

KEYNOTE SPEECH
DELIVERED BY DR. AGNES KALIBATA, PRESIDENT OF THE ALLIANCE FOR A GREEN
REVOLUTION IN AFRICA (AGRA)
AT THE LAUNCH OF TIKKUN OLAM VENTURES (TOV)

JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

30 JULY 2018

Introduction

Minister Eli Cohen, Minister of Economy and Industry;

Seth Merrin, TOV's lead donor;

H.E Tsegay Berhe, The Ambassador of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to Israel;

Arieh Doobov, Director, Tikkun Olam Ventures;

JDC (Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) leadership;

Members of AGRA Delegation

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

My team and I are delighted to be at this important event to launch Tikkun Olam Ventures (TVO) which is graciously hosted by your Ministry, Honourable Minister, we salute you.

I also want to thank you, Professor Eugene Kandel, Chief Executive Officer of the Start-Up Nation Central and your able team for your warm welcome and hospitality. You have all made us feel so at home in your beautiful country. The programme we are participating in is both rewarding and exciting.

Congratulations to you Arie Doobov, Director, Tikkun Olam Ventures (TOV) and to you Mr. Seth Merrin, TOV's lead donor and, indeed, the entire leadership, management and staff of TOV on this momentous occasion. Thank you for your collaboration with Africa, beginning with Ethiopia, one of Africa's leading transformative countries here ably represented by H.E. Tsegay Berhe, the Ambassador of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to Israel. Your Excellency Ambassador, congratulations too.

I also wish to salute the leadership of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee for so ably steering TOV.

My trip here to Israel is unlike so many I have made to different parts of the world before. Israel is inspiringly different. It has achieved a very rare feat in taming one of the world's harshest environments to produce enough food. Food not just for its people, but also for export. I am told that it is in the desert that you produce 80% of your milk, and under the scorching sun that you produce 80% of the food you export.

Minister Cohen, it is admirable the way your country has harnessed technology to grow food and the economy. This achievement is a shining beacon of hope for my continent, Africa. It is a living example of what can be achieved when nations are dedicated to transformation.

With agro-ecological conditions that are mostly less hostile than Israel's, Africa can achieve much more through prudent deployment of the right technologies and models. I am excited at the possibility of partnering with you, and with the Israeli private sector, to bring these technologies to Africa.

This morning, I witnessed the ingenuity of the Israeli start-ups first hand. I spent time with a series of inspirational and transformative initiatives. Some of them are already operating in Africa, but more importantly, all of them have the capability of making a difference on our continent.

Shining Examples

N-Frnds, for example, is one of such start-ups. It provides software solutions to transform smallholder farming by providing access to finance, agricultural information, and interactive communications through the farmers' existing mobile phones.

It is already operating in sub-Saharan Africa. In my home country Rwanda, they have digitized the milk value chain, giving the Ministry of Agriculture access to key data on milk collection throughout the country. They are working with the Ministry and other key partners in both the private and public sectors to collect information that builds a farmer's credit history. This is enabling farmers to access much-needed finance.

They also facilitate sharing of information on the weather and give farmers advice on inputs and tips on post-harvest management of crops. This is all through the farmer's existing mobile phone.

As *N-Frnds* have shown, it is often not about invention, but using the tools already available in the most productive way possible.

Another example I've seen of Israel's amazing innovation is with *Amaizz*. This is an agritech company that is developing drying, storage and refrigeration technologies to eliminate losses in grains, cereals and horticulture.

They are confident that by using their system, it is possible to reduce postharvest losses in developing countries by up to 50%. This has the potential to make a huge impact on African small-holder agriculture, where farmers lose close 40% of their grains and up to 80% of fruit and vegetables.

But innovation is not just limited to crop-growing. I also met *Farmster*, a digital marketplace for agriculture in emerging markets. It is a product designed for the 80% of farmers who have no access to the internet. It offers them a platform to post their produce using an SMS chatbot prior to harvest. This way, buyers can search for produce in the marketplace app or on the website.

I had a very good time discussing possible collaboration with these start-ups. As I told them, my organization, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), is ready to work with them and others to take their technology to scale in Africa.

Partnerships will be Key

Our experience over the last 12 years as an alliance of partners for agricultural transformation in Africa tells us that no meaningful change can be achieved without collaboration. A key component of our work is in building and maintaining strong partnerships to achieve an agricultural transformation, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It is interesting to see how partnerships between the Israeli government and the private enterprise is integral to the successes we are witnessing here. I am told that businesses provide space for researchers with good ideas, while the government supports 85% of the required funding.

This is incredible. Your country has, as a result, the highest number of successful start-ups of any country per capita worldwide.

