

**2nd WCA Agricultural Science Week and 9th General Assembly of CORAF/WECARD
24 to 29 May, 2010, Cotonou – BENIN**

**Speech of Professor Yusuf ABUBAKAR,
Chairman of the Governing Board of CORAF/WECARD
At the Opening Ceremony (Cotonou, 25 May, 2010)**

Your Excellency, Professor François ABIOLA ADEBAYO, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific research of the Republic of Benin,

Excellency Henri OSSEBI, Minister of Scientific Research of the Republic of Congo,

Distinguished representatives of International Institutions,

Distinguished Chairman of the Global Forum for Agricultural Research,

Distinguished Director General of AfricaRice representing the Alliance of the 15 International Centers of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research,

Distinguished representatives of Regional Economic Communities,

Distinguished Representatives of Sub-regional and International development organizations

Distinguished members of the Sub-regional and International Scientific Communities,

Distinguished Members of the Governing Board of CORAF/WECARD,

The Executive Director of CORAF/WECARD,

Members of the Scientific and Technical Committee of CORAF/WECARD,

The Director General of the National Agricultural Institute of Benin,

Dear Colleagues Heads and Members of National Agricultural Research Systems of CORAF/WECARD,

Honorable Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Your Excellency, The Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of the Republic of Benin

I have the greatest honour, on this remarkable occasion that brings together a cross section of the agricultural research and development family of West and Central Africa together with its partners from all parts of the world, to express to your Excellency, first of all on behalf of our family, as well as the Governing Board of CORAF/WECARD and its 22 Members NARS, and on behalf of myself, our sincerest and heartfelt appreciation for having accepted our invitation and more so to Chair the Opening Ceremony of the 9th General Assembly of CORAF/WECARD and the 2nd West and Central Africa Agricultural Science Week, despite your very busy schedule.

Your Excellency Sir, we are also grateful to the Government and the valiant people of Benin for this warm and memorable reception that has been given to each and every one of the delegation, and on your behalf I would like to take this opportunity of heartily welcoming them to Benin: MI KOI BOO, MA THIÉ LÈÈ !

Your Excellency,

Distinguished Guests,

I wish to recall that almost 2 years ago when we met in Yaoundé, Cameroun for the same reason as today, that was at the 8th General Assembly Meeting and the 1st West and Central Africa Agricultural Science Week, the world in general and West and Central Africa in particular, were grappling with difficult challenges as a consequence of the rocketing increase in oil and food prices that imposed an unbearable cost of living which caused socio-political uproar in several countries in our sub region.

It is worthy to note that this serious turpitude of food security occurred in a global context where climate change and its ramifications are implicated. It is also very important to note that the threat of rising food prices still remain a

nightmare for our nations. In this regard, Your Excellency, it is imperative that we put agriculture back on the saddle, in other words at the centre of the concerns of every nation, which nevertheless rose up, nearly like a loner, to face up to the challenges within the context of bilateral as well as multilateral cooperation.

Our meeting in Yaoundé in 2008 has not failed to keep its promise of deeply reflecting on the appropriate responses to give to the most crucial problems of food security and related issues notably production of biofuels, use of biotechnology, climate change, etc.

Moreover, we could say, without feigned modesty, that these concerns have been taken into consideration in the Strategic Plan 2007-2016, which is a translation of the new vision of CORAF/WECARD, in the following terms:

« A sustainable reduction in poverty and food insecurity in West and Central Africa through an increase in agricultural-led economic growth and a sustainable improvement of key aspects of the agricultural research system »

From this new vision we have drawn the following new mission for CORAF/WECARD:

« Sustainable improvements to the competitiveness, productivity and markets of the agricultural system in West and central Africa by meeting key demands of the sub-regional research system as expressed by target groups ».

Your Excellency

The first CORAF/WECARD Operational Plan established for implementing this Strategic Plan for the period 2008-2013 is in full operation. The success of the efforts which have been deployed in order to realize the activities of the Plan, rely on the success achieved through the implementation of the Institutional Change Management Plan, which involves all stakeholders the vast majority who are expected to be reached through the training of trainers.

The success of the efforts actually deployed to realize these activities, are complemented by the success achieved through the implementation of 19 on-going research projects that are supported by 10 scientific and technical partners. At this juncture, I would like to note the regional dimension of these projects: each and every one of them is implemented by at least three countries in the sub region. I would also like to note the successive involvement of several countries of the ECOWAS in the new West Africa Agricultural Productivity Program (WAAPP); and finally on the more remarkable increased involvement of

decision-makers of the sub-region in the activities of CORAF/WECARD, which are admirably supported by development partners, who moreover, are still increasing in number and diversity.

