



## **KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**BY**

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**AT THE**

**FOURTH EDITION OF THE OPENAG SYMPOSIUM  
THEME: POWER PLANTS - TRANSFORMING FOOD,  
ENERGY AND WATER SECURITY THROUGH  
AGRICULTURE**

**SAÏD BUSINESS SCHOOL, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,  
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2024**

**The Organisers of the OPENAG SYMPOSIUM  
2024,**

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**GOOD AFTERNOON.**

**I. OPENING REMARKS**

**1.** It gives me great pleasure to be here today.

I am thankful for the opportunity to join business, political, and diplomatic leaders and members of academia for this year's

**OpenAg Symposium**, the fourth in the series.

2. I am particularly heartened that this important Symposium, co-hosted by the **Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development in partnership with UPL**, is held on this hallowed ground, which has contributed over 900 years of efforts in shaping men and women of means and mettle in character and learning globally.
3. This Symposium, with the theme **Power Plants: Transforming Food, Energy, and Water Security through Agriculture**, comes at a critical juncture in our development journey — a time when the world is urgently

grappling with unprecedented and pressing climate change challenges for food security, energy access, and water sustainability.

- 4. Securing food, energy, and water resources for the future** is not just a matter of survival, prosperity, stability, and sustainability.
- 5.** It is a pressing issue that demands our immediate attention, given its deep interconnections and the added layer of complexity it brings to our global challenges.

- 6.** The quest for food, water and energy security transcends traditional boundaries in a world where geopolitical tensions, environmental crises, and social inequalities intertwine.
- 7.** We are currently facing urgent and interconnected global challenges that demand our immediate and undivided attention.
- 8.** Therefore, it is imperative that we embrace innovative approaches and integrated solutions, emphasising the need for

creativity and adaptability in our problem-solving strategies.

## **II. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY IN AFRICA**

### **DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

- 9.** We are at a crossroads in addressing the significant threat climate change poses to both water and energy security, thereby affecting food systems globally.

- 10.** We must act now and decisively to make our world a better place for current and future generations.
  
- 11.** It is only through strategic thinking and forthright leadership that we can solve these interconnected challenges
  
- 12.** On the African continent, my colleagues and I are relentless in our determination to band together to mitigate the impacts of climate change by adopting practices that enhance resilience and sustainability

in securing food, water, and energy resources for the future.

**13.** Africa is the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. With so many of our people living close to the poverty line, climate change could reverse much of our hard-won progress on development.

**14.** Therefore, the move towards a greener and more sustainable development pathway can be a springboard for economic transformation.



- 15.** Most of our people live in rural areas, where income and employment depend almost entirely on rain-fed agriculture.
  
- 16.** This leaves the region highly vulnerable to changes in rainfall and temperatures and their consequences for agricultural production.
  
- 17.** Globally, particularly in developing countries, we are increasingly experiencing the devastating impacts of climate change on agricultural crop production, pastoral and livestock systems, and food

prices, with disproportionate effects on the poor.

**18.** 783 million people (**1 in 10 of the world's population**) are confronted with acute hunger, and Africa alone has 288 million hungry people.

**19.** Available data shows that the number of hungry people is rising due to multiple shocks from climate change (including cyclones, floods, and droughts), conflicts, geopolitical tensions, global food price inflation, food export restrictions, rising

poverty, and inequality. **This is a cause for grave concern.**

**20.** Hence, Africa's role in global discussions on **fostering a holistic approach to TRANSFORMING FOOD, ENERGY, AND WATER SECURITY THROUGH SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE is vital.**

**21.** Africa must not only participate in these discussions but also be a leading force, driving innovation, shaping policies, and setting the agenda for a water-, energy- and food-secure world.

### III. AFRICA'S AGRICULTURAL POTENTIAL

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

**22. Africa has the potential to lead from the front and change this narrative.**

**23.** With 65% of the world's uncultivated arable land, abundant water, diverse agroecological richness, and ample sunshine, Africa is poised to be the world's breadbasket by 2050.

