I can assure you that it is not all gloom and doom on our continent; I am sure everyone here knows of a success story somewhere on this continent in agriculture, health, education, and governance. What we need is to multiply those success stories to encompass the whole continent.

—Yoweri K. Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda

Presidents Obasanjo, Museveni, and Wade stand as the Ugandan national anthem is played during the official opening of the conference.

Ready for Action in Africa?

African-owned, African-driven conference on food and nutrition security has set the stage for real action to eliminate hunger and malnutrition. Is it finally Africa’s turn to make headway in achieving food and nutrition security?

Agricultural researchers and farmers generally move in different circles from heads of state and government ministers, but given the linked roles they play in addressing food and nutrition issues, these groups, and many others, are in some ways inseparable. In acknowledgment of this reality, more than 500 people from every corner of Africa, representing every group from presidents and parliamentarians to business leaders and nutritionists, gathered just outside Kampala, Uganda, from April 1 to 3. They were there to talk frankly about how Africa can overcome its persistent hunger and malnutrition.

The conference, “Assuring Food and Nutrition Security in Africa by 2020: Prioritizing Actions,” featured panels on topics ranging from trade and investment, water and energy, to financial and social capital. The event was organized by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), which is one of the global agricultural research institutes that form the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).

The conference featured discussions on how to ensure food and nutrition security in Africa, with a focus on policies that will lead to sustainable, resilient, and equitable food systems. The goal is to improve food access, affordability, and quality while reducing the number of hungry and malnourished people.

(continued on page 2)
Strengthening Actors, and Facilitating Partnerships,” was organized by the 2020 Vision Initiative of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), cohosted by the Government of Uganda, and cosponsored by more than a dozen organizations. The planning and program of the meeting were guided by a Conference Advisory Committee of African stakeholders, under the chairmanship of J. J. Otim, senior adviser to Uganda’s President Yoweri K. Museveni. In a comprehensive array of keynote addresses, panel discussions, and parallel sessions involving more than 120 speakers, participants engaged in wide-ranging discussions of Africa’s food and nutrition situation, attempting to pinpoint hurdles, forge new partnerships, and strengthen capacity for concrete action.

Overcoming Barriers to Progress

Providing striking evidence of the high level of concern over food and nutrition insecurity in Africa, three African heads of state attended the conference to deliver keynote addresses. All three acknowledged the continent’s distressing lack of progress to date in combating hunger and malnutrition. “Africa leads in hunger, malnourishment, and undernourishment,” said President Museveni of Uganda. “Experts assure us that unless an extraordinary effort is made by all of us, 40 million children on this continent will be malnourished by 2020.”

Many speakers and discussants pointed to external factors, especially developed countries’ subsidies to their own farmers and trade barriers against African agricultural products. “In the OECD countries, the subsidies stand at about US$1 billion per day,” said President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria. “We are all familiar with the cliché about Africans living on less than US$1 per day. Yet, a cow in Europe is subsidized at over US$2 per day. With this sort of subsidy, African agriculture cannot attain the competitive edge required to make it buoyant.”

Yet internal factors also stand in the way of Africa’s food and nutrition security. Wilberforce Kisamba-Mugerwa, minister of agriculture of Uganda, offered one list of such factors: drought, low adoption of technologies, poor extension services, poor rural infrastructure, degradation of natural resources, conflict, and failure to create an enabling atmosphere that facilitates increased productivity. Modest successes, however, are already occurring here and there across Africa. For example, Kisamba-Mugerwa pointed out that agricultural technologies, like improved crop varieties and soil and water conservation, have already helped many African small farmers. “Many of these small successes may easily be scaled up,” he added.

Expanding these successes and clearing the path for other advances will require another ingredient mentioned by Norman Ready for Action in Africa? (continued from page 1)
Borlaug, president of the Sasakawa Africa Association and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and raised in session after session—the need for more commitment on the part of political leaders. “The lack of political will, national and international, to develop African agriculture is a major difference distinguishing Africa from the Green Revolution period in Asia a generation earlier,” he said.

Putting Nutrition on the Map
By including the issue of nutrition security, the conference drew attention to an often neglected and misunderstood topic. Isatou Jallow, executive director of The Gambia’s National Nutrition Agency, explained that nutrition security goes beyond food security (reliable access to food in sufficient quantity and quality for a healthy and productive life for all individuals) to encompass a sanitary environment, adequate health services, and knowledgeable care as well. Like food security, nutrition security is key to development.

Breaking the cycle of malnutrition, however, can be complicated. It requires not just food, but also clean water supplies, sanitation infrastructure, health care, and education for caregivers. Several participants pointed out that for progress to be achieved, nutrition concerns need to be built into a broad array of development interventions.

