

Remarks by President Akinwumi Adesina of the African Development Bank Group, at the Special Session on "Achieving nutrition security" at the Annual Meeting of the African Development Bank, Lusaka, Zambia (23 May 2016).

1. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Welcome to this special session on "Achieving Nutrition Security".
2. In Africa, we respect the elders. One of the wise sayings in the Yoruba language in Nigeria goes this way "elders cannot be in the market place and watch while the neck of the baby droops while strapped to the mother's back".
3. Today, we have two big elders with us. Let me especially welcome former President John Kufour of Ghana, Chairman of the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition, and Mr. Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations and Chairman of the Africa Progress Panel.
4. Both of them have been inspirational leaders in calling for nutritional security. And we all know that as Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Annan led the world to develop the Millennium Development Goals. He won a Nobel Prize. And President Kufour - who I call the gentle giant - who clearly from his height and size never had any problems with stunting or malnutrition - won the World Food Prize. Thank you both for your leadership. Thank you for watching out for the babies, for watching out for their nutrition.
5. I also wish to also especially welcome Bill Gates, who will be speaking to us shortly via a video address. Bill's passion and commitment, and that of his wife, Melinda, to addressing the problem of malnutrition gives us great inspiration. Jamie Cooper, Aliko Dangote are major philanthropists that have committed to this same cause and they are here with us today. The presence of Dr. Mayaki, my dear brother and CEO of the NEPAD Agency, sends a strong political support by the African Union and NEPAD for tackling malnutrition.

6. I am delighted that several Ministers of Finance are here today. This is a positive development, for we will be speaking about what malnutrition does to economic growth and performance.
7. In a few months, leaders of governments, development organizations and businesses will come together at the Second Nutrition for Growth Summit in Rio to pledge and commit investments that will tackle the socio-economic scourges of malnutrition over the next ten years.
8. Yet, the situation with malnutrition in Africa is appalling.
9. Africa accounts for 20 of the 24 countries with stunting rates of over 40%. Furthermore, 22 of the 34 countries that collectively account for 90% of the world's stunting are in Africa. About 58 million children in Africa under the age of 5 years are too short for their age (stunted); about 14 million weigh too little for their height (wasted) and 10 million are overweight.
10. The African Union, through the Cost of Hunger in Africa study, conducted across 9 countries (Egypt, Ethiopia, Swaziland, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Chad, Malawi and Rwanda) found that 37-60% of the working age populations in these countries were stunted as children. This has serious economic consequences in terms of low labor productivity and low economic earning potential: posing huge losses to the economies. Malnourished kids perform worse in school due to reduction in cognitive capacity.
11. Underweight kids below the age of 5 are more susceptible to diseases and face higher risk of dying before the age of 5. The Cost of Hunger study showed that Burkina Faso loses 7.7% of its GDP (\$802 million) from malnutrition. Malawi loses 10.3 % of GDP (\$597 million), Rwanda loses 11.5% of GDP (\$820 million) and Ghana loses 6.3% of GDP (\$2.5 billion).
12. UNICEF has estimated the annual cost of under nutrition in sub-Saharan Africa at \$25 billion. Africa and Asia lose 11% of their GDP every year due to poor nutrition. The evidence is clear: ***boosting nutrition boosts the economy.***
13. These are very disturbing numbers. And they are numbers we must change.

14. We must now change how we look at the problem of malnutrition. The greatest contributor to economic growth is not physical infrastructure, but brainpower: what I refer to as "**grey matter infrastructure**". While it is obvious that a road or port can add to improved trade and economic growth, it is often not recognized that stunting shrinks the size of the brain and therefore compromises current and future economic growth of nations.
15. ***Stunted children today leads to stunted economies tomorrow.*** It is that simple.
16. Therefore, we must redefine the debate around nutrition from one seen as a social development issue to one that shapes the path of economic growth and development. We must now invest in developing the **grey matter infrastructure** of Africa, by investing in better nutrition for its children, who are the future of the continent.
17. Access to food, in the right quantity and quality, is a basic human right. There is absolutely no justification that Africa, which has over 65% of all the arable land left in the world, is unable to feed itself, spending \$35 billion per year on food imports – an amount projected to rise to \$110 billion by 2030 if the current trends continue. Africa can feed itself – and Africa must feed itself. That is why at the African Development Bank, we have set “Feeding Africa” as one of our High 5 priorities. Working with governments and partners, our goal is to help Africa to achieve food self-sufficiency within 10 years.
18. No child should ever go hungry – and no child should ever lose future economic opportunities or die early because of lack of nutritious food. We must do all possible for the children, from conception to their second birthday – the first 1,000 days – **and beyond!** And we must support better nutrition for their mothers, for a healthy mother, who is economically empowered, will nourish her children.
19. **We must hear their voices!** I am reminded of what Bill Gates said on August 1, 2014 on the “*importance of giving all children the nutrition they need for a healthy start in life. Their future depends on it. So does Africa’s*”.

20. It is time for Malnutrition Accountability in Africa. The African Development Bank therefore calls for an "African Malnutrition Accountability Index". As leaders, we must be accountable. And as leaders we must not watch as the babies' head droop from their mothers' back, due to malnutrition. We must act
21. That is why today, the African Development Bank in partnership with the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition, African Union/NEPAD, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Big Win Philanthropy, Dangote Foundation, World Bank and the World Food Program, call for the establishment of a high-level body: *African Leaders for Nutrition. The African Leaders for Nutrition* - which will include Heads of States and Private Sector Leaders - will champion accountability and elimination of malnutrition in all its forms across the continent.
22. Note that I did not say reduce: I said eliminate malnutrition.
23. This is what brings us all here today. The African Leaders for Nutrition Forum will set out a call to action for governments, philanthropic organizations, and Africa's key public and private sector leaders to find innovative and effective financing approaches and schemes to end malnutrition.
24. Let us, together, end the scourge of malnutrition. It is well within our reach to do so, and the evidence is overwhelming that we must act – and act now.

Thank you very much.