- 24.** Agriculture, which provides livelihoods to over 70% of Africans, is not just important. It is a responsibility we must urgently invest in to secure our future.
- 25.** While climate change remains a major threat to the agriculture sector, it also offers opportunities.
- 26.** Data shows that through climate-smart agriculture, Africa's annual agriculture and food market could reach US\$1 trillion by 2030.

**27.** Therefore, if agriculture is well managed, it will create inclusive wealth, sustainable income, and abundant jobs for our people.

**28. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, what Africa does with agriculture will determine the future of food in the world.**

**29. Our Continent has the potential not just to feed ourselves but to feed the world.**

## **IV. SIERRA LEONE'S FEED SALONE PROGRAMME**

### **DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

**30.** In my country, Sierra Leone, my

Government recognises the importance of agriculture and food security for sustainable development and social progress.

**31.** With over 5.1 million hectares of arable land (nearly three-quarters of our nation's land), diverse agroecological richness, abundant sunshine and rainfall, Sierra Leone is naturally endowed to grow

enough food to feed its people and our neighbours.

**32.** Agriculture is the main sector of our economy, accounting for an average of 51% of the GDP and employing approximately 65% of the labour force.

**33.** While our great nation possesses high agricultural potential, agricultural yields and labour productivity remain low — partly due to our huge infrastructure bottlenecks and financing gap.



- 34.** Urgent action is needed to transition from being a net food importer to developing agro-allied industrial zones.
- 35.** This shift is crucial for our goal of achieving Middle-Income status by 2039 and ensuring food security for our people.
- 36.** To achieve this, my Government has prioritised innovative strategies and strengthened our legal and regulatory frameworks for a private sector-led approach to agricultural productivity and food security.

**37.** In our agriculture sector transformation odyssey, we launched the flagship **FEED SALONE Programme** in October 2023 as our roadmap towards achieving food security and inclusive economic growth through transforming our food systems.

**38.** The **FEED SALONE Programme** aims to enhance agricultural productivity, promote inclusive growth, increase access to locally produced food, and significantly reduce our reliance on food imports —

especially rice, which currently costs us a staggering US\$200 million annually.

**39.** Additionally, the **FEED SALONE Programme**

seeks to combat hunger and malnutrition, boost export revenues, and create jobs, particularly for our women and youth.

**40.** To accelerate our progress, my

Government has **increased the national agriculture sector budget allocation from 2% to 7%.**

**41.** My Government has **pledged to mobilise US\$1.6 billion over the next five years to deliver on the FEED SALONE Programme objectives.**

**42.** Our short to medium-term vision is to invest heavily in climate-smart agriculture mechanisation and technologies and promote private sector involvement throughout the agriculture value chains.

**43.** The private sector is a key partner in our efforts to increase access to agriculture finance.

**44.** International investments and strong alliances will be vital to implementing the **FEED SALONE Programme.**

**45.** We seek partnerships that will enhance agricultural productivity, support sustainable development, create jobs, and de-risk the agriculture sector in Sierra Leone.

**46. Under my leadership and with my Government's commitment to delivering on these promises, the moment to partner with us is now.**

## V. THE ALLIANCE OF CHAMPIONS FOR FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION (ACF)

### LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

**47.** Our efforts go beyond our borders. At **COP28** last year, Sierra Leone, Brazil, Norway, Rwanda, and Cambodia launched the **Alliance of Champions for Food Systems Transformation (ACF)** — a new strategic coalition of ambitious countries determined to act urgently together.

**48.** As a Founding Member and Co-chair of the ACF, we are committed to pioneering a ‘Whole-of-Government’ Approach to food systems transformation that reflects our ambition to alleviate hunger, promote local food production and create sustainable livelihoods.

**49.** The ACF Members recognise the urgent need and commit to delivering universal access to affordable, nutritious, and sustainable diets to accelerate significant progress this decade.

**50.** Food systems are failing us at both national and planetary levels. Rather than nourishing us with nutritious food, a third of the global population cannot afford a healthy diet, while one in ten are obese.

**51.** Food production is now a primary source of environmental destruction, causing 90% of deforestation, 60% of biodiversity loss, and 30% of Greenhouse Gases while using 70% of our freshwater supply.