The Elephant in the Room
Every issue discussed at the conference, said Alan Whiteside, director of Health Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Division, South Africa, was informed by the HIV/AIDS epidemic that has swept across Africa—it was “the elephant in the room.” “Unless there is significant and sustained action, we could only be seeing the peak of impact by 2020,” he said. “This is a sobering and perhaps, for some, unbelievable thought.”

Uganda has received attention for its vigorous and innovative approach to fighting HIV/AIDS. Janet Museveni, the first lady of Uganda, described the country’s efforts. “Our strategy has been to mount an aggressive education, information, and communication campaign, using not only the electronic and print media, such as radio, television, billboards, and print materials, but also devising other methods which have proved to be more effective in a basically rural and semi-literate population,” she said. Communication efforts have been flexible and imaginative, and the strategy has focused on young people in particular and succeeded in reducing risky behaviors. The lessons of Uganda’s fight against HIV/AIDS can be extended to the fight against food and nutrition insecurity, she said: “When people are empowered with information and knowledge about how to think and innovate and find solutions from within, they can succeed at whatever goal they set for themselves.”

Giving Birth to New Partnerships
Discussions soon made clear that the most difficult step in achieving food and nutrition security in Africa would not be about deciding on the problems and solutions, but rather about transforming decisions into concrete actions and then implementing them. Success will depend on many stakeholders from many sectors working together in new ways.

President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, one of the architects of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), emphasized the potential of this initiative to stimulate real action. Because NEPAD is a partnership of African heads of state, who have the power to make decisions and get results, he said, its goals are more likely than past plans and programs to be effectively pursued.

Participants called for other kinds of partnerships, as well, so that the efforts of various stakeholder groups would complement, rather than duplicate or even undermine, one another. “Speaker after speaker reiterated the necessity for a strong...”
Hunger is often as much a cause as an effect of poverty, and programs to reduce chronic hunger could play an important role in the reduction of poverty, especially extreme poverty.

—Victoria Sekitoleko, Subregional Representative for Southern and East Africa, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

public-private partnership,” pointed out Alhaji Bamanga Tukur, executive president of the African Business Roundtable and chairman of the NEPAD Business Group. Such partnerships can help small farmers form cooperatives and become fully engaged in the food production and marketing chain, he said.

The Problem with “We Are the World”
Because food is not just an economic commodity or a requirement for good health, but also a centerpiece of culture, Wole Soyinka, Nobel laureate for literature from Nigeria, spoke on the role of cultural leaders in changing attitudes and behaviors related to food and nutrition. Soyinka recalled, for example, the quasi-mystical status of the yam in much African culture. “Food is allied to culture in the most organic, interactive way, and one may be brought to the aid of, in enhancement of, or in celebration of the other,” he said.

Yet culture and food came together in a way he found disturbing when Western pop musicians in the 1980s created a song called “We Are the World” to aid starving Africans. “Culture and the arts can prove handmaidens of cultivation,” he said. “We have a choice, however—either to create our own cultural incentives that motivate productivity and lead to self-reliance or await the handouts from the charity of the world. We must remember, however, that there is a condiment that must be swallowed with the food of charity, a chastening ingredient that is known as Pride.”

We Can Do It, But Will We Do It?
Did participants see grounds for hope that Africa could in fact achieve food and nutrition security by 2020? Periodically over the three days, conference participants were asked to give their views on various questions using a digital instant voting system (“digivote”). Results showed that more than 60 percent of participants believed that food security can be attained by 2020, but only slightly more than 40 percent believed that it in fact will be attained. Their predictions for nutrition security were much grimmer: 44 percent believed that nutrition security can be achieved, whereas just 14 percent believed it will be achieved.

For many participants, the gap between “can attain food security” and “will attain food security” in the digivote results was disturbing evidence of lack of confidence in African leadership. Marco Quinones, Africa director of the Sasakawa-Africa Association, said after the
conferece, “Most participants still could not clearly see the signals of political will (and the financial resources) on the part of both donors and African governments to jointly and harmoniously address the challenges on poverty and overall economic development in Africa once and for all.” Even the participants themselves, he said, did not offer clear solutions to the problems described.

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Sample Views from Conference Participants

Through a digital instant voting system (“digivote”) used periodically over the three days of the conference, participants gave responses to about 20 questions on issues related to food and nutrition security. Here are a few of their responses.

**Food security (that is, access to enough food for all) in Africa by 2020**

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**Nutrition security (that is, access to adequate food coupled with health care) in Africa by 2020**

<table>
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</tbody>
</table>

There will never be peace without development, and considering the long-term devastating effects of conflict, we have no choice but to push the development agenda forward and together build the capacity of Africa.