This unique structural support for innovation has yielded tremendous results. I am reminded of the description of this success by *The Economist* back in 2010. The magazine stated that within a few decades, Israel had "transformed itself from a semi-socialist backwater into a high-tech superpower". I could not find a more apt way to describe what I am witnessing during my visit here.

The launch of Tikkun Olam Ventures (TOV) today, is a shining example of the power that can be unleashed when a number of collaborative organizations come together with a shared vision and determined minds.

I am happy to learn that TOV is a hybrid international development programme providing access to Israeli Ag-Tech to smallholder farmers in developing countries. As you may be aware, AGRA, a farmer-centred organization, works with smallholder farmers to turn their subsistence agriculture into profitable and sustainable businesses. I am glad to note that among your strategic and implementation partners in Ethiopia are a private Ethiopian bank, the Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) and TechnoServe. We seem to have a lot in common. Ethiopia is one of our 11 priority African countries. ATA and TechnoServe are among our partners.

There are also personal ties that bring us together. Mr. Seth Merrin is a close personal friend of Mr. Strive Masiyiwa, Chair of the AGRA Board. Mr. Merrin, Mr. Masiyiwa asked me to pass on his regards to you.

I believe these relationships are not mere coincidences. They are foundations that we can capitalize upon to build synergies to advance agricultural transformation in Africa.

This kind of cooperation is exactly what my organization, AGRA, is all about. We work with our partners in governments, the private sector and in the development world to identify opportunities for doing business and then do whatever it takes to enable the process.

We work to catalyse transformation. We bring technology out of the laboratory and into the field.

Our Value Proposition

In the last 12 years, we have led efforts to develop and deliver better seeds, increase farm yields, improve soil fertility, upgrade storage facilities, improve market information systems, expand access to credit for farmers and small suppliers, and advocate for national policies that benefit smallholder farmers.

And now, we have set ourselves an incredibly ambitious target of improving the incomes and food security of 30 million smallholder households by 2021. We are working to change the lives of 150 million individuals.

We are aware that none of this is possible through a single agency. As always, collaboration is the key to success. AGRA's aim is to be the enabler that stirs the pot. We are working with governments, the private sector and foundations as well as NGOs and other financial and technical partners to strengthen systems that will deliver these targets, and more, on a sustainable basis.

It's important that governments have ownership, that the private sector is nurtured, that the NGOs all have an exit plan and, ultimately, that all of these projects become self-sustaining.

Making this possible requires appropriate funding. Because no one entity has all the answers, or all the resources, we advocate blended finance.

Blended finance allows us the strategic use of development finance and philanthropic funds to mobilize private capital flows to emerging and often risky frontier markets. It also mobilizes public funds to create an enabling business environment. Ultimately, this blend of resources creates positive outcomes for investors and communities.

Business Opportunities in Africa's Agriculture

As I conclude, I would like to paint a picture of the African agricultural landscape for you. Farming, including by smallholders, is fast becoming a business. It will only get better.

The power of entrepreneurs and the free market is driving Africa's economic growth from food production. Businesses are waking up to the opportunities a rapidly growing food market in Africa can provide.

This market is currently valued at US\$ 300 billion and is projected to grow to more than \$1 trillion by 2030. This means that imports will be substituted with high value food, made in Africa.

Agriculture is fueling a quiet revolution, with SMEs and smallholder farmers creating high productivity jobs and sustainable economic growth. AGRA is committed to the inclusion of young people. In the words of our Chairman, Strive Masiyiwa, if agriculture is to attract the next generation, it must be “profitable, competitive and dynamic.” As Israel has demonstrated, agri-tech offers this and more. Our young people, driven by their unbounded innovation and creativity, will steer this tech-powered revolution.

AGRF 2018

As an act of reciprocating your warmth and hospitality hosting us here this week, I am extending an invitation to as many of you as can make it to this year’s edition of the African Green Revolution Forum (AGRF).

With the theme of *“Lead. Measure. Grow: Enabling new pathways to turn smallholders into sustainable agribusinesses”*, the 2018 AGRF will be hosted in Kigali Rwanda, from 5-8 September 2018, under the leadership of H.E. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda and Chair of the African Union in 2018.

The AGRF is considered the world’s most important and impactful forum for African agriculture, pulling together stakeholders in the agricultural landscape to take practical actions and share lessons that will move African agriculture forward.

It is a unique multi-disciplinary forum where delegates discuss and commit to programmes, investments, and policies that can counter the major challenges affecting the agriculture sector on the continent.

This year's Forum will be attended by more than 2000 delegates and high-level dignitaries, including current and former Heads of State and Government; Agriculture and Finance Ministers; Central Bank Governors; eminent leaders of global and regional development institutions; top industry captains from the national, regional, and global private sectors; and lead representatives of farmer organizations and key non-governmental implementing partners.

We would be delighted to see Israeli public and private sector leaders at the Forum.

Thank you.