



The Howard G. Buffett Foundation Releases Groundbreaking Report, Calls for a Brown Revolution Emphasizing Soil Health for Africa's Food Security

"The Hungry Continent: African Agriculture and Food Insecurity" analyzes the politics, production techniques and traditional development approaches that have resulted in African food insecurity and calls for innovative, biologically-based systems to harness smallholder farmers' potential

DES MOINES, IOWA, October 10, 2011 — The Howard G. Buffett Foundation (HGBF) will release its groundbreaking research report on African agriculture and food insecurity, *The Hungry Continent: African Agriculture and Food Insecurity*, on October 12, 2011 at the 25th annual World Food Prize. The publication provides a comprehensive look at the historical context preventing Africa from achieving the first millennium development goal to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, while offering 30 case studies on sustainable agricultural interventions. While critical of the politics, production techniques, and development approaches that have contributed to Africa's pervasive food insecurity, the report also offers a way forward, showing how the continent can significantly boost agricultural productivity and food security by promoting sustainable, regenerative, biologically-based production systems that are appropriate for and available to the majority of the continent's smallholder farmers.

"If we truly want to make a difference—to put an end to the terrible fact that 239 million Africans go to bed hungry each night—we have to look critically at why agriculture has failed on the continent," said Howard G. Buffett, President of the Howard G. Buffett Foundation. "Africa is often compared to India in the mid-twentieth century, but it is a continent, not a single country, and a variety of factors—conflict and corruption, a lack of government commitment, inadequate infrastructure and heavily degraded soils—mean that a Green Revolution, or even a uniquely Green Revolution, will not work in Africa. We must acknowledge, once and for all, that Africa's smallholder farmers need myriad solutions, not a single silver bullet."

Citing the National Academies Press statistic that more than 750 million sub-Saharan Africans live in dire poverty, earning less than \$1 a day and relying on subsistence agriculture for their major source of food and income, the report concludes that these farmers need education, innovative thinking and donor policies that will enable them to grow a diversity of culturally appropriate foods that are critical to nutrition, health and the avoidance of hunger periods.

The Hungry Continent commends the recent increases in donor and foreign aid investment in African agriculture as a long-term, sustainable solution for hunger but laments that critical research in improved agricultural techniques best suited for Africa's diverse agroecological growing zones get little attention and scant funding in favor of expensive, input-dependent models. Resource-conserving technologies and practices such as integrated pest management, integrated nutrient management, conservation-based initiatives such as minimum or no-till, agroforestry, aquaculture, water harvesting and livestock integration, according to the report, have increased productivity dramatically but are not being widely adopted in agricultural policy or development approaches.

"It's unfathomable and enormously frustrating that the world possesses the information about what works for Africa's smallholders but continues to ignore it," said Buffett. "Our own research and experience



working in over 37 countries is compatible with thorough, comprehensive reports like the InterAcademy Council's *Realizing the Promise and Potential of African Agriculture* and the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development's *Agriculture at A Crossroads*, which make it clear that there is no magic bullet when it comes to agriculture and food insecurity. Nonetheless, some donors and African governments are fixated on technology—seeds and fertilizer, for example—that can actually do more harm than good if they are adopted by farmers who cannot afford them, do not know how to apply them and will use them to the detriment of their soil.”

The Hungry Continent concludes that there are no blanket prescriptions for boosting African agriculture and food security but advocates that a “Brown Revolution” prioritizing soil health through conservation agriculture is the key component to any successful agricultural system. The publication spotlights the need to promote diverse, regenerative systems that are inclusive and combine practices that are neither bound nor driven by ideology and can be easily implemented by smallholder farmers, including women, who farm the majority of the continent. The thirty case studies provide successful intervention models at various scales, showing that a sea change that shifts the focus from intensive monocropping to a system that includes minimum tillage, protecting soil surfaces, alternating or mixing crops with soil-enriching legumes and reducing the need for agrochemicals is not only possible but critical to feeding the world.

###

Established in 1999, the Howard G. Buffett Foundation's primary mission is to improve the standard of living and quality of life for the world's most impoverished and marginalized populations. The Foundation invests in agriculture, nutrition, water and conservation to sustainably address global food insecurity. HGBF supports a number of research initiatives in Africa in agriculture as well as innovative programs such as local purchase for food assistance needs.

For media inquiries, please contact Karina Qian at karina@globalphilanthropy.com or +1 310-584-7053 or Megan Quitkin at maq@hgbfoundation.org +1 646-221-9524