

CLOSING REMARKS

By

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CARD 4th General Meeting Seminar Program

“Private Sector Development and Roles of the Public Sector”

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Mr. Chairman

Fellow Participants of the CARD 4th General Meeting

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin my brief remarks by expressing our thanks and appreciations to the CARD Secretariat for choosing the theme “Private Sector Development and the Roles of the Public Sector” for the seminar program for the 4th CARD General Meeting. This is a challenging theme. As if the theme was not challenging enough, the topics chosen for each of the sessions are even more challenging and sometimes controversial. The topics include, (1) Mechanization in rice sector development; (2) Roles of the public sector in promoting small-medium agri-business, including input delivery in the seed sector value chain, irrigation and water management as vital ingredients for doubling rice crop production, and community activation; and (3) Capacity building in rice production techniques.

There seems to be a consensus as we come to the end of this seminar that private sector participation is critical to the realization of the goals of CARD – to double rice production in Africa from the current 14 million metric tons per year to 28 million metric tons by 2018. It is inconceivable and perhaps impossible to promote issues such as mechanization, input delivery, market access, value chains, and commercialization of agriculture which are essential to doubling rice production without strong private sector participation in the entire process.

However, it is important for us to step back and acknowledge that currently the private sector in most African countries still face a number of teething challenges, some of which have been mentioned and discussed at this seminar, including, but not limited to the following:

- ✓ The private sector is very weak;
- ✓ They have limited catalytic financing from commercial banks; and

- ✓ They have limited knowledge and experience in the rice value chains.

Thus, achieving private-public partnership in the agriculture sector requires strong government commitment and support – especially creating a stable enabling (investment) environment for the private sector to thrive (e.g. reduction or elimination of duties and taxes on agricultural inputs and equipment, and formulation and implementation of an agro-financing policy that promotes agribusiness, subsidies, credit availability, etc.) with special emphasis on smallholder farmers, especially women farmers who are active in the entire rice value chain.

Talking about the need for strong commitment and support from government to boost the agriculture sector, especially to ensure the doubling of rice production from the current 14 million metric tons per year to 28 million metric tons by 2018, there are some signs of good leadership emerging in a number of African countries in that they are developing new strategies and launching new initiatives for a future free of hunger and poverty. In my country, Liberia, we have leaders who are championing the call for strong government commitment and support for the agriculture sector. The President (H.E. Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf) and the Minister of Agriculture (Dr. Florence Chenoweth) have demonstrated strong commitment and support to the sector. In spite of the huge challenges associated with the country's recovery from the protracted 41-year civil war that nearly destroyed the agriculture sector, the Government has built a strong foundation during the past six years for moving the agriculture sector forward and to serve as the engine of economic growth and development. The Government has developed clear agricultural policies and strategies that have enabled it to receive support from development partners. For example, Liberia is one of the few African countries that was awarded a grant from the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) Trust Fund. Liberia is also among countries that are implementing the West Africa Agricultural Productivity Program (WAAPP) with special emphasis on rice production within the Mano River Union (MRU) countries.

I am pleased to inform you that on October 22, 2011, Dr. Florence Chenoweth, the Liberian Minister of Agriculture was awarded The Hunger Project's 2011 prize for leadership during her career during the past four decades as an agricultural scientist at both national and international levels in promoting sustainable agricultural development over the last four decades. Dr. Chenoweth was the first woman in Africa to be minister of agriculture; and she has spent her career fighting for gender-equal agricultural rights and resources. Nobel Laureate for Peace and President of the Republic of Liberia (H.E. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf) was also awarded The Hunger Project leadership prize in 2006.

Ladies and gentlemen, although our discussions during this seminar today have centered on rice, the issues that we have covered such as agricultural mechanization, private-public partnership in promoting small-medium agri-business, input delivery, irrigation and water management, community activation, and capacity building, are not limited to the rice sub-sector. These are cross-cutting issues that are applicable to other farming systems like maize and cassava.

We have been reminded during this seminar that there are still huge and compelling multi-faceted challenges ahead of us as we strive to develop and implement our respective National Rice Development Strategies (NRDS). To limit the frustrations in the process of overcoming these challenges, we need to phase the implementation of our NRDS. The implementation of NRDS could be done in at least three phases:

1. *The Quick Wins* – what can be done now with minimum stress and delay
2. *Medium Term* – what is feasible within 3-5 years
3. *Long Term* - scaling up interventions beyond 5 years

On behalf of my fellow participants at this 4th CARD Meeting Seminar Program, I wish to express our thanks and appreciation to the speakers who skillfully dealt with the topics in a thought-provoking manner. They have given us ample food for thoughts as we proceed tomorrow with the presentations and discussions of our respective NRDS. We will definitely take the issues discussed today into consideration as we design and implement our NRDS.

Finally, I wish to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to our development partners, including AfDB, AfricaRice Center, AGRA, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, FAO, FARA, Foundation for Advance Studies on International Development (FASID), IFAD, IRRI, Japan International Research Center for Agricultural Sciences (JIRCAS), NEPAD, Sasakawa Africa Association, World Bank, USAID, WFP, among others, for their commitment and support to the CARD initiative. With their continuous support and the contributions of our respective countries, I am confident that we can double rice production by 2018. *It is doable!*

On that note I wish to thank you for your kind attention.