

LAUREATE LUNCHEON ADDRESS

Speaker: Akinwumi Adesina
October 20, 2017 - 12:15 p.m.

Introduction

Dr. Akinwumi Adesina

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2017 World Food Prize Laureate

Thank you very much, Ambassador Quinn. I can tell you that in a world that is very hard to find faithful men and women, to find somebody like Ambassador Quinn that has thrown his entire life into not only sewing but also fertilizing and watering and just encouraging everybody on with the vision of Dr. Norman Borlaug. It's very rare to find this kind of a man. So I'd like you to stand and also be recognized for all your great work. Let's give him a rounding, standing ovation – he's a good man. Thank you, thank you. And of course he couldn't do that without his wife, so I know that you say that.

Thank you for this Laureate's Luncheon and thank you for a luncheon in which I get in and there is Ibadan salad, and yesterday at the dinner there was even a special steak which was called Steak à la Adesina. And so welcome to my restaurant.

First, Olusegun Obasanjo, former president of Nigeria, President John Mahama, former president of Ghana, John and Janis Ruan, Jeanie and Julie Borlaug, representing the Borlaug family, the World Food Prize Council of Advisors, the World Food Prize Laureates and their spouses... And they're all over here. You know, I'm just a little kid on the block, so you might all just stand up, because you're all great guys and which you admitted me to your club, too. Where are they? World Food Prize Laureates, thank you very much, and thank you for welcoming Grace and I to your family which we can know call our family.

There are friends and family of the World Food Prize, a special recognition in particular I want to give to the Dean of the Board of Directors of the African Development Bank. I saw him somewhere, yes, Mr. Samy Zaghoul, The Executive Director for my country, Nigeria, Dr. Bright Okogu. And all of my staff and colleagues from the African Development Bank. You know, these are the guys that work just like yours, you know, all night and all day. Please, thank you very much for being here.

And as I look around, I see the future, Borlaug, and I see the young people – you are the hunger fighters of the future – and so thank you very much for coming and welcome to this lunch event.

Let me say I am thrilled to have been asked to give this laureate address. And of course I know that a laureate address is always something you take as very, very seriously. But when I got the award yesterday, I was going to be serious, really, but when you see President Obasanjo dancing, you have to really shake it up a little bit.

Today I'll be speaking to you about Africa's pathway out of poverty. For millions of rural poor, the aspiration is that they will make it out of poverty, especially through their kids, and thereby laying the foundation of a march out of poverty for generations to come.

This is my story. My father and grandfather were farmers and became so terribly poor farming that they had to work as part-time laborers on other people's farms. My father told me that farming did not pay. It was only through a benefactor that I made it out of the village to get the benefit of education and low as that education could be. But it was such a golden opportunity – there were a lot of sacrifices that gave me the benefit of an education and today by God's grace, being given an incredible opportunity to stand on a global stage to receive the World Food Prize. You can just imagine how mind boggling that is for me.

We must invest, therefore, in education across Africa, especially across rural Africa – for this is the fastest way to end inter-generational transfer of poverty. As a Christian, the Bible always inspires me. The Bible tells of a story of Apostle Paul preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and in a vision he heard a voice, a cry from the people of Macedonia. The voice said, "Come to Macedonia and help us." Paul arose in obedience to preach the Gospel and save the people.

I know you all must be wondering whether this is a pulpit and whether you are listening to a preacher today. Of course, I am a preacher. For like Paul, I also hear the voices rising out of rural Africa, saying, "Come here and help us to get out of poverty." This "agriculture gospel" in quotes was first preached by Dr. Norman Borlaug, the Nobel Peace Prize Winner who created the World Food Prize, for he heard the voices of a billion people – mind boggling, a billion people. And through his dedicated work, to deliver a Green Revolution across Asia that fed a billion people.

