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It gives me great pleasure and it is an honour for me to address this very important inaugural conference on Africa’s Land Policies. Land issues have bedeviled Africa’s economic and political history over the last centuries, from the pre-colonial to the colonial and postcolonial periods. In the last decade or two land issues have taken on much greater significance in the face of the new scramble for Africa that has been dubbed “land grabbing”. With the 2008 food crisis pushing countries and major investors from around the world to acquire portions of the unused agricultural land in Africa, and in some cases currently used land, African governments and civil society organizations became even more conscious of the need to develop policies that would promote inclusive access, sustainable management, protect the continent’s rich land resources and ensure availability to future generations.

Land is critical to Africa’s development. Over 60% of Africa’s population depends on agriculture including livestock for their livelihood and agriculture produces 35% of the continent’s GDP. In a continent that suffers from very high unemployment, over 30% of the labour force and over 50% for youths, agriculture and the land on which it is practiced stand to provide the job opportunities that will contribute in the short to medium term to create employment at scale. Study after study has demonstrated that investments in agriculture create more jobs and contribute more to poverty reduction than investments in other sectors. However, the lack of credible land policies that protect the rights of current users, especially smallholders most of them women, and provide guarantees to prospective investors has constituted a serious handicap to investments both domestic and foreign in the use of improved agricultural
technologies. Africa’s agriculture remains to this day mostly low input and low output, producing yields that cannot sustain families let alone generate sufficient income for farmers.

In the face of the unacceptable level of hunger on the continent, 30% malnourished children and high level of poverty, 50% of the population living on less than 2 USD per day, and the very high food import bill for the continent, about 40 billion USD in 2012, African Heads of State and Government decided through the CAADP and Maputo Declaration of 2003 to devoted at least 10% of national budgets to agriculture with a view to transforming Africa’s agriculture to be more productive.

Many individual agricultural transformation efforts had been tried before by various African countries and development partners but these were pilots, limited in scale and duration and highly dependent on external donors and government institutions. In 2006 the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) was established by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to work with African Governments, Universities, Farmers, Private sector and civil society to trigger an African Green Revolution. This Green Revolution was to focus on Africa’s basic food crops (maize, sorghum, cassava, rice, millet, banana, beans, cowpea, soybeans, sweet potato) grown by the continent’s smallholder farmers, most of whom are women. Initially limited to programs in seeds, soils and markets in 13 countries, AGRA’s programs expanded to include programs in policy, finance and farmers’ organizations and AGRA is now in 16 countries. Many more countries are implementing on their own some of the AGRA inspired programs.

The question to be addressed is how close are we to the African Green Revolution?

Great progress has been made but the journey is still long. AGRA supported crop improvement programs have produced high yielding varieties of a wide range of staple food crops. More than 100 private seed companies have been established and their combined production last year was around 100000MT. This is enough to plant 6 million ha and produce 20 million MT of grain equivalent. Over 200 students have graduated with MS and PhD degrees from 12 supported African Universities and some 15000 agro-dealers are ensuring that farmers, especially smallholder farmers in remote villages have physical and financial access to the seeds, fertilizers and other productivity enhancing technologies needed for a sustainable green revolution.

Africa’s degraded agricultural land has soils that are poorly endowed in nutrients. Farming practices that include the clearing of land by burning destroys soil organic matter, soil structure and reduces water holding capacity. A sustainable Green Revolution cannot be based on such soils. AGRA’s integrated soil fertility management programs have reached 1.8 million farmers directly and 3 million more have been made aware of ISFM through demos, field days and radio programs. ISFM programs have strengthened national capacities through the establishment of
broad based soil management consortia, upgraded soil testing laboratories and supported the development of fertilizer policies in several countries.

Africa’s soils problems are intricately linked to land policies existing in African countries. With some 65% of Africa’s agricultural land already degraded, urgent attention is needed to the effective implementation of the many declarations, action plans, frameworks and guidelines that have been adopted under the framework of the LPI. The declaration by the United Nations of 2015 as the International Year for soils has great significance for Africa and should be taken advantage of to mobilize national and international support for the implementation of decisions of this conference. The Montpellier Panel, of which I am a member, has decided to provide particular focus on Africa’s soils next year, starting with the launch of a special report at IFAD in Rome on December 4, 2014. No sustainable actions can be taken to restore Africa’s degraded soils without governments putting in place land policies that will enhance security of tenure. Without security of tenure it will be near impossible to generate the investments needed to efficiently and sustainably manage Africa’s soils and boost the chances for a successful African Green Revolution.

Programs in market development have linked millions of smallholder farmers to more remunerative markets through warehouse receipt systems and commodity exchanges. These two innovations have considerably increased farmer incomes and stimulated production. Food crop processing has added value to crops that were hitherto marginalized. The cassava revolution in Nigeria has resulted in the creation of millions of on-farm and off-farm jobs. Cassava flour is now routinely substituted for wheat flour, up to 20%, in bread production. The target of 40% substitution is dependent on the discovery of appropriate enzyme systems. The substitution of cassava flour for wheat in Nigeria has saved the country more than 3 billion USD in wheat imports. The use of cassava in the production of beer in Mozambique and Nigeria is adding even more value to the crop.

