

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE ASIA-AFRICA
AGRI-BUSINESS FORUM**

FICCI Auditorium, New Delhi: 04-02-2014

1. It is my pleasure to be here today to inaugurate this important Asia-Africa Agri-business Forum. I am sure that this platform would provide a unique business environment to the participating business leaders, policy makers and other important stakeholders for exchanging ideas and experiences, and for collaborating on agri-business.
2. It could not have been a more opportune time to organize this event as agriculture and agri-business are dominating the global and regional agenda on economic transformation and development in Asia and Africa. This forum will add another dynamic chapter to the evolving cultural, social, educational and economic engagements between these two continents.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

3. Agriculture growth is the singular contributing factor for food security. It also plays a pivotal role in creating employment opportunities and promoting socio-economic development. By 2030, global food production has to increase by forty per cent to keep pace with the world demand. One billion people, representing fourteen per cent of the global population, is still afflicted by hunger. Asia and Africa account for most of them. This cannot continue any further. Food production has to proceed in a business-unusual manner; on a war footing.
4. Enhanced crop production and productivity are key priorities in Asia and Africa. Agriculture makes much more than robust business sense in these continents. The alleviating effects of this sector on poverty are alluring. Studies have projected agriculture and agri-business to be a three trillion dollar business in Africa and almost 4.5 trillion dollar business in Asia by 2030.

5. However, the development of agri-business in these continents has remained stunted due to inefficient utilisation of capacity and resources and for want of a more favourable policy environment. The sector is plagued by serious constraints in production, demand and supply, export potential and processing capabilities.
6. In Africa, weak agricultural performance is a major barrier in the development of the agri-business sector. The availability of land for agriculture is a crucial factor for food production. The continent is endowed with 733 million hectares of arable land of which only 183 million hectares of land is currently under cultivation. It is disheartening to note that huge tracts of land suitable for agriculture still remain uncultivated.
7. In Asia, land availability for agriculture is continuously decreasing due to rising population. The shrinking and deteriorating land resources have to be judiciously used in order to sustain the needs of the future. Adequate policies, strategies, technologies and human resources have to be in place.
8. I am aware of the Report titled, “Unlocking the Food Belts of Asia and Africa”, which has been prepared by the organizers. It is indeed a matter of introspection as to how, despite availability of agricultural labour and sizeable arable land, notwithstanding some decline in Asia, many Asian and African countries have witnessed spiralling food prices.
9. The challenge is to translate the woes into business opportunities. There is a need for both the continents to overcome the challenges through symbiotic associations. Partnerships must aim at developing the agri-business sector into an efficient business enterprise capable of competing in other international markets. It is heartening to note that the agenda of this business forum includes forging new business partnerships, sharing best practices and new technologies, and exploring project finance and funding options.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

10. Strategic partnerships for adoption of best practices and to maximise benefits through technology transfer have become more important today. The Accelerating Green Revolution programme in Africa seeks to achieve a quantum jump in productivity and production levels. India, which had witnessed a Green Revolution in the Sixties, is now moving towards an 'Evergreen Revolution', recognizing the positive role that information technology can play as powerful catalyst for sustainable agricultural development. India's strategy centres on the Action Plan for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Agriculture, which has been operational since 1995.
11. The ICT for Agriculture Plan calls for strong cooperation between Asia and Africa. There is need for ICT to facilitate the development of extension services, value chain, production and marketing systems, and agriculture risk management. An International Conference at Rwanda held recently has highlighted the need to have a South-South Cooperation Programme on ICT for Agriculture.
12. The future of agriculture depends on the adoption of scale-neutral technologies. Farm mechanisation, as an efficiency inducing measure, has proved to be a great success in the US, CIS countries including Russia, and several European countries. India, on her part, has launched a 'National Mission on Farm Mechanisation' during the Twelfth Five Year Plan period of 2012-13 to 2016-17. This programme has been initiated to promote customized hiring facilities for agricultural machinery and to also generate employment for the rural youth.
13. Increased mechanization of the farm sector in India has led to improvement in productivity. India is today a potential source of high-tech agricultural machinery. Our country can provide agricultural equipment like harvester, thresher and bailer machinery, earth moving equipment, tractors and sowing machinery to African nations.

14. Time has come to look for a 'viable alternate farming model' to promote the agri-business sector. The experience of different countries in contract farming needs to be shared so as to build a greater understanding of and acceptance for this model.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

15. A shift in focus towards the development of horticultural crops and food processing industry can provide the impetus necessary for the overall growth of the agricultural sector. Africa has tremendous scope for benefiting from the development of the food processing industry. India can provide training in post harvest management of different crops and provide assistance in developing packaging technology in line with world standards. India has requisite expertise for each level of the value chain and can assist African countries in developing the same.
16. Access to agriculture markets and finance as well as greater public private partnership in agri-business and the food processing sectors in Asia and Africa are essential to unleash their potential. Major investment in infrastructure like irrigation, water conservation, roads, markets and cold chains is also necessary. I strongly recommend that the investing firms and banks forge a strategic partnership to address the credit requirements of both Asian and African countries. This would help the agri-business and food processing sectors to meet their requirement for finance.
17. I am happy to note that during this international conference, you have planned 'business to business' meetings for the distinguished participants from Asia and Africa. I am sure that the discourse and dialogue amongst businesses will bring out several new ideas for cooperation as well as solutions to tackle the challenges that Asia and Africa face in the agriculture and agro-processing sectors. With these few words, I conclude. I thank you all and wish Asia-Africa Agri-business Forum in New Delhi all success. I compliment the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry for organizing this one-

of-a-kind conclave. Let me also avail of this opportunity to welcome all the international delegates who have come to India to take part in this inter-continental dialogue.

Thank You.

Jai Hind.