Dr. Borlaug was always such a huge inspiration to me, but a moment in particular stands out in our relationship. It was in 2006 as we both walked on the streets of New York when I worked at Rockefeller Foundation. We were going to do the African Fertilizer Summit, chaired at the time by President Obasanjo. As we were walking across the street, he gingerly put his hands around my shoulder, and he said, "Akin, do you play football?" Of course, scraggly looking me, what do I do with football in America? I said, "Well, I play soccer," but I was wondering why out of the blue he would ask me such a question. And then he proceeded, now with greater deliberateness in his voice. He said, "You see, in soccer you never can believe you can win unless you score the first goal." And he said, "Akin, I wanted to go out there and score goals for agriculture in Africa, that Africa can believe that it can win with agriculture." As I said in the video yesterday, for me it was like a call. It was a wake-up moment for me but has inspired me ever since.

I'm therefore proud to be a disciple of Norman Borlaug to preach this gospel that I call the "agriculture gospel" across Africa. The new agriculture gospel is simple – to lift millions out of poverty, of people out of poverty, agriculture must be treated as a business. And I think it's important to recognize, for in agriculture as a business lies the hope of economic prosperity for Africa.

Let me share with you my work on this, if you may wish, some kind of a missionary journey, to reach Africa's rural poor and unlock the potential of agriculture on our continent. Every time that I pass through rural parts of African countries where the agriculture engine is, or let me say, should be unlocked, I see nothing but wasting potential. They sit on 65% of the uncultivated arable land left to feed the world but they can barely feed themselves. They hear of

rich farmers in Europe and America and wonder why they themselves are left to languish in poverty. Suddenly life must be better than this. Why have we forgotten them?

Conventional economic growth models look down on the agriculture sector as the low-value sector, so much so that for decades millionaire economists saw getting out of agriculture as the way to national prosperity. The path to prosperity was industrial development. Rising wages in the industrial sector will pull labor out of agriculture. This led to underinvestment in agriculture, the so-called primary sector.

In the race towards industrial manufacturing, hundreds underinvested in rural areas and banking on urban buyers' development. The dual poles were created for rural areas versus reach urban areas. Extreme poverty in rural areas has thrown them into zones of economic misery, but also fertile recruitment grounds for militants and terrorists.

The biggest challenge today in development is how to create and spread hope across these battered rural lands. If we don't, the grinding poverty in rural areas and the hopelessness will cause African economies to implode. We must create sustainable parts out of poverty in rural areas. The way to do that is to invert the economic development model. Turn the rural areas from zones of economic misery to zones of economic prosperity. And that solution lies in making agriculture a source of wealth creation in rural economies.

Now, think about it for a moment. A great opportunity to invest and promote agriculture is offered by the projected rise of Africa's food and agriculture market, which will top one trillion dollars by 2030. We must start tapping into this potential to create wealth and strongly support farmers, especially millions of smallholder farmers. I have been in development for quite a long time now, but I'm yet to see any farmer who wants to be poor. And neither have I met a subsistence farmer. Everybody talks about subsistence farmers, but I haven't found one yet. But I have seen hard-working farmers who simply are poor because they lack access to technologies to boost their production, without access to affordable finance, without access to secure property rights for their land, unable to turn their land assets into wealth – abandoned by political leaders and left to fend for themselves like a boat left to drift alone at sea.

Yet, like every one of us, deep down in their heart is an undying hope that they will leave behind a better future for their children so their children won't have to suffer the indignity that comes with poverty. The hope of millions of marginalized Africans is that, through a good education, their own children will escape the traps and the clutches of poverty.

The main highway out of poverty for farmers lies in having the right political leadership, one that is able to make bold decisions to unshackle millions desperately looking for help and opportunity to create wealth. It was this search for political leaders that will stand up and be counted that led me and my colleagues at the Rockefeller Foundation to initiate the Africa Fertilizer Summit, backed by eminent global leaders including Dr. Borlaug with the inspiration of President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria at the time. It was the biggest and the largest in Africa's history to galvanize leaders for agriculture.

