



**Graça Machel – FAO McDougall Lecture on “Migration, Agriculture  
and Rural Development” – June 22, 2019**

Good Morning,

Mr Graziano da Silva, FAO Director-General,

Honorable Ministers,

Ambassadors,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the honor to address you this morning! I am not a diplomat, so I must provide a disclaimer at the outset of my remarks. You have invited a passionate humanitarian to deliver the McDougall Lecture this year, and my activism coupled with the urgent issues we face as an international community, cannot be tempered by well-mannered



protocol. We do not have the luxury to be polite and gentle with each other. You see, we are failing to deliver on the promises we have made to our children.

Five years ago, we agreed as a global family to pursue the Sustainable Development Goals as a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. It was an **urgent** call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership to:

- end poverty,
- improve health and education,
- reduce inequality, and
- spur economic growth.

The urgency, however, seems to be lost on us. I stand here with deep anguish and concern that the enthusiasm and speed with which we all



agreed to work to achieve the SDGs seems to have lost steam somewhere along the way. The pace and scale with which we have been operating have not matched the magnitude of the monumental tasks and noble results we set out for ourselves. Our ambition has been woefully inadequate.

I am encouraged, however, that you as the FAO have turned considered attention this year to the intersection between migration, agriculture and rural development. And I hope this is a signal that the requisite attention and adequate investment of resources in meeting the SDGs are on the rise. We simply cannot afford **not to urgently take bold action** to end poverty and hunger, and create more prosperous and vibrant rural communities.

**<Contextualizing Migration>**



I would like to provoke your thinking and action today by starting out with dispelling a few myths surrounding migration and hope then to offer food for thought around how women and young people, coupled with a more innovative approach to rural development can possibly usher us into a more well fed and nourished, and more equitable and prosperous world.

Please allow me to challenge a few contemporary narratives that are quite damaging and untrue in our discourse around migration:

1. Migration is not a new phenomenon. However; it does need to be managed adequately.
2. Migration, by definition, is not harmful to countries of departure or destination.
3. And turning specifically to my own continent, Africa is not a continent of exodus.



I begin with these points of departure to help contextualize conversations this morning.

Humanity has always been on the move. Throughout history, we have moved across lands and seas:

- in courageous search of new opportunities,
- better ways of life and
- improved social, political and economic conditions, as well as
- to escape persecution, conflict and poverty.

Human beings at our core are transient, and for centuries, movements of people have been happening within and between continents and countries, as well as inside national borders.

**<Global Migration>**



The numbers of migrants, thanks to innovations in travel and globalization, have increased exponentially over the past few decades.

The World Economic Forum details how today people are moving more than ever before. There are presently approximately 258 million international migrants. That figure has grown rapidly since the turn of the millennium, when there were 173 million. Together with this increasing volume, we are seeing changing demographics, advancing technology, evolving needs of labor markets and continued challenges posed by:

- conflict,
- food shortages,
- and climate change.

There is nothing inherently wrong with migration and to treat it as a phenomenon that needs to be halted, is to deny ourselves the benefits



and opportunities that come with the cross pollination of peoples and cultures.

We sometimes think of certain countries as sources of migrants and others as recipients. But most nations today, to differing degrees, experience migration from all three perspectives – as countries of origin, transit and destination<sup>i</sup>. Communities have played a key role in the development of sending, transit, and receiving migrants for centuries. Nowadays, international migratory pressures are more complex and globalized. And as a global family we have agreed, under the banner of SDG 10, to facilitate **orderly, safe** and **responsible migration**.

Migrations and migrant labor have shaped the wealth of many nations—surely, we must admit the economic dominance of high-income nations like the United States and many European countries have been built on



the backs of migrant labor. Migration is an integral part of the global economy and fosters growth and development through the exchanges of cultures and knowledge, as well as financial gains in the form of remittances and skills acquisition.

There is a need to have a realistic, honest examination of migration and shun the xenophobic, isolationist narratives that seem to make global news headlines on a regular basis. I know we sit here in Rome today where there are daily debates around the influx of refugees and migrants coming from Africa and the Middle East. However, I would like to paint a realistic picture based on hard fact and statistics:

- When it comes to refugees, developing countries host 85% of the total refugee population of the world. **<sup>ii</sup> It is often countries with the least amount of resources that are absorbing the greatest number of refugees.**



- And Africa plays host to the largest refugee populations in the world with over 4.4 million African refugees finding a home with their neighbors on the continent.
  
- I must put on record that statistics from the 2019 Ibrahim Forum Report reveal **African migrants represent only 14% of the global migrant population. This is much less than Europe which comprises 24% or Asia's share which totals 41% of the worldwide migrant population.**
  
- To further unpack the numbers, 70% of sub-Saharan African migrants stay within the continent, and only 25% make their way to Europe.



