

**Speech by Président SOGLO at the official ceremony to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the late Norman BORLAUG, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate**

**Uganda Symposium 07-12 July 2014**

Your Excellency Mr Edward Sskandi Vice-President of the Republic of Uganda

Honorable Professor Ruth Oniang'o, symposium chairperson, Sasakawa Africa Association and Sasakawa Africa Fund for Extension,

Honorable Yohei Sasakawa, President of the Nippon foundation,

Distinguished Madame Jeanie Laube, daughter of the illustrious Norman Borlaug,

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, members of the government of the Republic of Uganda.

Your Excellency Madam Tumusiime Rhoda Peace, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, African Union.

Dr Amit H Roy, President and chief executive officer, IFDC

Your Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the Board of Sasakawa,

Distinguished researchers and spécialistes in rural development in Africa

Ladies and Gentlemen, farmers and other members of rural society

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Guests

First of all, it is a great pleasure for me to express my thanks and my respect to the President of the Republic of Uganda, His Excellency Yoweri Museveni – with whom I share many memories of working together and I am pleased to regard as an old friend.

Everyone is well aware of the importance of the events that bring us together this week in Uganda. Just to speak of someone as respected as Norman BORLAUG surely stirs deep feelings, and recollections, amongst us. His memory is very much alive today.

So it is with deep gratitude that I express my thanks to the government of Uganda, the Sasakawa Foundation and all those who have worked together to organise this celebration. For you have chosen to mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of Norman BORLAUG in a manner that is not only significant but is also enriching for all of us who are taking part.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we are reflecting on the impact that Norman BORLAUG's message had across Africa. I should certainly like to see the whole continent benefitting from his distinctive ideas and the knowledge he brought to the development of our rural communities.

Already this week eminent speakers have explored ways in which we can face up to the challenges of today. But of course the legacy of Norman BORLAUG has been a great influence on those working in rural development today.

So I should now like to look at the man himself and his vision.

Norman BORLAUG died at the age of 95. So but for a few years he could have been with us as we celebrate his hundredth birthday.

But nature decided otherwise. As traditional wisdom has it in Africa: it was at 95 that he went home to heaven, blessed and admired. And our gathering in Uganda this week is an expression of our great admiration and affection for him.

Norman BORLAUG -- **“the man who fed the world”** – is in itself a striking tribute. Yet even this does not fully **recognise the enormous work he did in** research and in applying the results of science to agriculture, and in developing the support structures that could help rural communities to boost yields, develop more self-sustaining livelihoods and eradicate hunger.

Awarding him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970, the prize giving committee declared that, **“more than any other single person of this age, he has helped provide bread for a hungry world”**. Other observers have said that no other scientists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has taught the world to feed itself and that his actions have saved many millions of lives.

Norman BORLAUG's own experience gave him the energy to drive forward in pursuit of his goals.

For as an adolescent, he had seen how the rural poor suffered terrible deprivation during the Great Depression in the US in 1929. So from early on in his career he realised that it was necessary to link scientific research to the improvement of farming livelihoods; he saw the need to bring to give the wider rural population access to the techniques and resources that could produce higher yields.

**He dedicated his life to the fight against hunger and famine.**

He became personally involved in the big campaigns to tackle this threat. First of all in India, where the West, led by the US, mobilised itself to free the sub-continent from the famines that were frequent, endemic. And this was the era of the Cold War; so a lot was at stake here for the

West. This was, in effect, a protective cordon sanitaire against the spread of communism.

Through his teaching on the ground, and the impressive results that followed, Norman BORLAUG played an essential role in the achievement of the Green Revolution and the eradication of famine in India. And the same was true in Pakistan and in Mexico, other countries where US power played a key role.

## **So what about Africa ?**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The activities of Norman BORLAUG in Africa, and the application of his ideas in this continent took place in a very different context, quite disconnected from Cold War rivalries. But of course famine still had a devastating impact in Africa.

The great droughts in Ethiopia and the Sahel in 1982 and 1983 had disastrous consequences, causing huge numbers of deaths and destroying much of the livestock. And the rural societies facing this new hunger and famine were already in deep poverty.

The Japanese philanthropist Ryochi SASAKAWA was moved by this awful spectacle. But he realised that transporting vast volumes of cereals to the drought-affected countries – a massive logistical challenge and hugely hugely expensive – could only provide temporary relief. It was not a durable solution.