At the age of 92 years, Dr. Borlaug showed up in Abuja, calling on leaders to rise up – and they did. The result was the adoption of the need for an African Green Revolution. Backed by 40 heads of state and government, we have succeeded in turning back 30 years of push-back on the years of high-yielding varieties and fertilizers in Africa.

But I must tell you part of the story which I will never forget. Dr. Borlaug stood on the lectern, and he was addressing the heads of state. And he got to a point, he said, "I don't need 22 of you. I don't even need 10 of you. I don't even need 5 of you. I just need two of you to rise up and fix this." And he said, "Well, I'm 92 years old now, but I want to see a Green Revolution before I die." And all of a sudden, President Obasanjo, from where he was sitting (you know he's always in a nice-looking agbada of his), he ran out of his chair, and he ran straight to the lectern – the president of Nigeria, the largest black country in the world, without shoes. And his security detail wondered what had gone wrong with the President. And so he ran after him with his pair of shoes, but President Obasanjo kept running faster than his security detail. He got in front, he held Dr. Borlaug's hand, and he looked into the faces of all the heads of state. He said, "Dr. Borlaug has been telling us for a long time that we must have a Green Revolution – and you are not listening to him. Now, Dr. Borlaug, he's here, and now he's threatening us with death." And he said, "Absolutely nobody here wants to be responsible for killing Dr. Borlaug." He says, "So all of you in favor of an African Green Revolution, let me see your hands up." All the hands went up, and that was how we approved it. Thank you, Mr. President. I hope you are still wearing shoes.

But we wouldn't get anywhere unless farmers in rural areas are able to access farm inputs. I realize that millions of farmers were unable to access improved seeds and fertilizers because rural input markets weren't fully developed or absent in most cases. It was easier, actually, to find pop soda in rural Africa than to find Gebisa's high-performing sorghum varieties in most parts of the country. This led me with my colleagues at the Rockefeller Foundation to develop and work with several partners to roll out a major program to develop what we call agro-dealer networks – it's like your mom and pop shops that you find in rural areas – all across rural Africa. And we wanted to make sure that no farmer will travel more than 3 kilometer radius to be able to find seeds and fertilizers. We had to establish guaranteed facilities with banks to improve access to finance to all these agro-dealers.

And I must say this is all part of that, when President Obasanjo was leading his effort with Dr. Borlaug. You know, President Obasanjo and Dr. Borlaug asked me the question – Give us the five things that you think we must do. I said first we have to make sure that we build an agro-dealer network. We have to make sure that we have financing to support this agro-dealer network. We have to make sure we have smart subsidies that support smallholder farmers in Africa to use good technologies, that we had to set up domestic manufacturing of fertilizer and regional procurement of fertilizers, and that we had to also have an Africa fertilizer financing facility that will support the procurement and industrial manufacturing of fertilizer on the continent. President, I think when you look at me now, I have a high five strategy for the bank, but I think I got a five from there that time. And I want to thank you. I want to say that for all the five areas that we agreed, they are working and working very well.

These initiatives of the agro-dealers triggered a revolution, unleashing a new wave of rural farm input shops, run by the private sector and successfully getting farm inputs to the doorsteps of farmers. Bill and Melinda Gates and Raj was here, and he's a great friend of mine. He gave a popular speech here. And we visited in 2006 some of these agro-dealers in rural Nigeria. Bill Gates became so convinced and passionate about this that he decided that in the fall of that year to actually commit money to create the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, where I later became vice president.

With over \$150 million in funding to AGRA, we began to roll out these farm input shops. Today millions of farmers can now easily get access to farm inputs, boosting farm production,

triggered rapid growth of seed and fertilizer companies. As always, myself and my colleagues were inspired by Dr. Borlaug's words, *Take it to the farmers*.

