation and change. They agreed that the continent of Africa should be turned into an African Food Basket through specific innovations, interventions and strategic partnerships. They also agreed that Africa should be able to supply food to the rest of the world.

THE RATIONALE

I am convinced that if African governments could invest enough budgetary resources and investment in agriculture, the continent could produce enough food for all. Therefore, the consensus was that in the next two to three decades, sustainable growth and development in

African countries will be determined by what happens in the agriculture sector.

The other rationale was that presently, only 10 percent of arable land in Africa is under cultivation. In other words, Africa has vast unutilized arable land - the 90 percent - that could be used to produce food for Africa and the World.

But this not all: there is evidence by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations to show that sub-Saharan African countries lose about 40 percent of food after harvest compared to less than 1 percent in Europe, North America and South East Asia.

Thus, I firmly believe that if this amount of food that Africa is now losing could be saved, the food security would significantly improve without cultivating any additional land.

In addition, we have evidence of success stories in food self sufficiency in Africa and of countries that are able to produce enough food to feed their people. These include Egypt, Sudan, Malawi, South Africa, Ghana, Senegal, Morocco, Algeria and Cameroon.

Irrigation Development is yet another area that the African Food Basket is propagating. It is a paradox therefore that Africa with its many rivers and lakes, faces problems in managing droughts and rainfall inadequacy.

Presently, only 7 percent of African arable land is irrigated. The potential for irrigation in Africa is therefore enormous, estimated up to 42 million hectares.

In order to ensure sustainable food security, the African Union also decided on three key priorities to spur development and to rescue the people out of poverty and underdevelopment. These include agriculture and food security; transport and infrastructure development; energy development and climate change.

The **African Food Basket** initiative is therefore a new focused approach that highlights agriculture and food security as the springboard for growth. It calls for Africa and all cooperating partners to focus on improving agriculture and food security in the next five years through innovative interventions and increased financing.

INNOVATIONS AND INTERVENTIONS

The innovations and interventions take many forms but here I will mention; only a few.

Firstly, the proposal is to introduce subsidies for African smallholder farmers, especially women, to enable them produce beyond subsistence. This has worked well for Malawi and we believe it can work in many countries in Africa. Such subsidies should be directed towards the purchase of fertilizers, improved seeds, pesticides, tractors and irrigation equipment, extension services, and marketing.

The second policy intervention is to scale up productivity through increasing investment in irrigation infrastructure, especially small earth dams for rural communities. We also plan to focus on cross-country irrigation development programmes.

New irrigation initiatives will have to draw on the experiences and expertise of the countries that have been involved in irrigation for a long time such as Egypt, Libya and Sudan. The ultimate goal is to have the whole of Africa covered with a green blanket of forests and new grasslands. This will enhance the realization of Africa Green Revolution through increased productivity and production, efficient utilization of land and water resources for irrigation, increased use of best soil fertility management technologies, increased access to farm inputs, mitigation against climate change, use of improved seed for drought tolerance, improvement of storage facilities to reduce post-harvest food losses, value addition and marketing systems for agriculture products.

TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

I have earlier mentioned that transport infrastructure would enhance the realization of this mega **African Food Basket** project. I will expand this analysis by stating that we need to provide efficient means to transport food more efficiently and cheaply from surplus to deficit countries.

New partnerships will be sought for financing both national and cross border road infrastructure projects to support food security. The transport sector offers huge investment opportunities for the private sector either in the form of Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) option or the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) option.

The African Union Commission and the Regional Economic Commissions have been working towards developing and implementing a joint and robust program on transport and infrastructure development encompassing air, road, rail, inland waterways, Maritime transport and ports. These programs act as catalysts for trade and transit transport facilitation to serve critical sectors of the economies of the continent in support of the African Food Basket.

Some examples of new opportunities in the transport infrastructures sector include the Shire-Zambezi Waterway serving Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe; the Central Corridor (Dar-es-Salaam-Kigali, Goma and Bujumbura); the North Corridor (Mombasa-Kampala, Juba-Kigali-Addis Ababa corridor); the Trans-Sahel Corridor, serving Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Senegal; the Western Sahara Corridor serving Morocco, Saharawi, Mauritania, and Senegal; the Djibouti Addis Ababa - Khartoum - Juba Corridor; Addis Ababa-Berbera Corridor; Khartoum-Cairo Corridor; Cairo-Tripoli Corridor; Asmara-Khartoum-Cairo Corridor; Dar-es-Salaam Corridor (Dar-es-Salaam-Mbeya-Lilongwe); Mtwara Development Corridor; Nacala Development Corridor; and Beira Corridor.

ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

I like to argue the case for energy development as an important aspect; for achieving and sustaining the African Food Basket. Here we need to recognize that energy is fundamental in development of agriculture and food security. This is a pre-condition for economic and social

development and indeed to the survival of human mankind. ! The energy sector in most parts of Africa is underdeveloped and under-equipped to sustain modern industries.

Essentially the energy sector in Africa is characterized by lack of access to power and inadequate power generation and lighting especially in rural areas where purchasing power, low energy efficiency, low and overdependence on the traditional biomass is prevalent.

The major challenge I see in this sector is that access to electricity remains extremely limited, with rural areas in some Sub-Saharan countries having electrification rates of less than 1 per cent. Traditional biomass energy in those areas represents as much as 70 per cent of the primary energy supply; while energy intensity per capita is extremely low, at almost less than half of the world's energy average.

