

PLENARY SESSION June 2nd 2004

IFAP's 36th WFC Washington DC. Omni Shoreham Hotel

Speech by: Dr. Olanrewaju B. Smith
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Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I bring you greetings from the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR), a stakeholder led organization (initiative) whose vision is that by collaborating as equal partners, the scientific community and other stakeholders (Farmers, NGOs, private sector) will in the near future, develop a multi-purpose agriculture that effectively contributes to poverty alleviation, food security, and sustainable natural resources utilization.

Farmers and their organizations are an important if not central constituency of the various stakeholders that formulated this shared vision.

Paradoxically, FOs are at one and the same time, the strongest and the weakest link in that GFAR chain of stakeholders. Strongest because of the central role they Play in the Agricultural sector.

Weakest because they are the least well organized functionally and structurally. Their voices are therefore not often clearly heard, their concerns not adequately addressed, and they remain for the most part marginalized.

Because a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, GFAR has resolved to strengthen that link in our chain.

Mr. Chairman, representatives of GFAR stakeholders are participating actively in the 36th Congress to provide support for one of their own-the farmers constituency.

Over the last several days and specifically during the regional sessions we shared with you strategies and proposals on how to strengthen linkages between farmers and their organizations on the one hand and researchers and their institutions on the other hand given our vision that the complex challenges and dynamic changes thrust upon the agricultural sector and farmers can only be effectively addressed if all stakeholders involved in ARD work together as equal partners. We shall incorporate all the innovative suggestions harvested during these sessions into initiatives and projects that will soon be carried out to achieve the objective of strengthening functional linkages between farmers' organizations and research institutions.

These activities will include strong capacity building of FOs component and will be driven by the FOs themselves starting with an institutional self diagnosis to identify strengths, weaknesses and needs, so that actions could be taken to build on these strengths to correct weaknesses and address the needs.

The GFAR and the IFAP secretariats will continue on-going discussion on how to facilitate the implementation of number of activities including the following:

- Strengthening the Science and Technology Committee of IFAP, so that it could contribute to the global science and technology debate;
- The effective participation of FOs in the CGIAR Challenge Programmes.

With regards to the latter, we have already had some successes, as we lobbied for and obtained the setting up of a GFAR Stakeholder Committee which will have some impact on the policy direction of the CP. The committee is made up of 14 substantive members three of whom are FOs representatives.

In conclusion Mr. chairman, I believe that the theme of this congress: Farmers speaking for themselves could not have been more appropriate. Over the last several days, I have heard some excellent eye opening diagnosis of the underlying causes of many of the problems facing the agricultural sector today, both in developed and developing countries, as well as the role farmers could play in finding solutions to many of those problems, if only they were given the space, opportunities and enabling environment to contribute their quota. The task now is for the farmers and their organizations to continue doggedly and relentlessly to lobby, and advocate that those solutions be implemented at the appropriate levels – local, national, regional or global. By continuing to speak for yourselves clearly and repeatedly others will rally around to support you to make sure that those voices are heard and responded to.

Thank you.