REMARKS OF THE PRIME MINISTER, HEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT

HIS EXCELLENCY MATATA PONYO Mapon

High-level Conference on the Transformation of African Agriculture

Dakar, 21 October 2015
Excellency Mister President of the Republic,

Mister President of the African Development Bank Group,

Ladies and Gentlemen Members of the Government,

Representatives of the African and International Organizations

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

First and foremost please allow me to extend my gratitude to His Excellency Macky Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal, for his warm welcome to me and to my entire delegation.

My gratitude also goes to the President of the African Development Bank Group, Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, for having invited me to attend this high-level Conference.

Dear participants,

This conference is being held at a historical moment for the African Development Bank and the development goals For the Bank, because it is experiencing a transition period between two terms of office; the one of Mister Donald Kaberuka, the outgoing President, and the one of Dr Akinwumi Adesina, the new President.
As far as development is concerned, we are doing the assessment of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) and define a new type of goals referred to as Sustainable Development Goals.

Of course much has been achieved but we still have a long way to go. The overall result was that if we are to make the best performances regarding the new Development Goals, it is mandatory for us to radically change our development approach, in particular in the agricultural sector.

It is actually time for us to leave mere declaration phase to take concrete and ambitious actions. En effet, il est temps que nous puissions quitter le monde de simples déclarations pour passer aux actions concrètes et ambitieuses.

If we agree on the fact that in Africa at least 60 percent of the poor people live in the rural areas, it becomes therefore normal that to fight poverty, unemployment and food insecurity, the growth in the agricultural sector is more effective than growth in other sectors.

In fact, agricultural growth enables poverty reduction directly by improving the farmer's income and indirectly, through the decrease of food stuffs prices. as well as by creating jobs on all phases of the value chain.
Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very happy because both my professional background and my political position have given me opportunity to better understand the problem of development in Africa, and moreover that of the agricultural sector as a powerful drive in the fight against poverty and food insecurity.

This same background has enabled me to make my opinion on what the African Development Bank support to the agricultural sector should be like.

In fact, in my capacity of Economist at the DRC Central Bank, as Managing Director of the biggest agency in charge of implementing the World Bank and African Development Bank-funded projects, as Finance Minister and presently as Prime Minister, I feel obligated to share my personal point of view for what needs to be addressed and in a sustainable way, talking about the agricultural sector.

From the onset, I believe that a radical change of policies and approaches is needed to put effectively back agriculture on top of the national development priority agenda. We also need to rethink the African Development Bank’s strategies if we are willing to undertake a new step towards enabling Africa to feed itself and to play its role in the international economy as a partner.
Excellency Mister President of the Republic,

Mister President of the African Development Bank,

Distinguished guests,

I would want to call for a new agricultural revolution in Africa around which we have to unite - African countries and the African Development Bank - in order to open our people to new horizons. This new development agenda of agriculture must set ambitious goals in terms of performance and productivity. But in order to launch such a voluntary initiative, we have to change our mindset when it comes to supporting the agricultural sector, to change management methods at the domestic level and at the African Development Bank level. It would therefore be unthinkable and counterproductive to scatter energies, thinking to develop agriculture in Africa, by continuing to distribute hoes, machetes, axes to farmers and to provide them with ordinary and low yield seeds.

We all know how such season-based programs have failed to bring tangible results, but has helped to dilapidate time and precious resources which the continent badly needs.
I wish this agricultural revolution to be structured around three axes:

**Firstly**, the rehabilitation of feed roads. To this effect we can resort to an intense workload method that has been proven effective in Africa; especially in a context where the youth make the major part of the labor force. This approach answers to the need for the public powers and the African Development Bank to generate positive externalities to incite households and economic actors to do business, in addition to institutional factors.

**Secondly**, the creation of agricultural cooperatives? Funding small-scale relevant and modern agricultural units does definitely build up food self-sufficiency in our respective countries.

**And thirdly**, the creation of agribusiness parks which will enable a large scale production for both domestic markets and for exportation. This alternative has an advantage in that it adds value chain to African products. There would be no need to complain that African goods are exported as raw materials; if we do not take corrective actions to reverse the trend. How come we can continue to produce cocoa and import chocolate?
Excellency Mister President of the Republic,

Mister President of the African Development Bank,

Distinguished guests,

The real issue that we should address with political boldness is to know how Africa that has much arable land and abundant rainfall as well as a considerable labor force should continue to face food problems, when countries without all these assets have been able to ensure food self-sufficiency to the point of exporting the surplus towards Africa? Please believe me, this apparent paradox can be explained and even corrected.

Without hesitation; I can state that the difference lies in the commitment, the action, the method and innovation. This is the reason why I beseech you to get out of the habitual practices and to go against set policies and strategies. This is the approach the Western adopted for their agricultural revolution in the nineteenth century.

Hence;

- Time is not for theories now, but for concrete actions grounded on a better understanding of the problems.

- This is not time for long procedures which end up giving priority to bureaucracy rather than to the results on the ground.
I think that time is no more for repetitive fora which develop obviously coherent and logical theories but quench courageous yet indispensable ambitions for a quantitative and qualitative performance.

As for me; I would wish that this forum triggers a new start where the AfDB and African countries will seal up a new partnership aiming at promoting the new agriculture revolution likely to enable Africa to be put in the heart of the legitimate ambition to feed and to fit into international trade. This commitment will not be translated into reality unless the AfDB stops to operate according to the present methods, especially in the agricultural sector.

This is the reason why I think that in a new scope of responsible partnership and joint commitment, countries, the African Development Bank and development partners should tackle a new paradigm of revitalizing the agricultural sector in Africa.

