



WORLD FOOD SECURITY: CAN PRIVATE SECTOR R&D FEED THE POOR?

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AFRICA'S GREEN REVOLUTION - THE CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGE

A green revolution of African farmland is possible if R&D representatives focused their energies on radical programs and policies to increase productivity and create new markets for millions of smallholder farmers.

This was the message given by Dr. A. Namanga Ngongi, President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, at the 2009 Crawford Fund International Conference "World Food Security: Can Private Sector R&D Feed the Poor?" in Parliament House Canberra on 27-28 October.

Speakers including senior Federal politicians, senior representatives from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The UN World Food Program, Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture, DuPont and Monsanto, addressed the intersecting roles of the private, not for profit and public sectors in global food security and how to get the private sector better engaged for the benefit of the rural poor.

In welcoming delegates to the event, The Hon Neil Andrew AO, chairman of the Crawford Fund, noted that while some technologies, such as the mobile phone, flourish in the developing world, desperately needed agricultural technologies don't find their way to the countries that need them.

"While this is an issue giving rise to considerable controversy, especially questions such as intellectual property rights, multinational profits, the development of GMOs for the developing world and biopiracy, the private sector can and does provide much-needed R&D," he said.

The conference heard about Africa's struggle against the forces of climate change and global warming when it came to food production.

"Working with little more than a hoe and some saved seed, African farmers struggle to feed a continent of nearly one billion people. It is time to ensure that they have what they need to succeed. We must transfer research results into development," Dr Ngongi said.

He called on participants to break with old orthodoxies and engrained ways of working, and to think out of the box when it came to developing programs, policies and partnerships.

"This will be the only way to rapidly increase African farmers' productivity, create markets for their goods and increase incomes and employment opportunities for millions of smallholder farmers in Africa."

Dr Ngongi applauded the Australian government for their support of African food security programs and encouraged the countries to continue to work together.

"Like Africa, Australian agriculture has already felt the hot dry winds that can come with climate change. We cannot afford to wait to address this problem or it will be a total catastrophe, especially for Africa where 70 percent of the population depends on agriculture for our livelihoods."

Based in Nairobi, Kenya, AGRA works across the agricultural value chain, in partnership with the public and private sectors, to transform the subsistence existence of our smallholder farmers into viable commercial activity.

Ngongi told the conference that climate change is perhaps the largest challenge for Africa's smallholder farmers in the near and present future.

According to recent studies by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), climate change poses major threats to Africa's smallholder farmers and to the continent's food security. Mounting temperatures, intensified droughts, highly variable periods of rainfall are predicted to cut the yields of rain-fed agriculture by up to 50 percent in Africa.

"Africa did not cause climate change - the continent contributes less than three percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. But we now bear its brunt. An African Green Revolution must urgently help farmers to adapt to climate change. This will take technological, institutional and policy innovations, many of which can only come from public-private partnerships."

At the same time, Africa's smallholder farmers can and must be part of the global solution, he remarked.

"They can help mitigate climate change through sustainable farming practices that sequester carbon and conserve forests across hundreds of millions of hectares of land. Their efforts should be valued and included in the global carbon market. If we apply the power of knowledge and technology to meet the needs of smallholder farmers and the environment, we can transform African agriculture into a highly efficient, productive, competitive and sustainable system," said Ngongi.

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Speakers at this year's Crawford Fund annual event include:

- *The Hon Stephen Smith MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs opening the event;*
- *The Hon Bob McMullan MP, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance making the inaugural Sir John Crawford Memorial Address;*
- *Ms Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of the World Food Program;*
- *Dr Prabhu Pingali of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation;*
- *Dr Marco Ferroni, Executive Director, Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture;*
- *Dr Bill Niebur, DuPont Vice President, Crop Genetics R&D*
- *Ms Janice Armstrong from Monsanto Company*
- *Professor Philip Pardey, an internationally renowned Australian agricultural economist*
- *Leaders from public good international and Australian agricultural research centres*

Further press [materials](#) and [background](#) on website or by contacting Cathy Reade, 0413575934

The Crawford Fund's mission is to increase Australia's engagement in international agricultural research, development and education for the benefit of developing countries and Australia.

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