He was reminded of the Chinese proverb: **“better to teach a person to fish than to give them some fish”**.

So Ryochi SASAKAWA, a man of generosity and wealth, approached Norman BORLAUG, the father of the Green Revolution in Asia, and the former American president Jimmy Carter.

The three men, all geniuses – “the three aces, I call them” -- founded SASAKAWA Africa Association, which has subsequently prospered and created other institutions such as, for example, SAFE.

The actions and teaching – the message, if you will – of Norman BORLAUG, and the impact that they have had across Africa, can only be understood through the gradual development of the activities of SASAKAWA Africa Association, SAA, which has accomplished such excellent work. SAA’s success has its roots in the way that these founding fathers brought together scientific knowledge, financial resources and an understanding of how to actually make things work in the real world – as we say in French: *“l’avoir, le savoir et le savoir-faire”*. This means a good combination of having, knowing and instinctive reaction.

A beautiful marriage between love and reason. So we cannot speak of the impact of Borlaug's message in Africa without recognising the exceptional contribution made by his two founding allies and colleagues.

I want to pause here to remind us of several key messages from Norman BORLAUG's scientific research and his teaching – and for which SASAKAWA Africa Association has become the key voice across the continent.

- 1/ Rural communities and agriculture are the vital base for sustainable development in Africa.
- 2/ Science and research have not always given rural communities and agriculture priority attention. Henceforth, they should do so.
- 3/ The farmer should be seen as the principal actor in transforming the rural world. So he – or, very often, she – should be treated with considération, should be listened to and have their views taken into account; their role and their competence should be respected. So it really does make sense to teach farmers about new innovations and strengthen their ability to manage their work and develop new plans.
- 4/ It is absolutely essential to discuss programmes with farmers and support them as these are put into practice and to ensure that they can participate in implementing projects. This is the key role played by *the extension worker*, who brings research findings to the farmers and is thus an essential link between the laboratory and the rural community. And just as the farmer increases their knowhow through the transfer of knowledge that the extension worker brings, so that same extension worker needs regular refresher training, to stay up to date with the latest scientific knowhow that can be useful to the rural community.
- 5/ Governments need to realise that agriculture is the priority sector where the strengthening of capacity can drive forward Africa's development. And that means giving agriculture a substantial slice of the government budget.
- 6/ Science and research, alongside government action, are foundations for an appropriate level of investment in agriculture, which is itself the cornerstone of development in Africa.
- 7/ We have to persuade financial partners and governments that funding well defined projects in agriculture is not a waste of money and that in fact, by implementing such projects, it is possible to raise the incomes of the rural populations who still represent the majority of the population in most African countries.
- 8/ We need to get farmers directly involved in managing projects in rural areas so that they realise the role that they can play as actors in development and then go on to build up their own grassroots organisations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At our last meeting in Accra, where we celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the work of SASAKAWA Global 2000 in fighting hunger, we reviewed these lessons and recommendations.

**But are we, as African countries, and particularly governments, following through in applying them?**

My own country saw extraordinary progress in yields, in productivity, in the wellbeing of farmers and the wider rural community, during my period in office as president, from 1991 to 1996. But after I left office things went backwards, so now I am arguing the case for SASAKAWA to return to Benin, to rebuild.

We've seen what happened in Mali – where some pilot projects produced highly satisfactory results. The then head of state, Amadou Toumani TOURE (ATT), was a supporter of SASAKAWA and the application of Norman BORLAUG's ideas. But after he was forced out of power in the 2012 coup d'état, much of the earlier progress was lost. After a period of terrorism and rebellious instability, elections were held last year, but there is a lot of rebuilding work to do.

In the African 14 countries where Sasakawa has been active – now or previously -- Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda stand out as models of the application of SAA ideas and recommendations.

This week we are taking stock of how SASAKAWA programmes have performed here in Uganda, drawing on the teachings of Norman BORLAUG.

Unfortunately, I have the impression that, at present, many African governments have yet to realise how much they could learn from Norman BORLAUG's ideas and the expertise of SASAKAWA.

But the good news is that there is plenty to celebrate when it comes to the work of universities and researchers in Africa.