**52.** Thus, when food systems appeared centre stage for the first time at **COP** last year, it was a sign that the World has finally woken up to their centrality — not just to climate breakdown but also to many of the other global crises we currently face.

**53.** At **COP28**, over 150 Governments, including Sierra Leone, committed to integrating food systems and agriculture into their **National Climate Plans** by signing the **UAE's Declaration on 'Sustainable**

## **Agriculture, Resilient Food Systems, and Climate Action’.**

**54.** Member Countries pledge to update their **National Climate Plans** to enhance their approach to food systems transformation, focusing on ten **Alliance of Champions for Food Systems Transformation** priority intervention areas.

**55.** By working together to foster collaboration and share knowledge and lessons through a ‘Whole-of-Government’ Approach, we

will make the transition to sustainable food systems faster and easier for everyone.

- 56.** We hope others will join us and build upon the commitments made under the **UAE's Food Declaration**, which prioritises resilient food systems and climate action.

## **VI. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ON FOOD SYSTEMS**

### **LADIES AND GENTLEMEN**

**57.** It's safe to say that we are all feeling the increasing negative effects of climate change.

**58.** From the surge in storm frequency and intensity to the unprecedented heat waves in our countries, we are witnessing the severe consequences of human-induced global warming.

- 59.** Small island nations and economically disadvantaged countries are disproportionately bearing the brunt of climate change and food insecurity.
- 60.** This calls for our collective action and support, underlining the importance of each of our roles in this global challenge.
- 61.** Yet, these challenges also present unique opportunities. Our responsibility lies in leveraging these opportunities to ensure an effective transition to sustainability and to secure a better future for our people.

- 62.** This transition hinges on investment in climate-resilient infrastructure, technology, and capacity building for local communities.
- 63.** Governments must implement supportive policies that promote sustainable agriculture, protect natural resources, and incentivise green practices.
- 64.** Strong global collaboration is also essential, with the private sector and partnerships driving large-scale change.

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

**65.** As one of the most climate-vulnerable nations, Sierra Leone urgently needs a more robust system for adapting and responding to the adverse effects of climate change.

**66.** My Government supports convergent efforts across various sectors, including agriculture, energy, environment, nature, and resilient livelihoods.

- 67.** We focus on developing food systems in specific locations and prioritising value chains.
- 68.** Fostering linkages across various sectors and ensuring active operational coordination in these areas are essential for our success.
- 69.** Doing so creates a cohesive and integrated approach to transforming our food systems, ensuring sustainable development and resilience against future challenges.



## VII. CONCLUSION

### **DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

**70.** Sustainable agriculture is not just an environmental or economic issue but a fundamental pillar of global security.

**71.** My Government's investment in this all-important sector concerns our national security and prosperity.

**72.** Therefore, we are embracing sustainable practices to enhance food security, mitigate climate change, preserve natural resources, and foster economic stability.

**73.** Our overarching vision is to take advantage of our soil wealth, grow agriculture as a business in climate-smart ways, and leverage it as a fundamental source of national security and prosperity.

**74.** My Government is committed to leading with vision and commitment, ensuring that agriculture becomes a force for positive change and a cornerstone of a secure and sustainable future for all.

**75.** I thank the **Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development at Oxford University, UPL, and all other partners and investors for this opportunity and for their commitment to contributing to this ongoing conversation about how**

agricultural practices affect national security.

**76.** I invite strategic partners to Sierra Leone as your next destination for investment, research, and collaboration in the agriculture sector.

**77.** I leave you with these words by **the late renowned environmentalist and Noble Peace Prize Winner Wangara Mathai**

**(I QUOTE)**

***“In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a***

*new level of consciousness. To reach a higher moral ground. A time when we have to shed our fear and give hope to each other. That time is now.” (END QUOTE)*

## **LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

**78.** It is now time to move this conversation away from the four walls of Oxford University into the real world.

**79.** We must walk the talk and put into action everything we are discussing here today.

**80. Thank you all for listening and do enjoy the rest of the Symposium.**