It therefore must be clearly recognized that most refugees and migrants are settling in the global South and not flooding Northern or Western shores to the magnitude some would make us believe.

### <Rural – Urban Migration>

Another aspect of the movement of people that is relevant for discussion is that of rural-to-urban migration.

Those of us gathered here today know all too well the causes and impacts of migratory patterns, the brain drain, rapid urbanization and rural flight. We are all well aware of the challenges that are associated with the lack of industrialization of agriculture, food security and investment in rural development.

So, I will not revisit analysis of the alarming poverty statistics or belabor discourse on migratory flows which overcrowd cities and leave rural areas underdeveloped. But I will challenge us to be much bolder and



more disruptive in both our planning and action to address issues of rural poverty and rural flight. Despite recycled commitments, our investment is far below the amount required to match the magnitude of these problems.

As the FAO, you are uniquely positioned to contribute to the development of rural areas through the touch point of agriculture. If and when agriculture is modernized and rustic areas are brought into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century so people can benefit from electricity, water and sanitation, irrigation, quality education and gainful employment prospects, people will remain in rural communities and contribute to their vibrancy.

### **<Nutrition and Rural Development>**

I would also like to emphasize the direct linkage between hunger and migration. As you know, more than 113 million people across 53 countries in the world experienced acute hunger requiring urgent food,



nutrition and livelihoods assistance in 2018. Many of those suffering from acute hunger became migrants due to fleeing protracted conflicts or extreme weather conditions in search of food for their families and the basics of survival.

This type of forced migration disrupts rural livelihoods and threatens food security and nutrition in areas of both origin and destination. I must make specific mention of the importance of nutrition here.

A lack of adequate nutrition is a key contributor to unacceptably high levels of both maternal and child mortality as well as stunting-- and therefore the loss of human capital for the overall economic, social and political development.



Studies<sup>iii</sup> in several African countries reveal that the cost of malnutrition has a huge impact on a country's economic growth. The knock-on effects of **stunting** on learning and on earning, is quite debilitating when translated into economic terms. For example, losses in GDP are estimated at:

- 10% in Malawi
- 11.5% in Rwanda and
- 16.5% in Ethiopia.

As such, adequate nutrition, is a critical element of national development, and as the FAO, I encourage you to adequately focus and prioritise **promoting nutrient rich food production and food security** as there is clear evidence of its wellbeing to individuals, households, and the vibrancy of national economies.



Crop yields and growing seasons are being adversely impacted by climate change. For example, hunger already affects about 240 million Africans daily. Recent estimates indicate that by 2050, even a change of approximately 1.2 to 1.9 degrees Celsius will have increased the number of Africa's undernourished from 25% to 95%. Decreasing crop yields and increasing population will put additional pressure on an already fragile food production system. **If the current situation persists, Africa will be fulfilling only 13% of its food needs by 2050.** This situation will further threaten about 65% of African workers who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods including children and the elderly, who are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity<sup>iv</sup>. We know this fate is upon us—but this doesn't have to become our destiny. We have the power to reverse it. Starting now!



I ask you as experts: what innovative instruments and climate smart policies are we putting in place now to avert this impending crisis?

### <Innovation in Rural Development>

Innovation in agriculture needs to cut across all dimensions of the production cycle along the entire value chain - from crop, forestry, fishery and livestock production to the management of inputs and resources to market access. However, I challenge us this morning to go beyond incremental changes and small-scale innovative initiatives: **disrupt the agriculture sector as a whole!**

Like Uber has transformed the transportation business and like Netflix has shaken the entertainment industry, we need a game changer for the agriculture sector. Within the UN family you have researchers and



scientists from all fields of study, world class agronomists and policy experts, and pools of talented young people from around the world at your disposal. Harness their creativity and expertise, and leapfrog over the traditional! Push the boundaries of our current thinking and approaches.

For example:

- How big are the investments we making in climate resilient agriculture approaches that place value on indigenous seed production as well as traditional know-how around nutrient-rich crop diversification and farming and animal husbandry techniques?
  
- And how can we democratize technology? There are places where innovative techniques such as drip irrigation and solar powered desalination systems are transforming patches of deserts into vibrant farmlands. All this innovation is happening while in other



parts of the world, people are still languishing in inhospitable environments, and are food and livelihood insecure. We need to massively scale up successful approaches and implement best practices so that our advances in technology benefit millions and not just a few hundred thousand.

- And how do we better leverage the blue economy and potentially transformative industry of aquaculture? Over 70% of the planet is made of aquatic systems that play a crucial, growing, and yet largely underutilized role in food and livelihood security and nutrition from the fisheries and aquaculture sectors.
  