I also believe that in order to overcome these energy constraints, African countries need to capitalize on developing new clean energy sources such as solar and wind. Appropriate attention is now being given to national, regional and inter-regional power connectivity to help smoothen out the uneven distribution of energy resources across Africa. An integrated, continent-wide energy strategy, linked to national policies for growth is the way forward towards addressing this important challenge.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

I now turn to the issue of information and Communications technology (ICT). During the past twenty years, the world has moved so much faster in ICT than was believed possible. There is now E-government, E-commerce, E-finance, E-banking, E-medicine, E-education, etc.

As a result, African governments have decided to increase investment in ICT to enhance flow of information, movement of people, goods and services including the production and supply of agricultural inputs within and among nations, regions and the continent at large.

It is encouraging to note that African governments are determined to create comprehensive data bases on industry and agriculture so that countries and regions share the available information and technologies. The information shared would include commodity trading and early warning systems. These will support and complement the food security initiative.

More specifically, African governments are designing ICT to be an effective tool for enhancing agricultural activities in African countries by making information available all the way down to rural communities. The African Union members are focusing on how to generate, package and disseminate information on farm inputs and implements, marketing, feeding patterns and best farming practices using radios, televisions, compact discs, mobile phones, internet and other electronic media. The results are astounding.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Let me now move to climate change. There is a shared global concern that climate change, environmental degradation and global warming have emerged as most urgent issues of our times. As a result, Africa has to constantly combat shortages of rainfall resulting from climate change.

The Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are also embarking on extensive regional food security programmes through extensive irrigation schemes that would ensure that each region produces enough food for all at affordable prices. This is supported by increased investment in water development for irrigation farming and extensive reforestation and tree planting, which will mitigate the adverse effects of climate change.

I must also point out that Africa faces many natural disasters which could easily be mitigated through more integration of the early warning mechanisms in environment and climate change. The countries are now enhancing and strengthening national institutions that deal with monitoring natural disasters and changes in the environment.

Given that Africa is the most vulnerable region to climate change, and that countries have the least adaptive capacity, a global partnership is needed to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

The most important aspect of the African Food Basket is to have effective mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and evaluation. We therefore envisage such mechanisms at several levels.

(a) The Strategic Group of Seventeen

We have established an ad-hoc body of 17 countries in Africa called the Strategic Group of Seventeen (SG-17) on the African Food Basket that would spearhead and monitor the process towards turning Africa into a food basket. The group is composed of countries with track records of achievement in promoting agriculture and food security: Egypt, Sudan, Senegal, South Africa, Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana, Ethiopia, Algeria, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Cameroon, Mozambique and Mali.

The main mandate of the SG-17 will, *inter alia*, be to review the progress and co-ordinate strategies in the implementation of the African Union decisions on agriculture and food security and other initiative in this field and design the best methods for achieving food security for all African countries within the period of five years; and to follow up and dialogue with the G-8 countries to develop *a modus operandi* by which the industrialized countries would support the African Food Basket in terms of providing resources and technical assistance under the *L'Aquila Food Security Initiative* adopted by them for enhancing agriculture and food security in Africa.

The SG-17 will also review the L'Aquila Joint Statement on Global Food Security adopted by the G-8 countries and propose concrete actions aimed at assisting African Countries to source funds for the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative to develop viable agriculture so as to achieve food security and fight hunger, starvation and malnutrition.

In addition, the SG-17 will liaise with the G-8 governments and their bilateral and multilateral institutions to develop *modus operandi* for ensuring how developed countries can assist African countries to design new and best practices for enhancing agricultural development and for achieving food security for Africa and the rest of the world.

The SG-17 will, with the support of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), also facilitate the seed production and marketing policies within the Regional Economic Communities and unrestricted trade in improved hybrid seed varieties across country borders to increase access by farmers and to facilitate access to soft loans and credits by small, medium and large scale farmers.

(b) The G8 Governments

The successful implementation of the African Food Basket requires the full support of the G-8 governments. Through the *L'Aquila Food Security Initiative*, they made an historic pledge for the sum of US\$20 billion for agricultural development and to free humanity from hunger and poverty in Africa. The compact will imply their adopting quick-disbursing mechanisms to release these funds as quickly as possible to assist the African Union countries to implement its agenda on achieving food security in Africa. In addition, it is envisaged that the G-8 governments would agree to fund subsidies designed to increase application and use of agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, improved seeds, insecticides and extension services to smallholder and poor farmers to raise their productivity of food and cash crops.

(c) Public Private Partnerships

The African Food Basket recognizes the important role of the private sector in stimulating Africa's agricultural productivity. Special attention will be given to mobilizing the captains of the private sector in Africa and globally to increase their investments in African Agriculture and related sectors such as energy.

The strategic public-private partnerships envisages the establishment of regional fertilizer production, procurement and distribution facilities involving groups of African countries, including research and development, taking advantage of economies of scale. The SG-17 will facilitate and promote the establishment and operations of viable public-private sector arrangements in collaboration with the AU Commission.

Conclusions

I conclude by underscoring that the African Food Basket Initiative is a pragmatic approach to the seemingly perpetual food shortages in Africa and the rest of the world. It

is anchored on the firm belief and conviction that working collectively and individually, African countries can significantly increase food production, reduce food imports and heavy dependence on food aid, reduce hunger and malnutrition and increase household incomes and wealth in the countries.

The African Food Basket Initiative is a new battle cry for change. It challenges the African Union Heads of State and Government, the G-8 governments, World Bank, the private sector, and the non-governmental organizations, to reaffirm their resolve that Africa must be able to produce enough food to feed its people within the next five years and become the food basket of the world.

I have a strong conviction that this is the time for global action to end world poverty. The voice from Africa is clear. Africans want change. Africans want a new beginning. Africans want to stand up and be counted with the rest of the world.

I am privileged to be part of that voice.

Thank you.

God Bless you all.