Well, the fact is, we could get even greater results if farmers would receive strong support from government, just like they did when Norman Borlaug led the Asian Green Revolution. Of course, I am an advocate of subsidies for farmers in Africa. Many have written off subsidies in Africa as corruption-laden and inefficient. And they were right, but they missed the crucial point. The problem was not the subsidies but the system that delivered them.

Back in 2004, while at the Rockefeller Foundation, I worked with federal scientists, World Food Prize winner Jeffrey Sachs as we designed the subsidy program for Malawi and with some of the colleagues in the Foundation. At the time, Malawi was experiencing its worst drought in history. Despite quite massive doubts, and the government bought into the plan, and the subsidy program was rolled out. Donors lined up after an initial hoopla. It was a huge success. Within three months, Malawi that was a net food importing country desperately suffering out of hunger, produced a surplus of 400,000 metric tons of maize and exported that to Zimbabwe.

A few years later I faced a similar situation in Kenya in 2007. I was working then at AGRA. I noticed that we had at the time 2.5 million poor farmers that were so food insecure they had no access to farm inputs. And I walked into a meeting where all the donors were discussing this question. And I said, "Well, what we've got to do, for me, seems like a very simple thing — support them and help them out of poverty." As soon as I said we were going to support smallholder farmers, the guy who was leading the meeting said, "Next agenda item," to which I said, "I will not be back at this meeting. I wish that I had the power to actually confiscate all of your diplomatic number plates. I would send you out of the country, because I can't believe how you can be enjoying the beauty of Africa and the sunshine of Africa, and you can watch 2.5 million people that can actually get out of poverty, not get out of poverty, just because of an ideology that you have against it. What's wrong with it?" So I walked up to the Minister of Agriculture, and I said, "You've got to support your farmers to get the 2.5 million farmers out of poverty." He said, "Well, at the time the World Bank wouldn't let us do it." I said, "The last time I checked, none of these farmers live on 1800 Pennsylvania Avenue. They live in Kenya."

So that was how we got it done. It was called Climo Plus, and it reached a million farmers that year. Once again we had demonstrated that when pragmatic-centered policies meet the right political leadership and a dedicated administrator, things happen. You just have to go back to Ghana and see what President Kufuor did and President John Mahama did. You can see you need absolutely to have great political leadership.

Technologies exist to feed Africa. The challenge is to get them into the hands of millions of farmers. That was the situation with tissue cultured bananas. Florence Wambugu, I don't know. I saw Florence when I was... Is Florence here? There, please. You can look at Florence over there — terrific scientists. We have tissue culture bananas that can give you 40 tons per hectare. Today we have orange-fleshed sweet potato. We have pro-vitamin A cassava. We got water-efficient maize for Africa. We got all these technologies that Gebisa Ejeta developed, all the sorghum hybrid varieties. We've got all this BT maize and BT cotton that's all over the place but they are sitting on the shelf. They're not for sale on the shelf. They've got to be on the field of farmers. And so what we decided then to do, when I was in Rockefeller, I was — how are we going to get the farmers to get access to financing to be able to afford the tissue culture bananas that Florence Wambugu and others have developed?

And I remember, I want to thank very much Gordon Conway, who was my president at the Rockefeller Foundation, for allowing me to have \$500,000 as a grant. We used to call it program-related investment. And he said, "Here is \$500,000. Go and try out how you think we can do it." So I went to a bank in Uganda. I said, "This is \$500,000. Lend it to farmers," because the price of the tissue culture plantlet was \$1.50 per plantlet – and that's a lot for poor farmers. I said, "But if it works and they pay your money back, next year you have to put in a million dollars of your own money," and that was how we did it.

Fast track back four years. The Rockefeller Foundation lost \$4,500 on that facility. The farmers paid everything back, and then we went on from there to say President Museveni. And Gordon Conway went with me at night, at 2 A.M. We saw President Museveni, and President Museveni said, "Now, we have too much bananas." And he turned to Gordon Conway. He said, "Please help us to clean it up." Of course, the way to clean it up is to create markets, but I felt so excited that at least we had good problem, which was we had enough, a lot more bananas than we actually needed.

