

SESSION III. REALIZING THE PROMISE OF BIOFUELS IN DEVELOPMENT

October 19, 2007 – 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

Moderator: Ambassador Melinda Kimble

Speaker: Ibrahim Mayaki

Ambassador Melinda Kimble

Senior Vice President, U.N. Foundation

I'd now like to turn to Dr. Ibrahim Mayaki. Dr. Mayaki, as you all know, has also served as former prime minister and also foreign minister of Niger. So he now is the head of the Hub for Rural Development based in Dakar, Senegal. And he works very directly in the tradeoffs between food security and other agricultural opportunities.

He has been working closely with us on ideas surrounding improving the ability of Africa to develop sustainable biomass production, and I believe he will give you another perspective on this very complicated but important and critical agenda for development.

Dr. Mayaki.

Ibrahim Mayaki

Executive Director, The Hub for Rural Development in West and Central Africa, Senegal

Thank you, Melinda. I would like to begin by giving my thanks to the organization of the World Food Prize for inviting me to such an exciting event. And my thanks also go to the U.N. Foundation, with which the Hub I'm directing is working on that issue of biofuels and agriculture and rural development.

I will say a few words about the Hub. The Hub is a small think tank which has an original governance mechanism in which are, at present, governments, producers' associations, donors and civil society organizations. So what we do is give free advice to the governments, the intergovernmental organizations, and civil society organizations on issues dealing with agricultural policies, land tenure policies, international commercial relations, and questions of gender and rural development. So we have a number of experts in each of these fields, and the only one who is not an expert is myself.

The perspective from which I will approach the subject is a broad perspective. I am not a biofuels specialist; I am rather a public policy analyst, so I will try to draw from my experience as a public decision-maker and as a public decision analyst. And as I will focus on West and Central Africa, I would like to begin by contextualizing.

When we get in relations with governments in West and Central Africa, and with the intergovernmental organizations, what most strikes us is what we call a “schizophrenic scheme.” From the one hand, all the speeches, all the discussions, all the strategies tend to pinpoint rural development as a priority. But when you look at the allocation of resources to rural development, you get to the evidence that the priority is not put in practice. So that’s what we call the schizophrenic scheme, and that scheme, of course, we will see later.

The second trait of the context I would like to highlight is that the demographic growth rate is the highest in the world. It is between 2.6 and 3.2 percent. So every year we have between 12 and 16 million young people who enter the market economy. And those young people don’t have any other “job” besides agriculture.

Dr. Borlaug yesterday was pinpointing the importance of primary and secondary school. But most of the dropouts from primary school that we have – and we have a lot – don’t have any skills linked with agriculture. And that aspect is a very important aspect, and it’s the main challenge of African governments – how to give employment to those young people.

And you know that; you have seen the television images of young people fleeing Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, and dying in boats trying to reach Europe. So migration is a very big issue. Whatever Europe does to refrain those flows, they will continue if the migration aspect dimension is not managed and analyzed properly between Europe and Africa.

The second trait of the context I would like to highlight is linked to that schizophrenic scheme – a context of heavy poverty, very heavy poverty. Wherever a majority of poor people live in rural areas, agriculture is a stage of conflict of interest. So we touch here the issue of urban-versus-rural problematic. And I would like to make a link with the democratization process in which we are. I hope that we have a democratization process. The weight of the urban sector will diminish so that the interests of the rural sector are better taken into account.

The challenges which are facing African agriculture are well known by all of you. I would try to synthesize and take three of them which are key for me.

Productivity – which is linked to all the technological and scientific dimensions.

Land property – as Ms. Kutter was saying, land tenure management is a fundamental and key dimension. If our peasants are not motivated by appropriate land tenure, then their incentive to produce will not be there.

And agriculture training is evidently key. The first slide I showed about 80 percent of the young will not have any other job besides agriculture, but that job that they are taking is very informal. So the dimension has to be rationalized, and agricultural training has to be a priority as a challenge.

There are some myths to which I would like to attract your attention.

The first one is, generally it is said that the African peasant is archaic and has very archaic ways of cultivating. This is a myth, and that myth has led to sometimes agricultural

research centers not really establishing the necessary dialogue and approach with our peasants. So I think technological innovation to boost productivity in agriculture cannot be made without the producers' support.

The second myth is that politicians are implicitly supposed to be autonomous. I will not elaborate on that myth; I think everybody agrees.

And the third myth is that Africa is poor. Yes, Africa is poor, but it is important to notice that we import \$13 billion in food, and capital flight per annum is \$30 billion. And of those \$30 billion of capital flight, a good part is corruption. And the difference we have with Asia is not that we are more corrupt; the problem is that the "fruits," quote/unquote, of corruption, stay in Asia, but they don't stay in Africa.

So how should we use biofuels? I think in any case in any public policy elaboration, the main aim of the use of biofuels in sub-Saharan Africa must be to reduce rural poverty. And the public policies must deal with the issue of the use of biofuels at the local level, I mean at the level of a village. Let us not forget what – and this figure is very important, like Melinda was saying – 90 percent of rural West and Central Africa lives without electricity.

So what would be the goals? The goals would be a technological leap from a situation of a lack of fuel to an advanced technology. And the alternatives would be to use plants which do not compete with food crops so as to secure food security. And yesterday our Indian friend made a profound analysis of the limits of the use of jatropha. Well, jatropha is the most experimented plant in West and Central Africa to produce biodiesel, and there are a few studies which have put on the table the economic issue of jatropha. But we are in the process of experimenting with it.

And the third goal would be local management. I think the producers must have the opportunity to manage this process locally so that the added value stays in local areas. And this is a very important aspect.

And the prerequisites – we think there are two prerequisites. The first one is to understand the environmental issue, which is a key dimension because bioenergy requires a careful analysis of impacts across a whole life cycle. And to establish necessary political regulations so that social problems do not increase and food security is not jeopardized.

Because the two main risks that we have to take in account when constructing public policy would be food insecurity and land ownership concentration.

I have been shown the stop sign, so I will go more quickly. I will talk about the conditions, and I think there are three main conditions: the political conditions, which are protecting the small farmers – most of our farmers are very small; the scientific conditions, which we have talked a lot about during these two days; and the economic and commercial dimension to build regional markets. Regional integration is a key factor if we want to have a sound and effective policy dealing with biofuels.

So the promise of biofuels has been quite enhanced by some main United Nations organizations, like FAO, in reducing poverty, UNDP and the contribution to greenhouse gas

reduction, and UNCTAD in increasing income in rural areas. But the key aspect for me is this “virtuous cycle” with three conditions.

First of all, concerted policy decisions; I think this aspect has been reiterated – better partnership between governments, private sector, CSOs. Decentralized biofuel production. And innovative and sustainable cultivation systems and technologies.

And I would like to end by this quote from Charles Dickens, what you all know, the ghost. I read it in French, but...

*Are these the shadows of the things that will be?
Or are they shadows of the things that may be only?*

I think if I took that quote is to resolve that... *We can build the shadows of the things that can be.* Thank you.

Ambassador Melinda Kimble
Senior Vice President, U.N. Foundation

Thank you very much, Ibrahim, I think that really put in context the caution Nina Fedoroff made yesterday in her panel – that this holds great potential but there are risks and challenges. And as Gloria Visconti said, we need a policy strategy to optimize the benefits.