It is, therefore, my fervent hope that the identified Central Africa Productivity Program will also rapidly become a reality.

Your Excellency

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The total estimated budget of the Operational Plan (2008-2013) is 112 million US\$. More than 85% of this amount is expected to go towards implementation of Research Programs.

The amount of funds secured since 2008 to now is 68 278 898 US\$ representing 60.97% of the total estimated budget.

Commitments made by our financial partners and the Regional Economic Communities of the sub region has swelled this amount to 89 779 898 US\$, which represents 80.17% of the total needed budget.

Your Excellency,

Distinguished guests

We are also aware of the present global economic crisis. In the light of this CORAF/WECARD is taking measures to mitigate associated risks.

Your Excellency

Dear Colleagues,

During these past two years, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program, initiated by NEPAD and the African Union, for which we are responsible for implementing Pillar IV in our sub region, brings us satisfaction because 12 countries of ECOWAS have already signed and adopted the « compact » of their National Agricultural Investment programmes. The post-compact process, which is in progress, offers the opportunity for effectively taking into account Pillar IV of the CAADP: *improving agricultural research, diffusion and transfer of technologies.*

It is most gratifying to note the normal and regular functioning of the statutory organs of CORAF/WECARD; the transparency in the management of our resources as confirmed by the external auditors; the strong, clear and continued support of the subsidiary principle, the strengthening of sub regional cooperation and so many others. ...

Therefore, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, you can easily understand why we decided that the choice of the main theme of the 2nd WCA Agricultural Science Week should address « *Managing post-harvest systems of crops, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture products to improve agricultural productivity, competitiveness and markets in West and Central Africa* ». The introductory note highlights the importance of this theme in realizing also the specific objective defined by CORAF/WECARD.

Like in 2008, this forum is again expected to be a melting pot of diverse and meaningful interaction on this major challenge aimed at coming up with realistic and concrete proposals for immediate and sustainable solutions to current and future agricultural research and development challenges.

On issues, which, in effect, are already emerging in the face of CORAF/WECARD, and which we should consider very seriously, I would like to solicit the flawless commitment of financial partners; the need to accelerate the establishment of the Non Staple Crops Program, continued support to efforts being made, climate change, etc., etc.

Your Excellency,

What you have just heard wouldn't have been possible without the dedicated commitment of all stakeholders in the sub region.

I would like to acknowledge Dr Simon ZOK, the outgoing Chairman of CORAF/WECARD for the exceptional service and dedication rendered to the Organisation.

I would also like to particularly distinguish the Executive Secretariat of our sub-regional organization, under the leadership of the Executive Director, Dr Paco Sérémé, for the exemplary work accomplished daily, with transparency and abnegation, as well as for the quality of results obtained.

I would not end my speech without also congratulating the ECOWAS, UEMOA, ECCAS and CEMAC for the quality of their contribution to our cooperation, which I found exemplary because we have made significant progress since signing the agreements which bind us.

We also hope that our Development Partners, which are DFID, AfDB, USAID, World Bank, IDRC, CIDA, the European commission, FAO, CIRAD, CTA and AVRDC, AfricaRice and the other International Centers for Agricultural Research and Advanced Research Centers, find in these words, our sincerest gratitude for their unwavering support, notably, for the implementation of the Operational Plan 2008-2013. I would like to reaffirm that our commitment to pursuing the initiatives that we have in common, will not weaken.

With regards to our continental apex organization, FARA, we do commend the degree of protection that its umbrella provides to all the four member sub-regional organizations that in fact inspires us every day, to claim ownership of it through the multiple initiatives launched by its Executive Secretariat; which will contribute, without any doubt, to the realization of the objectives of the Millennium Development Goal for the development of our sub-region.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would not for one moment, in our acknowledgment and expressing our congratulations, like to forget the National Organization Committee of Benin, which under the direction of the Director General of INRAB, Dr Delphin KOUDANDE, has mobilized for several weeks now, all the stakeholders in Benin, for the perfect organization of our meeting as well as for its brilliant success.

Long live INRAB, long live AfricaRice,
Long live the African and International Cooperation
ENATHIÉNOMI KAKA (Thank you very much for your kind attention)