

# KHALID MEKSEM

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Thank you. Dr Kumar has addressed all the aspects of the topic in one presentation.

I would now like to give the floor to Khalid Meksem.

**Khalid Meksem, President of the University Mohammed VI**

Dr Kumar has done an excellent job in introducing most of what is being done in Africa. If we talk about African agriculture, I think that we need to go back in history and look at the development of agriculture through time. Most agriculture historians will divide Africa into four parts. The pre colonial part of agriculture in Africa was sustainable, local and harmonious. Africans learned to live with nature in a very harmonious way. In fact, most people who are interested in sustainability today will fly to remote locations in Africa and learn from the locals, something that I have learned about it is permaculture, which we are trying to re-introduce into Europe, the US and North America. This originated from Africa, so Africa have something to teach us.

Unfortunately, we always view Africa from the second part, which is the Colonial era. During the colonial time, there was a huge expansion in Europe and there was then an increased demand for food and Africa was a target. The colonial powers went there and then tried to industrialise and bring Africa up to speed. However, the purpose was to export the goods and did not really care about the way agriculture was done in Africa. The colonial powers did not care that the land and its people were abused. However, different countries had different approaches in dealing with the issue of sustainability in Africa and I would rank France as the number one country in trying to build a friendly ecosystem; as France invested a lot in infrastructure. They probably thought that they would never leave Africa. However, they did very well and the infrastructure that was built then is used today by most people interested in Africa. You have all the stations that were built and up to now they are the only infrastructure that exists. You will see French buildings from colonial times that are still being used to promote agriculture in Africa.

After that, we had the post colonial time and there was chaos for some countries. The world was divided between the Russians and Americans and there was a huge fight to acquire territories, which led to a lot of instability. This instability is what we see today in war zones, which has led to the fact that it is not possible to produce anything. Land is available and the resources are there but people are suffering. Our generation will remember the song about hunger in Africa in 1985 'We are the world'. that was written by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie

We now move on to the end of the 80s of the post colonial time and the 1980s and the 1990s were not a good time for Africa. There was hunger of course and a lot of political instability. However, the 1980s and the 1990s are also known for a time when some countries became what we call emerging countries. China started to play a major role and there was of course also Japan, Korea and India on the Asian continent. There was then this interest in Africa, for the simple reason that the price of food started going higher and higher. With all the instability in the relationship between the Soviet Union and its republics, as well as between the Soviet Union and the US, there was a demand by those emerging countries for more food and they knew that the only way getting it cheaper was to look for an alternative, and the alternative was Africa.

In 2000, something good therefore happened and we started looking at Africa as potential food provider. There were a lot of programmes – and Kumar has done an excellent job in exposing them – but the real question was what were we bringing to Africa and what are we taking from it? That was therefore what determined our approach. Were we the

kind of people who would go to Africa, make use of its resources and not care what happened, or did we want a sustainable relationship with Africa, where we would go there and try to do something with the locals, with the mindset that business is always very important? This is where a lot of countries in Asia have played a major role in this relationship. However, lately, from 2000 until now, three major countries within the African continent have also become major players in Africa, and these countries are Morocco, Algeria and South Africa.

I will stop here and talk later about these countries and how they approach the African continent.