But then I found out that the banks that we had lent to, years after when I was president of the African Development Bank, I was campaigning. And the Minister of Finance of Uganda was one of the people I worked to actually ask for a vote. He looked at me. He said, "Well, you don't have to campaign with me, because I was the manager of the bank that you put \$500,000 into the other time. And we ended up lending \$20 million of our own money, so you have my vote."

We went to Kenya. We mobilized when I was in AGRA a hundred million dollars. We went to Nigeria when I was Minister of Agriculture. We set up a risk-sharing facility, \$350 million, and we leveraged \$3.5 billion. And so we've shown that the banks can make money in agriculture if they can see the money trail in agriculture – and that's what we have to constantly develop.

But no matter how much we try to help smallholder farmers, we can't go far unless we tackle corruption, and policies will fail unless we tackle corruption. When I became Minister of Agriculture in Nigeria, I remember that I went, obviously, to get wisdom from my president, President Obasanjo, who had nominated me to be minister in Nigeria. And he's a general, you know, a war-time general. And Baba looked at me and said, "Akin, as you take up this job, there's just one thing that is so difficult – fertilizer sector. It's so damn corrupt," he said, "and it's so damn risky," he said, "so do anything, but whatever you do, don't go there, because it's a very, very massive sector." I looked at him and I thanked him, but because I consider him a father, I thought I would get his courage of a general, but I didn't tell him. I went home and I told my wife, I said, "Grace, we will fail unless we can end corruption on fertilizer in Nigeria." And that was how we developed the electronic water system that you talked about. And then we used it to deliver season fertilizers over the mobile phone via vouchers to over 15 million farmers. We ended the corruption of 40 years in 90 days.

Nigeria has over 21 million metric tons of additional food. We impacted lives of over 75 million people. I went back to the general, and the general told me, "You didn't listen to me, but I'm glad you didn't." And that is how generals always encourage those that are corporals in their regiments.

But I want to say that I would not have succeeded with this if there wasn't big political support. And one of the things that really excited me with mobile phones was women. We impacted 2.5 million women, and I went to northern Nigeria once, and I was in this irrigated perimeter. And there were all these women wearing black porter. I see one of the journalists – you can stand up,

too, because you can ask him about this story. He went with me. And they were running towards where I was, and because of the security problem in Nigeria in the North, everybody was scared. So my security guy said, "Get in the car." He pushed me into the car. I said, "No, but wait a minute. I'm a minister of agriculture. I'm not scared of farmers, so let me be there." And so when the women got close, they all reached into their pockets and they pulled out a mobile phone. And they said, "Minister, we all get seeds and fertilizer now in our villages with mobile phones, and men cannot cheat us anymore."

And I want to thank in particular President Jonathan – he's not here; he was my president – because without his political support, because to do such a reform, you need to have a backing of your president. It's not just about stepping on people's toes. I told the president, "We are going to walk on people's heads," and so he had my back covered, and for that I will be forever grateful. Please give it up to the president for what he did.

Today that system has gone global. As you know, the World Bank has taken it to Afghanistan. They're going to reach over a million farmers this year. The African Development Bank is scaling it up to over 30 countries as we speak.

Let me say that we were here as another repeated about the panel where Jennifer Blanke did on the technologies for African agricultural transformation. As you know, the African Development Bank, the World Bank, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, and also AGRA and Rockefeller will put a billion dollars to take technologies to the farmers.

But let me say, as we do all this, we must tackle the problem of malnutrition. We've got 54 million kids that are stunted in Africa today – it makes no sense. And so I'm committed that African Development Bank, we will help to address this particular problem, because it's not just about a social sector, it's about the economy. Because stunted children today will lead to stunted economics tomorrow. And so we've got to change the lenses we will look at it, is that it's not just a social sector – it is an economic issue. And that's why we launched the African Leaders for Nutrition with Kofi Annan, Bill Gates, Aliko Dangote, the Big Win Philanthropy, and the Global Panel on Food Systems and Nutrition.

