

**Breakthrough  
with  
Prof M.K Othman (PhD)**

mkothman@gmail.com

**Meeting American Ambassador Kenneth  
M. Quinn: Finding Hope In A Hungry World**

**M**y recent three weeks sojourn to United States of America took me to the Hall of Laureates of the World Food Prize Foundation at the Des Moines, Iowa State. It was a mission full of spectacular experience with amazing outcomes whose memory will ever remain refreshing in my life. After a three hours' drive from Lincoln, we arrived Des Moines at 12 noon, scheduled time for the lunch meeting with Ambassador Kenneth Quinn. After the formal introduction with amiable staff of the Foundation, I and my team members; Prof Chris Daudu and Dr Bala Shehu were ushered into the venue of the lunch when the Ambassador briskly appeared with an affable smile and warmth welcome. His voice was resonating, reminding me that "I had heard this voice before" but couldn't recall where and when. However, in the course of our discussion, it became clear that he was a keynote speaker of an event I participated in a week earlier. The event was the annual International Conference of American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE), which was held in Spokane, Washington State. It was a forum for acknowledging innovations in design and technology and creation of opportunities for professional development in Agricultural and Biological Engineering - with a focus on the global economic, political and societal impacts facing agriculture. Over 1,700 Agricultural Engineers across the globe gathered at the Convention center of Spokane for the four days, packed-full of activities (6:30 am to 9 pm). The choice of Ambassador Quinn as the keynote speaker was an apt and timely one in the face of global food insecurity - hunger and poverty; the twin sisters who are inseparable, wherever one is, the other is lurking behind scene. There couldn't have been a better choice. Bravo 2017 ASABE Organisers!

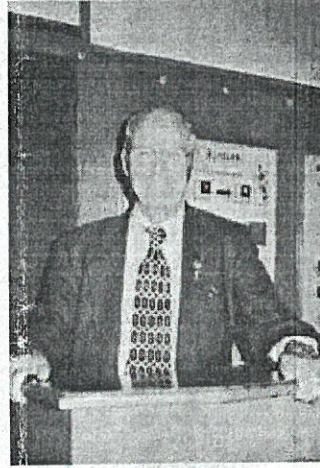
Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn, former U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Cambodia, is the president of World Food Prize Foundation, which he assumed since January 1, 2000. This was immediately after his retirement from public service. He served the US State Department for 32 years as a career diplomat in the Foreign Service. The Ambassador joined the foundation as a result of inspiration by Dr. Norman E. Borlaug's vision who founded the World Food Prize in 1986. Ambassador Quinn built this legendary annual event and raised it for an annual award of \$250,000 into the "Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture." The event holds every October 16th in Des Moines, coinciding with World Food Day. The foundation has many soul touching



Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn

activities; The World Food Prize Laureate Award Ceremony, Borlaug Dialogue international symposium and Global Youth Institute. These have grown in size and stature under the formidable leadership of Ambassador Quinn. Today, the Hall of Laureates of the Foundation occupies the historic Des Moines Public Library, a building designed to achieve LEED Platinum certification, the highest possible level of energy efficiency and resource conservation. This is to the credit of Ambassador Quinn with an active support of the John Ruan family, who championed the campaign that successfully raised \$29.8 million to restore and transform the old library into the World Food Prize Dr. Norman E. Borlaug Hall of Laureates.

Pleasantly, the 2017 World Food Prize Laureate was won by one of us, a famous Nigerian; Dr Akinwumi Adesina, immediate past Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. Dr Adesina is the current president of the African Development Bank. He is being honoured as "2017 World Food Prize Laureate for his leading role over the past decade", he significantly expanded food production in Nigeria by introducing "initiatives to exponentially increase the availability of credit for smallholder farmers across the African continent". As minister, Adesina's policy expanded Nigeria's food production by 21 metric tons and the country attracted \$5.6 billion in private sector investment in agriculture. Adesina is the first Nigerian to win the prize and fourth in Africa to be so awarded since 1987 when M. S. Swaminathan, an Indian became the first to win the prize. In addition to Adesina's giant achievement, it was also heartwarming for us to notice the picture of former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo hanging amid the pictures of Board members in the hall of this famous international Foundation.



Dr Norman E. Borlaug

Nigeria, a giant of Africa, may be facing several developmental challenges at home but has some sons and daughters whose positive contributions to global arena are dually recognised and part of this credit must go to our nation.

"Hunger is a menace to individuals, families and nations, it has to be first subdued or eradicated before facing other needs. To buttress this point, let me quote the statement of Dr Richard Berkland, the vice president of Valmont International, Valley who said "we must fulfill physiological needs before we can truly address and make progress on higher - level needs". Maslow's hierarchy of needs best illustrates this statement, we have to fulfill physiological needs (hunger, thirst, air), then move to safety (personal, financial security, health), move up to social needs, esteem, cognitive, aesthetic and finally to self-actualisation. Therefore, hunger is a big issue to humanity and it is rearing its ugly face especially in the developing countries. José Graziano da Silva, FAO Director-General presented this reality at the 2015 annual State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI) as he was quoted saying "Hunger remains an everyday challenge for almost 795 million people worldwide, including 780 million in developing regions. Thus, hunger eradication should remain a key commitment of decision-makers at all levels". The World Food Prize Foundation was principally established



**we must fulfill physiological needs before we can truly address and make progress on higher - level needs**

to fight global hunger through according recognition to the achievements of individuals who have advanced human development by improving the quality, quantity or availability of food in the world.

