Remarks Delivered by
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Good morning. Let me welcome you all to this session, organized by the African Development Bank.

Once again, we are grateful that you all made it here.

So let us talk about the challenge ahead of us: how to unlock the potential of Africa to feed itself and to help feed the world.

The challenge of addressing global food security is greatest in Africa where close to 300 million are malnourished. It is also the only region of the world where the proportion of the population that is food insecure has increased.

Yet, Africa holds the key for feeding the 9 billion people that will be on the planet earth by 2050. This is because Africa sits on 65% of the uncultivated arable land left in the world. What Africa does with agriculture will undoubtedly determine the future of food in the world!

Therefore, more than ever before, we must help Africa to rapidly modernize its agriculture and unlock its full potential.

The current situation where Africa spends $35 billion annually on food imports is not acceptable. If the current trend continues, Africa is estimated to spend $110 billion by 2025 on food imports. Ultimately, rising food imports hurt farmers in Africa.
Cheap food imports decimate rural economies, displace farmer incomes, and divert scarce foreign exchange. Instead, they replace what Africa should be producing very well, and make it impossible to create millions of jobs for young people that Agriculture indeed can provide.

There is therefore absolutely no reason for Africa to be a food-importing region. Africa has huge potentials in agriculture, but as Dr. Borlaug used to say … “nobody eats potential”!

Unlocking that potential must start with the savannas of Africa. The savannas of Africa cover a mind-boggling 600 million hectares, of which 400 million hectares are cultivable. But just 10% of this is cultivated, a mere 40 million hectares. So massive is the potential that the World Bank called the guinea savanna zone “one of the major underutilized resources in Africa”.

Africa's savannas are not that different from those of Brazil. Indeed, they are better than the savannas of Brazil, because their soils are not acidic and therefore do not need liming which had to be done at massive scales in Brazil.

Yet, while the savannas of Brazil feed the world, those of Africa cannot even feed the farmers there. Technologies, innovations, research and development, mechanization, modernization of agriculture, policy support and massive investments in infrastructure are what made the difference and turned the savannas of Brazil and those of Northern Thailand into food powerhouses.

To transform its agriculture, Africa needs to make a decisive decision to develop new agrarian systems, one that combines smallholder farmers with a new dynamic generation of medium and large commercial farmers.

Large commercial farmers played a huge role in Brazil, while in northern Thailand it was built around small farmers. One common thread in both
agricultural revolutions, was the rapid growth of the private sector and public policies that allowed these regions to interphase with external markets. Today, Brazil dominates global soybean production. Thailand dominates global rice and cassava markets.

The African Development Bank’s Feed Africa strategy has launched the Transformation of the African Savannah Initiatives (TASI) to help unlock the potential of the savannas of Africa.

The initiative will start by bringing approximately 2 million hectares of savannah in eight African countries - Ghana, Guinea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, and Mozambique - under the cultivation of maize, soybean, and livestock production in optimum conditions.

Africa must learn from the experiences that have worked elsewhere, while tailoring the interventions to the specific realities of Africa. We must ensure that small, medium scale and large-scale commercial farmers co-exist in a way that allows opportunities for all.

Partnerships in research and development will be crucial. That is why the African Development Bank has engaged to work with the strongest possible organizations with proven track records in tropical agriculture from South America. This includes the Brazilian Research Corporation (EMBRAPA), the Agricultural Corporation of Brazil (CAMPO), as well as others with long experience in conservation agriculture, including the Argentine Association of Zero-tillage, and the Argentine Agricultural Research Institute.

They will work very closely with universities and the national agricultural research systems across the savannas of Africa.

The Bank will also provide support to strengthen African agricultural research and development systems to play significant roles in the transformation processes, and ensure that valuable research no longer
simply gathers dust on the shelves of academia. Instead, valuable research must meet the needs of farmers and agri-businesses in ways that exponentially increase productivity and improve the quality of lives of our rural poor.

In doing so, the private sector must also play an important role to help develop viable agricultural value chains that create market and income opportunities for farmers across the savannas.

There is a critical need for supportive public policies and significant investments in infrastructure, especially for roads, irrigation, storage, warehousing and agro-processing.

The African Development Bank is investing $24 billion in agriculture over the next ten years to help unlock the potential of agriculture and assure food security for the continent.

Success in this endeavor requires that we wake up the savannas of Africa. When we do so, African agriculture will indeed rise up from its slumber!

So, let’s wake up Africa’s savannas and turn them into the new wealth zones of Africa - and unleash Africa as a global powerhouse in food.

Together, let’s arise and feed Africa!

Thank you all very much