In West Africa, for example, inspired by Borlaug's ideas and Sasakawa knowhow, universities in Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria have created scientific research units that work closely with rural communities. Some universities even organise distance courses for extension workers in rural areas.

And here in East Africa we see the same approach in Ethiopian and Ugandan universities, and particularly in here, at MAKERERE, this flourishing centre of intellectual life and scientific research.

I am also pleased to note that, beyond research and work to develop agricultural productivity, there's a growing focus on training people in how to transform products locally, to add more value and generate greater incomes for farmers and rural communities. And of course, it was

important at our symposium in Bamako, that we also stressed the importance of marketing products.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

**Without a reasonable income, farmers cannot afford to take up the advice and technologies that they are told about.**

The ideas that Norman BORLAUG had applied in the green revolution in India and Pakistan and in Mexico and their gradual promotion across Africa, through the activities of SASAKAWA, are now widely accepted.

But there is a risk, in my view, that the various institutions that are set up to promote these ideas might diverge off in different directions, without any assurance that the individual approaches they promote will be really effective and of relevance to rural populations. So there is a need for some coordination of their actions.

SASAKAWA Africa, working with the Nippon Foundation and the Carter Center, is best placed to play this role, also linking up with Koffi Annan's association and the green revolution structures that still exist in India, Pakistan and Mexico.

**The emerging countries – India, China, Brazil – are creating simple technologies adapted to the reality on the ground, while also taking account of environmental concerns.**

I think that it would be interesting for our association to take an interest in what they are doing, as part of its wider focus on research that is related directly to agriculture – while also encouraging the promotion of new ideas that are developed by researchers here in Africa, particularly in African universities.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Even so, I remain concerned that in Africa, not enough is yet done to appreciate the full value of the teachings of Norman BORLAUG, despite the existence of ample data demonstrating the excellent results that can be achieved.

So I would like to take the chance to suggest what might be done to remedy this situation.

### **Promoting awareness**

There is a case for telling a wider range of audiences about the successes of SASAKAWA, and how it has applied BORLAUG's ideas – by publishing key documents about SASAKAWA's

experiences not only in English but also in French, Portuguese and Spanish.

**A high level meeting to spread this knowledge and the rich lessons of SASAKAWA's experience.**

Such a meeting would bring together senior decision makers from the countries where SASAKAWA is operating with their counterparts from other countries, whether lusophone, francophone, his panophone or anglophones. The base working documents would have been translated into the various languages, so that everyone could fully participate.

A meeting of this kind could be organised in partnership with the African Union, possibly in a country where SASAKAWA has a solid track record of success and the relevance of Norman BORLAUG's ideas are obvious. And it would be good to ensure that it was also attended by other major development partners, such as the World Bank, the European Union or any others that SASAKAWA management, the Japanese government or the African Union thought would be appropriate.

Finally, in conclusion, I would invite you to look beyond Norman BORLAUG the expert, beyond his scientific work, beyond the special contribution of his key allies, Ryoichi SASAKAWA and Jimmy CARTER. Look instead at the humanity that all three have shared in their determination to eradicate hunger and the suffering that famine can bring in African.

Norman BORLAUG knew, as they all did, how far hunger and poverty limit a human being, enslaving them to fate.

By providing a route down which farmers could escape this trap, they showed how farmers could develop independence and become masters of their own lives.

The "three aces" as I like to call them, BORLAUG, SASAKAWA and CARTER, wanted to give the people of rural Africa the capacity to provide their own livelihoods through their own work, regaining freedom and dignity and escaping from the dependence in which they had been constrained by nature. They showed them how they could break out, through work, discipline and a sense of responsibility.

This is the ideal – something far beyond mere production statistics -- that motivated the founders of SASAKAWA. This, above all, is what I should like us to remember from our experience of seeing the ideas of Norman BORLAUG spread steadily across Africa and take hold.

And this ideal is also an invitation to Africa's governments to take a serious interest in the rural communities – where the majority of our people live – and to invest in the transformational steps necessary to develop agriculture and thus ensure self sufficiency in food production and

the wellbeing of farmers and low income populations.

The security and cohesion of our nations depend on this – as does stability and regional peace in our continent, at a time when no country is safe from the threat of terrorism.

Thank you for your attention.