As far as the countries are concerned, they have to:

a) put agriculture as a top priority around which public powers must build the development strategy focused on poverty reduction through a more inclusive approach;
b) allocate enough internal resources to the agricultural sector, knowing that the socio-economic dividend of such investments justifies this choice; c)
design incentivizing measures both physical and institutional, in order to encourage small-scale investments in the agriculture sector.

Concerning the African Development Bank, it is worth acknowledging its present procedures, though working towards maximum transparency, and countries commend this fact, seem not to be effective enough to address agricultural development in Africa. Hence, these procedures need to be profoundly revisited. Inasmuch as agriculture is season-dependent, we must not continue to resort to long procedures which take us long project identification, approval and implementation period.

The AfDB should relate effectiveness to expedite treatment? The reason is that even windows referred to as rapid response ones end up being swallowed by the slow bureaucracy.

*Mister President of the Bank,*

I am happy that from its member states will, the Bank has been put under your leadership for you are but a champion of the agricultural sector where you have excelled through a strong will and true political commitment aiming at implementing innovative solutions. And this has brought in success in your country. I strongly wish that Africa benefits from this insightful experience?
Today; it would not be politically fair that the identified projects at your taking of office will be implemented at the end of your first term of office only because of long procedures. How many poor people will we cause within the next five years?

In order to avoid such a scenario, the Bank must free itself from administrative and procedure circle and move towards more proactive, voluntary and accelerated approaches, obviously preserving good resource management.

Out of the experience grasped from agriculture projects funded by the African Development Bank placed under the fiduciary management of BCECO, the agency I was managing, I can state that the results did not meet the expectations. And the reason is but the long procedures and administrative heaviness.

For your information, President Donald Kaberuka (whose excellent work during his two terms of office I commend), at the beginning of his term of office, was aware of this heaviness and invited me in person to Tunis in order to address thoroughly the issue with him. Practical suggestions were formulated to the Bank in order to take corrective measures. Much has been achieved so far; but there is a long way to go.
Concerning the other development partners, they can join their efforts with the African Development Bank: a) for a new approach of agriculture in Africa. This clearly means putting in place innovative, rapid and flexible funding mechanisms to meet specific issues of agriculture; b) simplifying procedures as well in order to match the actions to be taken by countries with African Development Bank.

Besides, given that massive investments are needed in the agricultural sector, the idea of subsidies must be considered, provided that it is fine-tuned and limited in time and space. It would be a mistake for African countries to prevent themselves the use of this tool which is used by almost all the economic powers of the world. Today again, agriculture is subsidized in several developed countries.

To sum up, this is why I call for a profound reform of national agricultural policies, of services and procedures of our Bank in this sector in order to guarantee maximum effectiveness and to spearhead the new departure which we are all calling for in this sector. Similarly, the traditional donor community has to also commit into new funding instruments in favor of agriculture.

If not, we will definitely meet once more in few year for another forum, with the same observations, without having resolved these problems which we are used to talking about.
Excellency Mister President of the Republic,

Mister President of the African Development Bank,

Distinguished guests,

In order to relate the speech to the action, let me make an overview of efforts made in the agricultural sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo, referring to the new agricultural revolution.

Under the leadership His Excellency President of the Republic, Joseph Kabila Kabange, the DRC has launched an ambition program of putting in place agribusiness parks, the first of which is already operational on a surface of about 80,000 hectares.

With the funding amounting to 150 million USD, basically on The Treasury equity coupled with the technical support of South African partners, the Bukanga Lonzo agribusiness park is an innovative response to various concerns of ensuring food self-sufficiency, agricultural exportation and the launching of industrialization of this sector which is a high labor force consumption, a growth and a diversified national economy factor.
Conscious of power deficit which is another true obstacle to liberalizing latent energies of our countries economies, the Government has invested 30 million USD to equip the Bukanga Lonzo agribusiness park with electric power. This aims at improving the performance and productivity of this important site.

Today, the park is providing the local market with cereals, vegetables at an affordable cost, improving at the same time the food to people and reducing poverty.

In the same vein, the Government has launched a huge rehabilitation program of all agricultural and national roads for about 123 million USD also basically disbursed by the Public Treasury.

It would not be useless to highlight the fact that all these achievements have been made in three years.

In my humble opinion, this model should inspire the Bank's policies and strategies in the framework of the new agricultural revolution.

In fact, if the Government had to follow the Bank's procedures in order to put in place this park which is already operating, we would still be dealing with feasibility studies.
Let us not assume that time belongs to us. Instead, it is our worst enemy. Our population is expecting concrete results to their problems and not speeches, nor procedures.

Famine and malnutrition make a serious and shameful disease that eats Africa preventing it means to take actions. To this end, the continent deserves being taken care by his sons.

Instead of taking it to the hospital reception, Africa must be taken directly to the emergencies for immediate treatment, thanks to chock therapy for rapid and appropriate procedure. This is what Africa requires and this is the only way through which we will heal this disease.

**Excellency Mister President of the Republic,**

**Mister President of the African Development Bank,**

**Distinguished guests,**

I would not end my speech without reiterating the strong political commitment of my Government to work with the African Development Bank in order to identify innovative ways to make the new agricultural revolution a reality.

As I underscored it, Africa has all the assets to leave the habitual begging position, and to become a true partner to the international trade.

It only takes us to engage in a new way which has nothing to do with the past.
For this reason, we need to put a true demarcation line, a genuine political will and a real commitment to proceed. We need to take this action now. As for me, I strongly believe that we are up to the task, especially with the support of the new President of the Bank, my dear Adesina, who has revolutionized the agricultural sector in Nigeria. Let us therefore start this turning point which our people badly need.

Thank you for attention.