Well, while we were sitting over here having lunch – and this is the great thing about this kind of event – I looked over my shoulder, and Jan Low, World Food Prize winner, looked at me and said, "Akin," at the breakfast this morning... (was it this morning?) that you saw something for breakfast that was called indomie. Indomie is a food that young people like, made out of wheat and stuff like that. And she said, "But that's not nutritious." And my brain started working right away. I have with me President Obasanjo who is leading a big effort on Zero Hunger. I have here President Mahama, and thought, okay, good – we can solve this problem right here.

So I reached straight out to President Obasanjo. I said, "Mr. President, will you join me in making a convening of all the food industry anyone so we can get all the orange-fleshed sweet potato, the pro-vitamin A varieties that we have for cassava, for them to begin to process it into making those noodles. Because when kids have that, then they have better nutrition." And just like he did during the time of the Fertilizer Summit, the president got up from there, but this time he had shoes. He walked up there to where Jan was, and he said, the same way he talked to me, he said, "Now, give me the solution." And I said, "Jan, this President needs an answer." And he said, "I'll give you what the plan is." I said, "President, can show the plan?" That's it.

And so we have decided to launch a major effort in Africa with the immediate effect, but the President and I and the other World Food Prize laureates will do to ensure that we take the orange-fleshed sweet potato into the food industry at scale. And I want to thank President Obasanjo and also thank President Mahama for that.

Let me say that, as we look at agriculture, we have to make sure that we unlock the productivity of the Savannas. I've talked about that; I'm not going to repeat myself. But that's very important that we make that initiative of unlocking the Savanna, very, very important for us to succeed.

But infrastructure will be important, and we must look at infrastructure differently. Let me just say water infrastructure. If you look at countries today where they invest the agribusinesses and the food processing industries are all in the urban centers. They're looking always close to the port. They bring in the food intermediate products, they process it and they send it right into the hinterland of the country. But that doesn't create market. It doesn't create jobs. It doesn't stimulate anything really in the rural economy.

So at the African Development Bank we decided that we are going to support the creation of what we call, staple food processing zones, or AGRA allied industrial zones that will be special economic zones where we will invest in power, in water, in roads. And the food processors can be located there, close to where the farmers are. And then they can buy the produce, they can process the produce, they can create the markets, they can create lots of jobs and ship only out finished products. And I think these would transform the rural economies of Africa significantly and create a massive amount of jobs like we've never seen.

Let me say that I know the future belongs to the youth. And I know that agriculture is the coolest thing that you ever found. And for the young folks that are here – my son is not here, but I'll tell you the story. Those of you who were here last year, I'll tell you again the story because I'm on a mission to convert you into agriculture. No, there is not going to be any tithes or anything like that.

My father wanted me to be a doctor, by all means. And so I was only 14, and so whenever I took the exams, he would fill the form – medicine, first choice; second choice, veterinary medicine; top choice, dentistry. So I had to be a doctor anyway. But every time that I would apply, they would say, "Sorry, your grades – you didn't make it to medical school, but we'll take you for agriculture." My father who grew up as a poor farmer said, "No. Go again." So I tried three times, and every time they took me for agriculture. Then my father said, "God must desperately want you in agriculture." So when I finished my PhD degree in the United States at Purdue University, I was so happy to write my dad a letter, and I signed it "Doctor."

So my dad called me "Doctor" from that time on. But when our son wrote to me, graduate of a medical school in the United States, my dad was 90 years old, so we brought him to the United States. And he was trying to ask a questions, and he turned, and he said, "Doctor," so I said, "Yes, Dad." He said, "Not you. I mean the real doctor." To which I told my father, "Even the real doctor would tell you, take your medication three times a day but only after food, which means agriculture is still more important than medicine."

