

Keynote Address by
H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
At a Special Event:
“Getting Ready for the Post-2015 Development Agenda”
Organized by the United Nations Rome-Based Agencies
April 4, 2014
Rome, Italy

Madam Ertharin Cousin, Executive Director of the World Food Programme;
Madam Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization;
Mr. Adolfo Brizzi, Vice President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development;
Council Chairpersons;
Senior Management and Staff of the Rome-Based Agencies (RBAs);
Members of the Diplomatic Corps present;
Officials of Government;
Members of the Liberian Delegation;
Representatives of Civil Society;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I see a few familiar faces around the room and like to greet you. Thank you, on behalf of Liberia and Africa, for your service to our continent.

I am delighted to be back here in Rome and want to thank you the Rome-Based Agencies (RBAs) for inviting me to share some thoughts with you on how we can collectively reflect on “Getting Ready for the Post-2015 Development Agenda.”

Let me spend a few minutes talking about where we are now, in Liberia and in sub-Saharan Africa, on the issues of your institutions, the World Food Program, the Food and Agriculture Organization and the International Fund for Agriculture Development, issues on agriculture and food security.

Most of you in the room are probably familiar with Liberia’s journey. We are grateful for the service you have rendered to us and to our people during our difficult years. We have since moved forward and we have now gone from crisis to stabilize our situation. Now we can focus on the future and we want to continue to count on your partnership in our years to come, as we restructure our economy, especially agriculture. Clearly Liberia has indeed turned the page.

Dear Friends:

Throughout Africa, agriculture remains the strong socio-economic sector, for job creation, poverty reduction, and income generation.

As we all know, it is impossible to speak about agriculture in Africa without highlighting the critical role women play in the sector. African women, as you well know and more familiar with it than I am, comprise 70 percent of sub-Saharan African agricultural workers and 80 percent of those involved in the food value chain. Therefore, any serious discussion about agriculture and food security must seek to empower women. This means providing them with the means of production as well as the space to market their production. The record on this is clear as this is one of the surest paths to poverty eradication, to achieving the Millennium Development Goal, particularly Millennium Development Goal #1, which aims to halve hunger and extreme poverty by 2015.

In Liberia, we have made substantive progress since the end of our civil strife. The most recent Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (2012) for Liberia, prepared in collaboration with WFP and other UN agencies, showed that our food insecurity dropped from 41 percent in 2010 to 36 percent in 2012. This drop is significant, when we remember where Liberia stood just a few years ago. However, with fertile land, a youthful manpower and an abundance of rain, we must do better. This is why our administration has put agriculture and food security at the top of our next five years development agenda under the Agenda for Transformation. This is why food security is a matter of national security.

In Liberia, where over 70 percent of our population depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, it is this sector, although still very primarily subsistence, that will contribute most to local employment, poverty reduction, food security and income generation. This is why, as we try to rebuild a country that was totally broken, we emphasize agriculture as a priority area and, under this broad framework, addressing food security and nutrition as a starting point. In this regard, support is being directed at smallholders, where the greatest potential for improving and sustaining food security lies.

Building on the objectives embodied in Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Liberia Agriculture Sector Investment Program (LASIP) was developed and validated, seeking to transform Liberian agriculture within the framework of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP).

Our investment provides a framework for progressively increasing Government's annual budgetary allocation to the agriculture sector to a minimum of 10 percent to ensure sustainable annual growth of 6 percent in compliance with the 2003 Maputo Declaration. The Minister of Agriculture is in the room and she knows we have not reached there yet, but with the commitment, policies and new investment we are putting in place and in collaboration with our regional and institutional partners, we are committed to making progress.

We have launched a special program, supported by UN agencies, to enhance food security by addressing gaps in the production, processing and marketing constraints of small farmers and maintaining predictable and suitable inputs. These measures will not only improve the migration of people from the countryside to the cities since urban poverty is but one of the results of degradation of our food production and marketing chain. These policies will require substantive investments and we will strive to make the necessary resources available.

