

**Acceptance Speech for the GCHERA World Agriculture Prize, 2018
Nanjing Agricultural University, October 28, 2018**

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The Chairman of the Steering Committee and President of the Global Confederation of Higher Education Associations for Agriculture and Life Sciences (GHERA), Dr. John Kennelly

The Chancellor of Nanjing Agricultural University, CHEN Ligen

The Director-General of the Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture and Foreign Affairs, The People's Republic of China, SUI Pengfei

The Vice President of the DBN Group, MO Hongjian

Distinguished Members of the GCHERA, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I feel honoured and humbled before this august audience as a recipient of the GCHERA World Agriculture Prize 2018 and I sincerely thank the jury for selecting me to receive this prestigious award. I thank Dr. Ronnie Coffman of Cornell University and all those who worked with him to prepare the nomination. They have done an excellent job.

When in 1977, a high school headmaster accidentally triggered my interest in agricultural science, little did I know that he had set me up for honour. I continued my education at the University of Ghana where I studied Agriculture between 1979 and 1984. Those were hard times for Ghana; political instability, severe drought and total crop failure leading to famine. I worried about the poor maize yields.

When I went to Cambridge University to pursue my post graduate studies, I came to realize that an African Green Revolution could not occur unless African farmers accessed innovation. I recall submitting a term essay in Cambridge on "Appropriate technologies for agriculture in the developing world" in which I opined that farmers in Africa were cropping their fields with varieties which needed to be replaced with better varieties developed through good science and technology in local environments.

I felt proud when I returned home after my training at Cambridge at a time that several institutions had sprang up in Europe and the USA, offering juicy post doctoral fellowships to molecular geneticists. I turned down an offer of a post doctoral fellowship in an Ivy league University, a University which was later to work closely with me to realise my dreams. My return to Ghana has paid off well. By creating an institution that took the (then) unique approach of training future generations of plant breeders in Africa for Africa, and preparing them to address issues of agricultural productivity, I inspired the hope that we could improve the food security and livelihoods of millions of Africans.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I come here directly from Tokyo where under the auspices of the World Bank Africa Centres of Excellence project, we engaged Universities and the private sector in conversations on “Strengthening Higher Agricultural Education in Africa”. Training Africans on African crops in Africa for Africa is a smart development investment and I am proud to be working with many partners to meet Africa’s future food needs, by training the next generation of African plant breeders and seed scientists. A critical mass of well trained plant scientists and investments in the commodity value chains will make our dream of a food-secure Africa a reality in our lifetime.

The West Africa Centre for Crop Improvement, popularly known as WACCI, an institution which was established at the University of Ghana through my shared vision and leadership is leading a consortium of partners, both public and private, and including civil society groups, to establish a global platform for agricultural innovation and entrepreneurship driven by good science and technology to make Africa’s dream of food and nutrition security realizable in our lifetime.

Our glorious past and a future which should see WACCI as one of the top-tier global plant breeding institutions, is a record that proves the concept that with strategic partnerships and the right investments Africa can arise and take its future in its own hands. Africa needs strategic partnerships to help modernize its Agriculture and unlock its full potential.

I call on African governments to wake up to the reality that sustained core funding to institutions like WACCI would hasten the transformation of agriculture in Africa for agribusinesses to flourish for sustainable development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). I shall not sleep until our graduate schools in plant breeding and related fields are as good as the top tier graduate schools globally, and until the day the students who wish to research on African crops globally choose WACCI as their first choice destination for graduate education and post doctoral research.

I dedicate this prize to Dr. Ronnie Coffman of Cornell University, my WACCI team and Dr. John Barrett of blessed memory who was my Masters and PhD Supervisor at Cambridge University.

I cannot end this speech without sharing this short story. A couple of weeks after John Barrett’s demise, I received a letter written in ink from John’s mum, then 83 years old. She said Eric, I do not know whether you have heard about John’s demise. I am writing to you because John never stopped talking about you. He said you were different from the other African students he had taught and supervised in Cambridge and Liverpool. He believed in you and said you would achieve something great for Africa. She concluded, Eric, follow your dreams.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I intend to use my prize money to establish a Foundation to support and encourage talented but needy students to study agriculture at the University of Ghana. I hope the Foundation will grow in my lifetime with support from institutions and philanthropists globally to train NextGen Agricultural Scientists who

would be the game changers and history makers for the future of food and agriculture in our changing, growing and hungry world. Thank you again, for this prestigious award.