

UPF New York, USA's Fifth Annual Agribusiness and Economic Industry Summit

Lynn Walsh
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New York, United States -- The fifth annual Agribusiness and Economic Industry Summit, titled "Accelerating Innovation Worldwide through Partnerships and Roadmaps," was held at the UN Headquarters from July 24 to 26, 2019. The Agribusiness Summit is a transcontinental platform for dialogue and cooperation between Africa, the Caribbean, the Americas and others in order to promote agricultural and industrial activity through partnership, innovation and new technology. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), "Nearly 870 million people in the world are suffering from chronic undernourishment. Agriculture and agribusiness account for around 45 percent of GDP in Africa." The FAO statement reflects the potential for such a conference: "Science and technology coupled with improved human capital have been powerful drivers of positive changes in the performance and evolution of smallholder systems."

Welcoming remarks were given by Jean Jacques Nijoh Ewane, CEO of the Agribusiness Summit and of the Africa Marketing Agency. H.E. Ambroisine Kpongo, ambassador of Central Africa Republic to the United Nations, the summit host, gave a sobering account of her country's total agricultural collapse due to the last seven years of civil war. With vast burning of villages and destruction of once-arable land, she said, "Everything has to be redone." Although rich in natural resources, her country is now rated by the Human Development Index as at the second to the lowest level of human development in the world. Conflict, and specifically civil war, is a monstrous destroyer of human productivity.

Damian Onyema Ihedioha, chief agro industry officer of the African Development Bank Group, described the problem that the low productivity level in the continent has led to the high import rate and low export rate of food, despite Africa's rich potential. He said that the marketing system was problematic as often much of the farmers' profits ends up in the hands of intermediaries. Mr. Ihedioha warned that governments should not be allowed to take over agribusiness. Instead the people should be educated and empowered in agroindustry to achieve better efficiency and greater profit for farmers and their families. He addressed the major issue of low crop productivity. Mr. Ihedioha gave several examples of how the African Development Bank Group has been working to bring agrotechnology, access to fertilizer and education to farmers, which has resulted in increased productivity. He pointed out however, that the

poorest rural areas do not have power and so cannot access technology.

The African Development Bank, Mr. Ihedioha said, has made great effort to interest and educate youth about agribusiness such as by providing "fast-track funding" for attending agribusiness schools. He said with the ballooning of the youth population in Africa, "Youth unemployment is a time bomb, and unemployed youth can fall into terrorism and kidnapping." Mr. Ihedioha explained the benefit of training women in farm productivity as mothers who often work the land will be able to assure their children's health and development by providing better nutrition. In conclusion, the challenges are complex but, he said, the continent is not stagnant; with partnerships, such as those discussed at the conference, agricultural transformation throughout Africa will advance.

Larry Schaefer, from Global Schaefer Management, shared valuable methods to increase food production. He analyzed the poor nutritional quality of most farmed fish such as what is produced in China or in fish-farm ponds in Africa where the water does not circulate. He also pointed out the limited nutrition of much of the food produced using typical African farming habits. Mr. Schaefer has developed an aquaponics method that combines fish farming with agriculture in an indoor controlled bio-secure environment. He explained that fish and crop production may be used symbiotically to enhance each other. These indoor aquaponics facilities can utilize solar or wind energy and can be built and run in rural areas just as well as in crowded urban centers. Mr. Schaefer emphasized the well-established science behind these methods and the need for education about running these facilities effectively. However, with enthusiasm, he stressed that such education can be presented all over Africa, which will bring significant health, economic, and social benefits.

Dr. Tageldin Hamad, vice president of UPF-International, shared the encouraging news from the recent African Union Summit in Niger he had just attended. He announced the signing of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, which creates the biggest trade area in the world and the strongest intra-African economic cooperation that has ever existed. He said this historical agreement will facilitate increased economic growth within Africa and boost the continent's exporting capacities. There is good reason to be optimistic, he reflected. Dr. Hamad then stated that as much as technology will aid development, "we will never truly solve the problems facing humankind unless we overcome selfishness and corruption. We have money and greater and greater technology and capacities, but unless human beings mature in their heart and are motivated by an automatic caring and concern for one another, sustainable development will be occluded."

Dr. Hamad additionally shared that we also need to recognize that the weakening and breakdown of the family worldwide is also a major hindrance to sustainable development. He explained that a loving family teaches personal responsibility and models loving and caring for others. Conversely, the breakdown of the family decreases productivity and happiness and deteriorates the moral fiber of citizens. He agreed that education is key for development and added that education that includes the value of the family will be the education that promotes optimal human development and leads to overcoming the most troubling of human challenges.

Other speakers and experts spoke of the crucial need of partnership and the potential of artificial intelligence. Question-and-answer sessions engaged all participants in lively discussion and useful conversations.