- Fish is more than food; it is a source of income, trade, and in coastal communities it is a way of life. More than 3 billion people rely on



fish for animal protein, and more than 800 million people, 10% of the world's population, derive their livelihoods from aquaculture, fisheries and associated fish value chains. Invest massively in this industry to tap into its rich potential to advance rural development, tackle hunger and malnutrition.

- Also, how can we scale the uptake of new farming systems such as vertical farming and tech innovations to traditional greenhouses?

I know I have more questions than solutions, but I hope to be able to ignite a fire of creative action in this room this morning to find their answers.

As a women's rights activist, I would be neglectful of my duties, if I did not bring to your attention the obvious fact that girls and women are overlooked, yet critical success factors to rural development.



## <The Girl – Child as A Change Agent>

Investing in the education of the girl child, in particular in rural areas, is a strategic entry point to transform a whole range of societal norms and traditional practices to create communities that value and protect the rights of women.

A study by UNICEF shows that women and girls in sub-Saharan Africa collectively spend about 40 billion hours a year collecting water. Wouldn't these billions of hours be better applied towards skills development? Shouldn't we be equipping our girls in the STEM fields and ensuring they receive a diversity of skills to meet the demands of the agriculture sector as well as industrialized labor markets? We owe it to our children to work much more quickly and smarter, and in concert with



each other as the UN family to figure out ways to better educate, feed, and provide a solid foundation for our youngest generation to flourish.

A lack of access to education for women is one of the most significant barriers that hinder enhancing skills that will allow them economic freedom<sup>1</sup>. Investment in the girl child equips her to realize her personal aspirations and professional ambitions, and provides her with the proper footing to contribute her full potential to the betterment of her community—whether it rural or urban.

### **<Women as Change Agents of Agricultural Development>**

Studies tell us that today there are nearly 821 million people who are undernourished, and if we are to end hunger by 2030, we must address the inequalities between women and men in agriculture. Women

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<sup>1</sup> <https://city-press.news24.com/Voices/education-and-technology-are-key-to-bettering-the-lives-of-rural-women-20180830>



comprise more than 50% of the agricultural workforce in developing countries, and in some regions of the world, such as my own, they comprise 70% of the rural workforce.

Yet, they receive only a fraction of the land, credit, inputs such as improved seeds and fertilizers, agricultural training and information compared to men. Rural women, in particular, should be recognized and valued as major agents of change in agriculture development.

As farmers and farm workers, horticulturists and market sellers, businesswomen, entrepreneurs and community leaders, they fulfil important roles throughout agri-food value chains, as well as in the management of natural resources such as land and water.



Yet the gender gap in food and agriculture is extensive. Women are under-represented in local institutions and governance mechanisms, and tend to have less decision-making power. In addition to these constraints, prevailing gender norms and discrimination often mean that women face an excessive work burden, and that much of their labor remains unpaid and unrecognized.

Bridging this gender yield gap would boost food and nutrition security globally. Studies project this additional yield could reduce the number of undernourished people in the world by over 100 million<sup>v</sup>.

Because women are such central players in the food chain and key to agricultural output globally, it is imperative that institutions focus on innovative ways to advance women's contributions in this sector. I offer a few examples:



- Women need to be in the forefront of agricultural industrialization, at the decision-making table and throughout the value chain,
  
- The development better farming technologies -- many women in Africa and Asia are still **using a farming hoe**, in a world where there is new, tech-savvy farming equipment easing the physical burden of farming and increasing productivity in other parts of the world.
  
- Asian and African women often undertake the arduous task of chopping firewood and suffer from smoke inhalation to cook for their families when there are climate friendly stoves within our reach to provide them. This level of physical exertion and reduction of quality of life are unnecessary.
  
- Women are often the custodians of treasured traditions and know-how. The sharing of their knowledge as well as value of indigenous



seeds and cultivation of nutrient-rich crops need to be recognized and scaled up.

- Governments need to scrap the traditional, social and legislative shackles which limit women from exercising their right to land ownership. **The securing of land and land rights for women need to have a set time period in which they will be realized.**
- Women need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to upscale their SMEs as entrepreneurs, and valued for their contributions to the economy.

It is utterly difficult to comprehend that we have not grasped the fact that we place a stranglehold on our own growth by limiting the potential of half our population. The disenfranchisement of women is not only an



economic issue, but a question of equality and social justice. The agriculture sector is one obvious industry where it is an absolute must to capitalize on the vital role women already play.

In addition to my advocacy for the increased investment in the girl child and women, I will close by briefly touching on the influential role of youth in the equation of migration and rural development.

### **<Youth and Rural Development>**

Africa provides to the world a unique laboratory for how to manage the demographic dividend. The 2019 Ibrahim Forum report tells us that the agriculture sector accounts for up to 60% of African jobs and roughly 1/3 of the continent's GDP.