Another innovation that will contribute to a successful green revolution is in finance. Agricultural finance has been a particular problem in Africa. In most countries agriculture consumes less than 2% of credit from commercial banks. Most government established agricultural banks have failed. For an African Green Revolution to succeed it was necessary to provoke innovations in agricultural finance. This AGRA did by establishing credit guarantees in commercial banks to trigger leveraging of up to 10 times the AGRA deposits in bank lending from their own resources. Equity Bank in Kenya has been a stellar success. The innovation was passed on to the Kenyan and Nigerian governments to use budgetary or Central Bank resources to leverage agricultural lending at scale. Kenya is using 65 million USD of budgetary resources to leverage 650 million USD of agricultural lending from several commercial banks while Nigeria is using 300 million USD of Central Bank resources to leverage 3 billion USD from a wide range of
commercial banks. Who would have thought this was possible a little over five years ago? Several countries are trying out different versions of innovative financing. This sustainable financing model in combination with out-grower schemes and newly developed insurance products provide solid ground for an African green revolution. The mobile phone technology is expanding access to market information and finance in ways that were unimagined just a few years ago and Kenya has been a leader in this. Now Nigeria has distributed millions of mobile phones to smallholder farmers to facilitate access to market information, essential inputs, especially seeds and fertilizer. Together with Mastercard Nigeria is designing a national identity card that will also serve as a credit card. It will enhance access to finance by previously unbanked farmers in remote rural areas. Yes, the revolution is raging on all fronts and should be firmly implanted in a few years!

More investment is needed to produce more improved seed, build markets, enhanced staple crop values through grading, improved storage and processing. Indeed investments along commodity value chains as appropriate in different countries will move the revolution forward.

Increased investment in sustainable land management, soil conservation, fertilizer production and blending to meet the diverse soil conditions of the continent is needed. New fertilizer plants have been announced for Ghana, Cameroon, Ethiopia and several other countries. The phosphate rock based Minjigu fertilizer Company of Tanzania that was producing only a few dozen metric tons three years ago is now at over 60000 MT and being traded regionally thanks to financial support from AFAP. The reduction of logistics cost of fertilizer in Africa that constitute up to 40% of the price of fertilizer paid by farmers will spur the use of this critical green revolution input and double or triple crop yields. This is the main focus of AFAP.

The pace of the revolution will be quickened by outcomes from this conference. Issues around land tenure, especially security of tenure for women and other smallholder farmers, access to land by youths, more transparent handling of large scale land acquisitions, opening up of new lands in ways that protect community rights, the environment and biodiversity and zoning that protects valuable agricultural land are very important for the revolution. Why would farmers invest in sustainable management of land that they do not own?

Several actions need to be taken to accelerate the pace of the African Green revolution:

- Set up specific Agricultural Transformation Agencies/Programs as in Ethiopia and support smallholder farmers to be more productive through access to knowledge, finance and inputs.

- Reinforce investments in agricultural education, research and extension and in value chain development.
• Support access to and settlement on new land especially by the new local and foreign investors. Specific incentives should be provided to nationals, especially youths and women, to own land and participate in national economic development.

• Undertake major zoning and mapping exercises to protect prime agricultural land from non-agricultural uses, enhance protection of biodiversity and watersheds.

• Organize large-scale land certification exercises, using a variety of instruments, individual and collective land certificates, to strengthen protection for smallholder farmers especially women and youths and communities.

• Give value to land. Why should communities or individuals for that matter accord priority to protect land and invest in its sustainable management when it has little or no value?

The forthcoming decade or two should see the transformation of Africa’s economy, through a dynamic agricultural sector as envisaged by African Heads of State and Government in their summit declarations: Maputo Declaration (2003), the Abuja Fertilizer Summit (2006) and the Malabo declaration (2014). This transformation will be fueled by a Green Revolution, one that is truly African, based on African crops. The indicators are there: increasing productivity, higher use of inputs especially seeds and fertilizer, more innovative means of funding for agriculture as in Nigeria and Kenya, increased processing and value addition as evidenced by the cassava revolution in Nigeria, increased activity around commodity exchanges, renewed interest in agricultural education and a higher commitment to youths in agribusiness.

The pioneering work of AGRA in building a coalition of stakeholders to trigger and sustain an African Green Revolution has let the genie out of the bottle and many actors on the continent are experimenting with a wide range of innovations, technical and administrative. Some of the innovations, especially in plant breeding are controversial. These Green Revolution technologies, innovative measures and institutions such as AFAP, will significantly increase productivity and agricultural incomes and thus make land a more valuable asset. This will increase pressure on smallholder farmers to sell out to larger and more financially endowed farmers. Governments need to act now, enact laws and develop land management policies that will protect and guarantee inclusiveness in Africa’s agricultural transformation, green revolution and overall economic development.

Chairperson, Excellences, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your kind attention.