

OPENING REMARKS

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WEBINAR ON “AFRICAN REGIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP ON JUNCAO TECHNOLOGY AND ITS SUPPORT TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND THE SDGS”

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Distinguished Participants,
Professor Lin Zhanxi,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, I am pleased to welcome all of you to this online “African Regional Capacity Building Workshop on Juncao Technology and its Support to Achieve Sustainable Agriculture and the SDGs.”

This workshop was originally supposed to be held in Kenya in February last year but had to be canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, thanks to technology, we are able to meet virtually and exchange ideas on the contribution of science, technology and innovation to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals as well as AU Agenda 2063.

It is also a great pleasure to have the inventor of the Juncao technology, Professor Lin Zhanxi deliver remarks today. His invention is helping to improve people's lives and livelihoods in more than 100 countries across the world. I am excited to hear from you and Dr. Dongmei LIN today.

I also look forward to hearing from the other speakers as your perspectives and the success stories you will share with us today will further inform us how African countries can fully leverage the benefits of this agricultural technology to fight poverty and hunger, harness opportunities along agri-value chains, and mitigate the impacts of ongoing climate change.

In September 2019, the Secretary-General launched the Decade of Action and Delivery and urged countries, development partners, and society at large to scale up actions to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, including a minimum set of investments to eradicate extreme poverty.

These investments include the transfer of appropriate technologies to developing countries.

However, as we meet today, the foundations of our world have been shaken to the core by the COVID-19 pandemic which has morphed into a health, social and economic crisis. The COVID-19 crisis has pushed us towards the worst recession in decades, with terrible consequences for the poor, women, youth, and people living in vulnerable situations.

Of great concern is the rise in poverty and hunger.

The number of people living in extreme poverty increased by between 88 and 115 million people in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, reversing global progress to eradicate poverty.

In addition, because of the impacts of the pandemic on agri-food systems, an additional 83 to 132 million people were added to the numbers of the hungry by the end of 2020.

As the effects of the pandemic continue, SDGs 1 and 2 will not be met if urgent and transformative action is not taken.

There is a need for a long-term, multisectoral COVID-19 response and a bold recovery plan that includes those who were already poor and hungry, disadvantaged and marginalized before the pandemic.

A bold recovery should also aim at building back better a sustainable, resilient and more equitable economy and society that prioritizes investments in areas such as agriculture, climate change mitigation, social protection, and tackling inequalities between and within countries.

Besides these challenges, the United Nations also projects that more than half of global population growth, from 7.7 billion in 2019 to 9.7 billion in 2050 is expected to occur in Africa, with the population of sub-Saharan Africa projected to double by 2050.

We also know that urbanization will continue at an accelerated pace, with the population living in urban areas making up 70 per cent of the world's population in 2050 compared to 49 per cent today. Income levels and the size of the middle class will also continue to increase, developments that will result in changes not only to consumption patterns, but in increased food demand. To accommodate these megatrends, FAO estimates that the world will need to produce as much as 70 per cent more food by 2050.

Because of these mega trends, countries continue to deliberate how they can, in partnership with the private sector, civil society organizations, academia and other stakeholders, design and implement policies and strategies covering the three pillars of sustainable development - social, economic and environmental – that can improve the livelihoods of people, in particular the poor and people living in vulnerable situations.

What makes me excited is the hope that is offered by advances in science and technology such as the Juncao technology that is making a difference where it matters the most: at the local and community level, to the lives of smallholder and family farmers, women, children, and persons with disabilities – those most at risk of being left behind.

We at the UN see Prof. Lin and the Juncao technology as an example of academic excellence and a real game-changer on the ground.

It is not called “magic grass” for nothing!

By supporting mushroom cultivation, this technology is boosting food security and the transition to a green economy through environmentally friendly technology, more sustainable agriculture, and green jobs.

It is also helping to fight land degradation by producing cattle feed and minimizing soil erosion.

Let me give you one example of a young entrepreneur from Rwanda who, after receiving training at the Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University (FAFU), set up an agricultural company in Rwanda. Today, this company produces between 10,000-20,000 mushroom substrate packs with a net income of US\$3,000-US\$5,000 per month.

Today we will hear about such success stories.

The Juncao Project which was launched in 2017 with the generous support from the People's Republic of China, underscores the importance of the transfer of technology through north-south, south-south and triangular cooperation for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The innovation that was developed at the Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University has shown the potential of a single innovation – if nurtured and deployed wisely – to change lives and improve livelihoods in developing countries.

The Juncao technology's success is also an example of why we need to invest in science and technology – and education. While the first phase of the Project is rounding its last quarter of implementation, we are developing new activities in the second phase.

Together with FAFU, we will organize online training courses and study tours to further promote the transfer, adoption and use of Juncao technology.

We also hope to provide small research grants to local experts in the pilot countries, which will further contribute to strengthening national institutional capacity to conduct research on localizing Juncao technology, and to provide extension services to the farmers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This workshop marks the start of a new journey and I encourage all of you to stay engaged, and exchange experiences and lessons learned that will contribute to promoting sustainable agriculture in Africa.

I trust that that you will find this workshop interesting and fruitful, and we wish you all success.

Thank you.