According to the Afrobarometer survey data from 34 African countries, agriculture employs nearly 19% of working young Africans aged 18-35, and is the biggest job-generating sector for young people. However, in rural areas, the lack of decent work opportunities is among the principal drivers of rural to urban migration, **especially for youth.**

Agriculture is expected to remain the main pool of employment opportunities for sub-Saharan African youth in the foreseeable future. Despite this, for the majority, agriculture is often seen as outdated, unprofitable and hard work for the uneducated in many settings across the globe. Given these dynamics, agriculture must become appealing! Strategic investments to modernize the sector and rural areas must be applied to both attract and retain young people so they feel it is an opportunity-rich environment where they can realize their aspirations without having to migrate elsewhere.



In addition to the structural changes and disruptions I advocated for earlier, in the immediate term, many simple technologies can solve some of the major challenges currently faced by farmers and young agriculture entrepreneurs the world over:

- access to markets,
- access to updated technologies and research,
- knowledge of commodity prices, and
- early warning systems on weather and pests, to name just a few challenges.

Two examples I will share emerging from Africa are “Gro Intelligence” and “Wefarm” – these two initiatives are leveraging technology and the talents of young people that could be scaled globally.



- Gro Intelligence is a big data and artificial intelligence company aiming at driving efficiency across farms locally to improve yields and production by uncovering information and trends that send signals to the market. Founded by a young Ethiopian woman and with a team of more than 60 people in Nairobi and New York, the company is changing agribusiness and leveraging the skills and talents of young people across the continent.
  
- “Wefarm” is another innovative approach to rural development and created its service offering, design and information architecture in conjunction with farmers in Peru, Kenya and Tanzania. It is digital network that allows farmers and entrepreneurs in agriculture to exchange ideas and market data, and gain access to crowd-sourced information via text messages. Over 1.4 million farmers are registered on the service, making it the



world's largest farmer-to-farmer digital network. Surely this model can be replicated at scale.

Capitalizing on new technologies and creating new industries and career paths within the field, like these and others, will allow the sector to become a part of the 'high-tech' economy. Thus, making it more attractive to young people, preventing forced migration, paving the way for greater specialization in the division of labor in agriculture, and moving progressively away from mere subsistence farming to large scale agribusiness.

### **<Conclusion>**

As I reflect on where the biggest challenges of the negative impacts of migration, the scourge of hunger and malnutrition, and the lack of investment in rural development have hit hardest, I cannot help but



continue to be vocal about the immediate need for **a departure from business as usual.**

Our problems persist because we are sitting in our comfort zones and not challenging ourselves individually or institutionally to change the status quo. There has been a shameful failure of global governance to address issues of food security, forced migration and equitable economic development. There is a dismal disregard for accountability and responsibility taken by those with decision making powers to transform broken systems which lead to economic and social inequality.

There is also a failure of governance at the country level to set priorities right. Governments are not allocating sufficient energy or resources to address root causes of poverty and provide all their citizens with a sound quality of life.



And lastly, there is a failure of individual conscience. A heartless complacency with the status quo has given birth to a bankruptcy of human solidarity. As I stand here this morning, every minute children are dying in Africa and Asia from malnutrition.

You made a mistake of inviting an activist...

The ambition of the goals are not being met with the courage to transform the status quo -- our outcomes are not matching our desired results.

I ask you--what are you going to do to increase the pace of progress and the scope of solutions?



You have the power in this room to transform the lives of millions of people for the better.

I challenge you to act boldly and invest adequately in the innovations needed to ensure:

- not one child dies from starvation,
- not one child goes to bed hungry and suffers from stunting,
- not one mother has to bury her child because we here failed her,
- not one woman is relegated to using the back-breaking hoe, and
- not one migrant has to choose between dying in his homeland or drowning at sea.

All this is within our reach!



Your Excellencies, we promised our children we would “leave no one behind.” Let us not fail them.

I thank you.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/01/global-migration-can-be-a-success/>

<sup>ii</sup> Source: GEMR/UNHCR Global Trends 2017

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.costofhungerafrica.com/kypmd1u0vmrf5iro3c0prngjdftu5u>

<sup>iv</sup> Africa Renewal. (2014). Despite climate change, Africa can feed Africa By: [Richard Munang](#) and [Jesica Andrews](#). <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/special-edition-agriculture-2014/despite-climate-change-africa-can-feed-africa>



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^ [Bloomberg. \(2018\).Ghana Raising \\$500 Million in Loans to Fund Education Pledge By Moses Mozart Dzawu. Article posted, November 9, 2018, 3:18 PM GMT+2](#)

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