—Graça Machel
The wake-up call has been sounding for too long. It is perhaps high time that the continent woke up to the truth, the truth that farming and farmers, as opposed to agriculture and agriculturalists, hold the terminal answer for food security and nutrition on the continent.

—Glyvyns Chinkhuntha, Farmer and Executive Director, Freedom Gardens, Malawi

Looking Ahead
In the end, after three full days of lively and intensive discussions, the clock ran out on the conference before all perspectives could be expressed and all potential solutions considered. Both the conference organizers and the attendees left hoping it would be not just another meeting, but a step toward real progress in achieving food and nutrition security. To help promote such progress, the Conference Advisory Committee synthesized many of the recommendations in a document called “A Way Forward” and distributed it at the end of the conference.

Joachim von Braun, director general of IFPRI, noted that progress will depend not on grand plans, but on strategies that can and will be implemented: “The priority actions should focus on raising agricultural productivity; fostering pro-poor economic growth through improved markets, better infrastructure, and greater trade competitiveness; building institutional and human capacity; improving health with due attention to HIV/AIDS; and strengthening governance. All of these require added resources, but the benefits of food and nutrition security outweigh the resource needs.”

IFPRI was especially pleased to help facilitate the conference, said Rajul Pandya-Lorch, conference director and head of IFPRI’s 2020 Vision Initiative: “African stakeholders brought a real spirit of commitment and a focus on the future. I was heartened that many participants left the meeting more determined than ever to contribute to the goal of achieving food and nutrition security in Africa.”

Given the new political and socioeconomic initiatives taking place in Africa, the conference was especially timely, pointed out J. J. Otir, chair of the Conference Advisory Committee. “This historic conference,” he said, “has put food and nutrition security prominently on the African development agenda.”

At the close of the conference, President Museveni made an unscheduled return to the conference hall to call for greater coordination and unity among African countries on the issues raised during the conference, emphasizing market access for developing countries. Since Ghana achieved independence in 1957, he said, 47 years had passed without a black African country making the transition from the third world to the first world. Africa, he concluded, must not lose another 47 years.

—Reported by Heidi Fritschel
In late 2003 IFPRI sponsored an Africa-wide youth writing contest on the theme “A Full Food Basket for Africa by 2020” to elicit and disseminate the views of African young people on food and nutrition security. More than 200 young people from about two dozen African countries entered the contest. At the conference, the 12-year-old King of Toro (in Uganda), Oyo Nyimba Kabamba Iguru Rukidi IV, awarded the grand prize to Nelisiwe Mbali Mtsweni, a 17-year-old student from South Africa. She then delivered her story, “Emancipation from Emaciation,” in which the arrival in Africa of a “70s disco king fairy godfather who spoke in rhyme” ushers in a new era of generosity, responsibility, and peace. The contributions of all contest winners are available in a booklet entitled A Full Food Basket for Africa by 2020, published by IFPRI.

Well, I’m here to nullify Starving,
So you can call me Marvin.
For too long now, every African nation
Has suffered from hunger’s emasculation.
I’m here to give you emancipation
From goiter, kwashiorkor, and emaciation!

—Nelisiwe Mbali Mtsweni, Age 17, South Africa,
Grand Prize Winner, Youth Writing Contest on “A Full Food Basket for Africa by 2020”

The conference website contains a wealth of information on the conference, including the full program, summary notes for speakers, and even audio versions of a number of speeches (www.ifpri.org/2020africaconference). Also included are daily reports on the conference by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), digivote results, and the document “A Way Forward.” Many of the materials are available in both English and French.

Additional materials will soon become available. IFPRI is preparing for publication many conference-related policy briefs and papers, as well as the full conference proceedings. Two publications are already available: Building on Successes in African Agriculture (a collection of 10 briefs edited by Steve Haggblade) and A Full Food Basket for Africa by 2020 (a compilation of selected entries from the 2020 Africa Conference youth writing contest). Please check the website periodically for availability of new products. For further information on publications and other conference materials, please contact Rajul Pandya-Lorch, head of IFPRI’s 2020 Vision Initiative, at r.pandya-lorch@cgiar.org.
Follow-up Action from IFPRI

Although the Conference Advisory Committee will take the lead in mainstreaming the results of the conference in their networks and forums, IFPRI itself will also take steps to respond to the repeated calls for action to improve food and nutrition security in Africa. In addition to publishing a comprehensive proceedings volume and various background papers and policy briefs prepared for the conference, IFPRI will

- communicate the conference results to key stakeholders, including in the international and donor communities;
- provide background support to the Conference Advisory Committee, which has decided to remain active for at least the rest of the year;
- revisit its strategy for research, policy communications, and capacity building in Africa based on conference deliberations; and
- use its increasing presence on the ground in Africa to support these activities.