And that's why I think agriculture is the coolest that you could ever find, and we at the African Development Bank are putting a lot of money... Last year we spent \$800 million in getting young people into agriculture. We will spend an average of \$1.5 billion every year for the next ten years. To be able to do that is the coolest thing you've ever found.

But as I said, women make all things happen. Who would be here without a woman? You wouldn't be here. And we are working at the African Development Bank to empower women, and we've set up an initiative that's called Affirmative Finance Action for Women to provide them access to \$3 billion in Africa to support women businesses alone. I think the men can come after hours, we can talk about that. But it's just going to be about women, because I've never found any bird that flies with only one wing. They only fly with two wings. And when you fly like that, you go faster with women, and I'm very confident about that.

So as I close, let me say that in this drive to feed Africa, we are not alone. Many of you here have come before us. On your achievements we are building new alliances and partnerships to do even more. So many people, of course, helped me to get here, and my lovely wife, Grace, my sons, Rotimi and Segun, my parents, my wife's parents, my entire family. Had great teachers in high school, and some of the teachers that are here from high school – are you still here? You know, high school teachers, they inspire you a lot. My professors when I was at the University. Gebisa Ejeta sat on my PhD - he's a very short man, but he will stand up -- he sat on my PhD thesis committee. JD Axtel really fired me up a lot. Lowell Hardin, you know, great man. These are the people - Wu Thomas - they made you have a passion for agriculture.

And when I was at Purdue University, at a time came, Mr. President, I have to say this publicly because I have to give honor to whom honor is due. Because I came on a scholarship, but then my scholarship money wasn't paid from Nigeria, and so I ran out of money. And I remember staying... Purdue was so cold, and I was going to the campus, and I had my last 25 cents on earth, and I stood on the bus line, and as I got into the bus, the guy said, "It will be 50 cents, please." And I put 25 cents, and he looked at me, and I said, "Well, that's all I have on earth." And he put his hand in his pocket, and he put another 25 cents in it for me.

And I went to university, got on the campus, and I went to the office of John Connor, one of my professors, and John Connor thought I was a bright student. And I told John Connor, I said, "John, I haven't been eating or almost three days." And John Connor reached into his drawer. He picked out a checkbook, and he wrote me a check for a hundred dollars. It was my fourth semester as a graduate student. He said, "When you get your PhD five years from now, you pay me back the hundred dollars." And then he said, "Go to Room 575." I went downstairs. I saw a mathematician who wasn't friendly to people, because he was all like about computers. I stood there, and his name was Phil Abbott, world-class trade economist. And I said, "Excuse me, please. I was asked to come here." He said, "Are you the Nigerian student?" I said, "Yes, please." He said, "I hear you are smart." I said, "I don't know about that." He said, "But I hear you have no money." I said, "That, I am very sure of that." He said you have an assistantship. I said, "What does that mean?" He said, "That means that your scholarship gets paid. It means that you get \$575 a month." And I said, "Excuse me, sir, I'm just so sorry. Will I get paid at the end of this month?" And was the first time Phil Abbott turned. He turned and he looked at me, and he said, "Young man. This is the United States of America. You work hard, you get paid." I said, "Don't get angry. You know, I need this money." And that was how I actually went through school.

And Gebisa was on my committee, supported me, and of course Sanders, my professor for PhD, supported me. And it's because of these kind of people I'm actually here today. And I remember when I finished my PhD, I walked back to John Connor's office. I handed him a check for a hundred dollars. He shook my hand. He shook my hand. He said, "Congratulations, doctor." This is what America does by opening up its doors to others.

I don't know whether he is here or not, but Jay Akridge, the dean of Purdue University, provost, and also the president of Purdue University, they were all there yesterday. I wouldn't be here without them. Absolutely not.

