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I want discuss the African farmer. We have heard a lot of things about global policy issues and the experience of Brazil, but I want to take you back to the heart of the African farmer, the person we are really talking about, because it puts it in perspective and into practical terms as we move forward.

We have heard a lot of statistics, but 70-80% of the food we eat comes from these people, 80% of whom are women. They use the hoe, and there is not a lot of technology. Agriculture provides almost 80% of the employment in Burkina Faso, and in general 60% of the income is of small holder farmers is used to purchase food for consumption, which brings another challenge to the equation. The contribution of agriculture to African GDP is 25-45%, but unfortunately it is not getting equal attention, so we find that investment in African countries, despite what my friend from Burkina Faso has said, is still below acceptable levels; African governments are not investing enough in African agriculture.

Therefore, these farmers will have very low levels of good inputs such as fertiliser, and I am sure OCP knows what percentage of fertiliser globally is consumed in Africa – it is 6% or less. That is a very bad statistic. Therefore, yields are very low, and adoption levels are very low; I heard the question about GMOs in Africa, and I not sure it is a good discussion, because these people just want something to eat. We have enough technology from conventional breeding to take us from the current level to the next level.

Access to finance is a challenge, because women have no access to property rights in most African countries, though this is starting to change, so they have no collateral. Our goal at AGRA is to work with these smallholder farmers, who normally are women, and we are trying to work in a unique African way, because we missed out on the green revolution that happened in South American and Asia, and therefore are also taking a lot of lessons in terms of sustainability and climate change issues. We use grant aid to allow these farmers to address constraints across the whole value change from seed to table, and we are working in 17 countries.

A smallholder soybean farmer in Malawi has an output way below that of a Brazilian farmer, has no access to good seed because there are very few varieties, and cannot afford fertiliser because she has no credit. Even when she produces – and we are seeing a positive trend in productivity, because it is growing, albeit at a very small rate, she does not have access to markets in a sustainable way. Therefore, she is risky to financers and to a lot of other people.

We have several programmes in the 17 countries we are working in, and the first is a seeds programme. We start with capacity building; we have taken a lot of PhD students from African universities to study breeding, so through conventional breeding they can work on varieties Africans have always used, from maize to millet, sorghum, cowpea and sweet potato, food products that people have always consumed. We address the nutrition question by breeding those African varieties with high nutritional value.

We work with national institutions, because breeding in Africa, as in most countries owned by governments and national institutions; there is a lot of debate about who owns the rights to the foundation seeds, and it is African governments who own them. Therefore, there is a challenge in handing over foundation seeds to a private company, which can then propagate that onwards to the farmer. We support national government breeding programmes by giving these students whom we have trained grants and they breed varieties within the different ecological zones. We then support them to link these improved varieties to private seed companies, local SMEs, so that the handover can be smooth. We have worked a lot on policies, because these can be a headache. A lot of governments do not have proper policies to make these handovers efficient.

We have worked with about 80 indigenous seed companies in these 17 countries, and what we do is to give them start-up money, information and sometimes training, and a lot of business support, and through that work, we will have produced almost 70,000 metric tonnes of seed through this process. We work with the agro-dealer networks, because distribution is difficult due to the challenged infrastructure network. To enable distribution to move from the national seed companies to the farmers on the ground, we have what we call an agro-dealer network, comprising input suppliers who we give business support and financing. We have worked with about 15,000 in the last five years.

Agronomy is a challenge, so we have another programme, called the soil health programme that promotes and trains farmers in integrated soil management, where farmers learn how to combine organic and inorganic fertilizer use with crop rotation and intercropping to improve yields, and therefore improve on the failures of previous green revolutions in terms of sustainability. We work through groups, because a smallholder farmer has less than two hectares, so they have no voice; so we are building their collective voice through farmer groups. We are training them in capacity-building in terms of how to run their own organisations and negotiate prices for both inputs and supplies, or indeed when they are marketing. We have another programme that works on structured markets, because traditional markets in Africa are just markets under trees and not very organised, but we are getting very sophisticated; retail chains are coming into the area, and we are helping farmers structure the debate in terms of what price they demand, quality standards expected, drawing up contracts, etc. This applies to big private sector companies like Unilever, people who are also doing very good work, as well as traditional SMEs which are indigenously owned.

We also have a programme called innovative finance; we know access to credit is a challenge, so we have been working with African governments to de-risk some money within private sector banks, and this money is then lent to smallholder farmers at preferential interest rates. This has been very successful in Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and Ghana. They are actually not risky, because the default rate has been zero.

I talked about seed systems and soil health; soil health is more about integrated farming and protecting the soil by giving back to it. Market access is about structuring how these farmers will go to the market to sell their produce, because they are starting to get back more than they are consuming. One thing we are addressing in this programme is post-harvest losses; we lose up to 60% even with increased productivity during different stages, at farm level, during transport, or in the market, so we are working with the farmers to train them on better handling and to start introducing some simple value addition techniques like threshing so that we can reduce the post harvest losses.

Policy and advocacy are very important, because sometimes governments have policies that are not helping their own farmers, not because they do not want to, but because nobody has reframed the issue with them, so we work a lot with the farmers to address these challenges and these frame policies. . I think we are having a lot of success in Burkina Faso, and Ghana is seeing changes in the seed laws, along with Tanzania in terms of handovers and how the country handles its own affairs in how it addresses farming issues.

The finance programme is a good example of how government, private sector and farmers can work together, and we have managed collectively to leverage about USD1 billion in the last five years to smallholder farmers, with a very low default rate. We have also used the money to grow indigenous SMEs.

Therefore, we work with partners to raise money. AGRA was started about six years ago by the Gates Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation, but since then we have gained a lot of partners, such as USAID, DFID, Norway, the Netherlands, and Sweden, and the list is growing. We are looking for a lot of partners so we can drive this agenda. We have a forum called the Green Revolution Forum in Africa, with nine Forum partner, who include both private sector and bilateral organizations and once a year we meet to deliberate and try to frame the debate towards effectiveness in terms of helping the smallholder farmers; if it works for them, the GDP of their countries will increase and they will have a better voice in discussions with their own governments.

We are engaging a great deal with the Africa union, because there are things that the African governments have promised to do but have not done; for example, they committed ten years ago to using 10% of their national budgets for agricultural investment, whereas very few are now doing so. Burkina Faso is one of them. The African Union wanted to secure an increase of 6% of GDP in agricultural production per year, and a few are starting to get there. Next year is the year of African agriculture, so it is a very important year, given the global attention African agriculture is getting, for obvious reasons – the next big source of food insecurity will be Africa, so if we do not address the African issue we will not have global food security. Next year is very important, so if you have not engaged in an African agenda or have not partnered with an African government to address food security, I request that you do so, because next year is our chance; if we do not do it next year, we can forget it.