

**Speech by HE Geoff Tooth, Australian High Commissioner to
Uganda, to the ACIAR Trees for Food Security Inception Workshop
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I am delighted to be here today to help launch “Improving
Sustainable Productivity in Farming Systems and Enhanced
Livelihoods through Adoption of Evergreen Agriculture in Eastern
Africa,” a very long title which I will henceforth reduce to “Trees for
Food Security!”

Ladies and gentlemen,

Winston Churchill is frequently said to have coined the title “Pearl of
Africa” for Uganda in his famous 1908 book on his African journeys.
But modern researchers suggest he purloined a phrase that had been
first used much earlier by the explorer Henry Stanley. What Churchill
did tell the world in 1908 though was to “concentrate on Uganda”
which he said was “from end to end a beautiful garden” with an
“exuberance of vegetation”.

And concentrating on Ugandan agriculture is indeed what we are
doing today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This project is proudly supported by the Australian International Food Security Research Centre. I was of course thrilled that in October 2012, the Food Security Centre opened its office in Nairobi. I'm similarly pleased that "Trees for Food Security" - it's first project - is now expanding to Uganda after successful forays in Ethiopia and Rwanda.

My colleagues have given you all the information you need on the work of the Centre and on this project. So my job today is to give you a picture of the broader context of Australia's engagement in agriculture in Africa, with an emphasis on East Africa and our host for this meeting.

Agriculture and food security have been a major focus of Australia's engagement with East Africa for many years. This emphasis has recently sharpened as part of Australia's aspiration to focus its aid more clearly on supporting economic growth in Africa and Africa's economic and trade links to Australia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Australia's experience and expertise in agriculture is particularly relevant to Africa, perhaps more so than that of any other industrialised country. Agriculture has been central to Australia's own economic development. It was once said that Australia "rode on the sheep's back" - a reference to the fact that for a century up to the 1950s, the wool industry helped give Australia one of the highest living standards in the world. But that had to change.

Today, Australia has one of the world's most efficient, diverse and innovative agricultural sectors. And it has developed its agriculture industry in the face of challenging agro-ecological conditions that are strikingly similar to those found in much of eastern and southern

Africa. Droughts, floods, heat, pests, poor soils and uncertain water supplies are familiar challenges to farming life in both rural Australia and rural Africa. Emerging from this experience, Australian support to African agriculture has four prongs:

The first of these, and our principle focus, is on agricultural research and innovation – supporting the science agenda of the African Union’s CAADP program. As you have heard, this includes the programs of ACIAR and the Food Security Centre. In addition, we support a partnership between Biosciences East and Central Africa – or BecA – and Australia’s Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation – or CSIRO.

This partnership has supported a range of agricultural research topics, and has a strong emphasis on taking the products of research to be adopted for the benefit of smallholder farmers and the rural poor.

For example, this partnership helped develop a thermostable vaccine for *peste des petits ruminant* – or PPR – a viral disease that affects sheep and goats. As part of this program, the partnership is working with the relevant government agencies and community animal health workers in Uganda to pilot practical ways of delivering these vaccines to poor pastoralists in Karamoja district as part of a global effort to progressively eliminate PPR.

In another example, our good friends at BecA are working with the District Veterinary Services in Busia and Tororo districts of Uganda – and with their counterparts across the border in Kenya – to develop and trial an integrated approach to controlling African Swine Fever.

Secondly, Australia has put a considerable emphasis on training and human resource development through its Australia Awards program,

which provides scholarships and fellowships for long-term and short course training in Australia. Uganda has participated strongly in this program – indeed Australia was the largest donor of scholarships to Uganda in 2013.

Agriculture is a key sector of focus for these Awards. Minister I'm sure you will be pleased to hear that, in 2013 alone, Ugandan awardees took up 10 Masters degree scholarships in the agricultural sciences, as well as 2 for PhDs in agriculture and 7 for short-term training in the field.

Thirdly, we are supporting rural markets and greater engagement of the private sector in the agriculture sector. The main instrument for this is the Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund. Specifically, Australia supports the “Research into Business” window, which encourages businesses to commercialise proven research innovations and take them to scale.

Fourthly, Australian NGOs are working with their African partners to improve the livelihoods of rural communities through the Australia-Africa Community Engagement Scheme.

For example, ActionAid Australia and its local partners are supporting farmers in Uganda to increase sustainable crop yields and to influence government climate change programs, while Plan International Australia works with its Ugandan partners to ensure that marginalised rural women and young people are able to claim rights and access to services – with a focus on rights to land.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Jeffery Sachs argues that “the end of extreme poverty is within reach” and to achieve it Africa must invest in its smallholder farmers.

Countries like Uganda do have the capacity to feed both their own people and sell surplus food to world markets. To do this agricultural innovations and better practice now need to be put into the hands of African farmers. Scientific approaches and traditional knowledge need to be brought together. Trees for food security will help us do just that and Australia is delighted to be part of this important story.

Thank you for listening to me today. I wish you all the best for your discussions this week and into the future.