But let me also thank those that helped me. Gordon Conway hired me in the Rockefeller Foundation. Bob Hart trained me a lot. Gary Toenniessen he really helped me to understand the importance of focus with little money. When I was at Rockefeller Foundation, my first job day at work, Gary Toenniessen invited me to lunch. I felt good. My director was inviting me to lunch. We went downstairs—you know, the curbs, you know, where you get all those one-dollar hot dogs? He bought a one-dollar hot dog. He gave me one, he took one. And I thought we were just having an appetizer on the way to the restaurant. And then he said, “We’re going right back into the building,” and we sat down. He said, “Welcome to lunch.” He said, “What would you like to drink?” I said, “I would like Sprite, please.” He said, “We don't have Sprite, but we have a cabinet over there with water. You can get some water.” I got the water. I sat down, and then he looked me straight in the face. He said, “Welcome to the job of managing a dead man’s assets. Find the sharpest minds you can ever get in the world, put him to task to get things done, and then get out of their way.” That is what has shaped me to who I am today. Gary is not here, but I will forever be grateful to him.

I want to thank Kofi Annan who supported me big time. I want to thank all my staff in the Ministry of Agriculture in Nigeria. The advisors I had, if you’re here, please, on the Agricultural Transformation Agenda of Nigeria, please stand at this time. The stage is yours.

I want to thank once again President Obasanjo, sir for having the confidence in making me a minister and nominating me, but also I want to say something about President Obasanjo and my wife, which gets me into trouble. Because President Obasanjo calls me Akin-45, and he calls Grace, Grace-55. You may not understand what that means, but that means, he says, 55% of my success is due to Grace. The rest is mine. And when I won the World Food Prize yesterday, I walked up to him, I said, “Mr. President, I've been at 45 for a long time. What do you think I am today?” He said, “46.”

And let me thank Ambassador Quinn once again, a man of impeccable honor who has continued to inspire and encourage me, Professor M.S. Swaminathan, the World Food Prize Board for awarding me this cherished award, and all the wonderful staff other World Food Prize Foundation for doing an incredible job of organizing all these events. We are very grateful. Thank you very much.

And last night I had the privilege of donating my World Food Prize award of \$250,000—and that’s a lot of money, a quarter of a million dollars, to set up a fund fully dedicated to providing grants, fellowships and financing for the youth of Africa in agriculture as a business.

And we were having dinner. This man can make miracles happen—call Ambassador Quinn. He came to me. He said, “Akin, you may want to come back for just a second. There’s a man that wants to talk to you, but it’s worth leaving your steak for a while.” And I got up, and his name was John Harrington, and he said, “I was so moved when you donated your \$250,000 to support young people in agriculture. And therefore I have decided to match it for you.” And so anytime Ambassador Quinn asks me to get up from anywhere, I'll follow.

So today I'm honored to announce that a portion of my World Food Prize and all other things that we will mobilize will be used to support the work of the World Food Prize Africa Youth

Institute, which we will set up. The World Food Prize Africa Youth Institute will support young entrepreneurs and young scientists and scholars who will be named Borlaug Additional Fellows. This will allow us to strategically continue the Dr. Borlaug's legacy of taking agriculture technologies to farmers and my philosophy of promoting and engaging agriculture as a business. And as we see those fellows, one thing they're always going to get, they'll get a badge of Dr. Borlaug with an arm of Dr. Borlaug on their shoulders, saying, "Go, score more goals." The youth of Africa are the future of the continent, and I pledge my full support.

So as I close, just like Elijah in the Bible thought he was alone until God spoke to him that there was an army of others who feel exactly the same way he felt. That's how I feel right now. As I look around this hall, I feel the same passion, I sense the same determination. I see an army of partners willing and able to help score more goals for African agriculture. Together we will, and certainly Dr. Borlaug would be delighted that the gospel of agriculture as a business finally helped to end poverty in Africa in this journey and endeavor, so help us, God. Look at the person next to you and give them a high five, say, "High five for Africa!" Thank you. Thank you very much.