

**Speech by the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries
at the TICAD IV Breakout Session on “Boosting Economic Growth”**

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1.

World Bank President Zoellick, African Union Chairperson Jean Ping, International Fund for Agricultural Development President Båge, national delegates, representatives of international institutions, ladies and gentlemen.

I am deeply honored to have the opportunity to attend this breakout session and contribute to the discussions in the field of agriculture here at TICAD IV. I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the current food crisis and the importance of agricultural development in Africa.

2.

About two-thirds of Africa’s population is engaged in farming, so raising agricultural productivity and expanding food production will not only ensure food security but also drive economic growth. Agricultural development is an important means of economic growth and poverty reduction. Agriculture is the cornerstone of African development.

3.

As you know, the rapid rise in food prices around the world is having a major impact on food-importing countries, including the countries of Africa. Agricultural productivity in Africa remains low as a result of unfavorable natural conditions, combined with drought and other factors. Population growth has therefore caused imports of rice and other grains to increase, making effective agricultural development an urgent priority.

4.

I believe that to overcome the current food crisis, it is a basic matter for each country, particularly developing countries to achieve food security by boosting agricultural production. I also believe that we need to produce bio-fuel in a way that is compatible with food security. Japan intends to support Africa through an effective combination of short- and longer-term measures.

5.

In the short term, last month Japan announced one hundred million dollars of emergency food aid, a large proportion of which is directed at Africa. As to trade actions at issue such as food export limits or bans, we are proposing to alleviate the difficulties faced by developing countries by voluntarily refraining from any actions that might cause international food prices to rise.

6.

As for medium- and long-term assistance to enhance agricultural productivity in Africa, Japan attaches importance to research and development, including the improvement of rice varieties such as NERICA, and to the dissemination of cultivation technology, construction of irrigation facilities, formation of farmers' organizations, and development of human resources. We will actively provide assistance in these areas. We note, in particular, that African countries are importing increasing amounts of rice. As Japan possesses a high level of technology in the field of rice production, we will strive to facilitate a doubling of rice production in Africa by providing intensive assistance in partnership with international organizations and others. Furthermore, it is important for developing countries to produce commercially viable crops. We currently provide assistance through "Development Initiatives," and we intend to strengthen our assistance through such methods as South-South cooperation.

7.

The international community is currently working as one to find solutions to the problem of rising food prices. Japan, too, is considering providing further assistance based on each country's needs. As Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda mentioned yesterday, for example, we are formulating a variety of assistance measures, including a package to help new victims of hunger and measures to promote the planting of crops this year and next year. We are considering including the provision of seeds and fertilizers in the measures.

8.

Finally, I hope that this meeting will serve to affirm the importance of agricultural development in Africa and to strengthen cooperation among aid donors, international institutions, and recipient countries. I would also like to assure you that Japan will make every effort to find solutions to the current food issues at upcoming meetings, including the FAO High-Level Conference and the G8 Summit. Thank you very much.