The overarching objective of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, as we discussed it in the UN High Level Panel and also in the Common African Position that was recently adopted by the African Union is the total eradication of poverty. To achieve this noble goal, we must look beyond food for survival. One of the key pillars of the Common African Position is industrialization. In the area of agriculture, it means going from subsistence farming to agrobusiness, where farmers will not only be able to feed our nations but to export their productions and generate enough income to break the vicious cycle of hunger and poverty.

Getting Ready for the Post-2015 Development Agenda

We'll like to talk about getting ready for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. I would like to say and I repeat that while we are looking ahead, while we are drawing strategies and roadmap on how to move forward beyond 2015, we still have to strive to complete the MDGs. We have more than a year before the MDGs expire. We can and must make plans for the longer future, we can dream about what can and what will happen in 10 or 15 years but we have work to do today. There are many critical aspects of the MDGs that need urgent attention. Our capacity to deal with these issues, to close the remaining gaps will be a very strong indication of our readiness for 2015.

The world is ready for a new agenda, the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which gives due recognition to the changes which have occurred since the year 2000. However, that agenda must be grounded in the realization of the MDGs. There has been much progress, especially in Africa and parts of the globe that were once referred to as Third World. There are new emerging economic powerhouses, there is new consciousness about human right and dignity and inequalities. There are new opportunities and challenges. We must take stock of those opportunities and find solutions to the new challenges that are facing us as humanity.

One of the major shortcomings of the MDGs was the very little progress made on the goal that deals with global partnership and cooperation. Notwithstanding progress and opportunities in many areas, global partnership still remains where it was almost 15 years ago. This is something we have the capacity to change.

There has been much progress in the area of infant and maternal mortality in the past decade, but there too the work is far from finished, because children still die of malnutrition and many women in the world die while giving birth. Although reduced to 49 percent throughout our continent, malaria, a preventable and curable disease still kills millions around the world.

The new development agenda will require a number of transformative and mutually reinforcing actions that apply to all countries. The past few years of political crisis, economic meltdown and the ever growing climate change have brought a new sense of universality, where we no longer must look at the world as divided in camps, with poor nations on one side and rich nations on the other.

The paradigm shift in our thinking of what constitutes human development and the universality of issues confronting us all will serve as the link that will unite us all in one boat. The world has changed and that shift must be reflected in the new agenda that we look beyond 2015.

In preparation for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, we have crafted what is now known as the Common African Position (CAP), a resolve to deliver on our various declarations and commitments on social and economic integration, poverty eradication, and employment generation for our people. The CAP aims at reorienting the development paradigm away from externally driven initiatives toward domestically inspired and funded initiatives.

The CAP is based on six pillars: structural economic transformation; science, technology, and innovation; people-centered development; environmental sustainability; peace and security; and partnership for development. At the core of each pillar is a strong commitment to good governance. These pillars are the indispensable building blocks for an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven and managed by its own people and representing a dynamic force in the international arena.

The CAP recognizes that sustainable and equitable development can only be guaranteed when people are the means and the end of the economic growth process and that Africa is committed to remain focused on pertinent development issues, completing the unfinished MDGs by focusing on the areas of education and health, and by responding to the social and economic consequences of Africa's changing demographic structure.

The CAP is to reverse Africa's dependence on a cluster of primary commodities serving as a reservoir of raw material and a market for imported finished good. It calls for a competitive added value to the vast natural resource, but a continent of strong resilience and improved socio-economic performance by harnessing science, technology and innovation. It postulates a sustainable development agenda for Africa anchored by the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, mutual respect, and mutual trust.

To conclude, yes, much progress has been made in formulating the strategies for the Post-2015 agenda but unless we commit globally to a new partnership, to a new way of doing business, we will undermine the progress to which we as all nations aspire. I remain optimistic that with the kind of consultations that have taken place around the world in formulating the new development agenda, the new concepts that are being developed and the new realizations that we are all in this boat together, as one humanity, not South and North, not poor and rich, I believe we can change the world and make a dent in poverty and hunger, and we can possibly eradicate both in our lifetime. May we strive to be bold in our action as we forward toward the new agenda.

I thank you.