A visitor to this edifice, the World Food Prize Foundation, must conspicuously recognise the collective breakthrough of four men of fame; Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn, Mr. John Ruan and Mr. Howard G. Buffett, respectively. Each of these men had his name imprinted in gold in the strenuous global fight against hunger and extreme poverty. Although the fight is not won and may not be easily won for a long time come, progress has been made. However, the progress in fighting hunger and the emerging challenges against food security are progressively moving at different rates; the latter is moving at an exponential rate while the former moves at arithmetic progression. To x-ray the struggle of these eminent men of distinction, one must start with the work of Norman Borlaug. Who was he?

Norman Ernest Borlaug was born on March 25, 1914 at a farmhouse near Cresco, Iowa State, USA. He was a son to a farming family of Henry and Clara Borlaug. He had his primary and secondary education in Cresco and proceeded to the University of Minnesota where he studied forestry. After completing his Bachelor of Science degree in 1937, he worked for the U.S. Forestry Service at stations in Massachusetts and Idaho. He returned to the University of Minnesota where he studied plant pathology at both Master's and doctorate degree levels in 1939 and 1942, respectively. He worked at the du Pont de Nemours Foundation as a researcher on industrial and agricultural bactericides, fungicides, and preservatives. In 1944, he was appointed as geneticist and plant pathologist, assigned the task of organising and directing the Cooperative Wheat Research and Production Program in Mexico. The programme was a collaborative effort between Mexican government and the Rockefeller Foundation. It involved complete scientific research in genetics, plant breeding, plant pathology, entomology, agronomy, soil science, and cereal technology. Within 20 years of his career, Dr. Borlaug was spectacularly successful in finding high-yielding short-straw, disease-resistant wheat. This was a historic milestone in the scientific career of Dr. Borlaug. Added to this scientific goal, was his practical humanitarian posture. Thus, he worked hard to put the new wheat strains into extensive production for the purpose of feeding the hungry people of the world. (To be continued next week).

Temper is so good a thing that we should never lose it.





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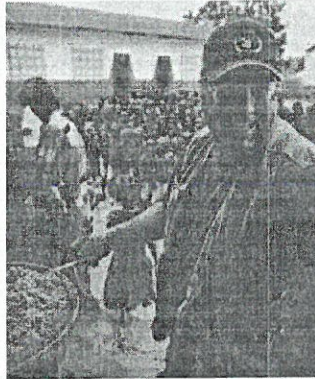
mkothman@gmail.com

# Meeting American Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn: Finding Hope In A Hungry World II

**D**r. Borlaug's career as agricultural scientist was spectacularly successful. As mentioned in my first part of this article, he was able to fabulously achieve a historic milestone of his career within 20 years of service when he bred a high-yielding short-straw, disease-resistant variety of wheat. Added to this scientific goal, was his practical humanitarian posture. Thus, he worked hard to put the new wheat strains into extensive production for the purpose of feeding the hungry people of the world. This success thrilled him and the scientific world, he astoundingly described his breakthrough as "a temporary success in man's war against hunger and deprivation, a breathing space in which to deal with the "Population Monster" and the subsequent environmental and social ills that too often lead to conflict between men and between nations". The scientific and humanitarian mien of Borlaug made him crisscross the globe to visit many countries; India, Pakistan, Latin America, Middle East and several African countries.

To us in Nigeria, Dr. Borlaug was a famous hero for the wheat and maize farmers of Kano, Saminaka, Bauchi and the host of other farming communities in the country. He raised the yield of maize from mere average of 1.5 to 8 tons per hectare with his improved varieties and practices. This was done under the auspices of SASAKAWA Global 2000, popularly known as SG 2000 (reader can refer to my article in October, 2015 for more information on SG 2000).

Borlaug's adventure into Africa was initiated and facilitated by Mr. Ryoichi Sasakawa, the chairman of the Japanese Shipbuilding Industry Foundation (JSIF). Mr. Ryoichi was a first class philanthropist. He was the first to fly aid into Africa when the continent was devastated by the worst famine of the 1980s. About 20 countries were hit with a consequential colossal loss of human dignity that greatly shocked the whole world. The worst affected countries were those located in Sub Sahara region. Mr. Ryoichi was fully aware that flying in food items was only an immediate solution to the food crisis and the permanent solution is attacking the underlying causes of Africa's food crisis, not just the symptoms. Thus, he was fully aware that the permanent and sustainable solution to the menacing food crisis could only come from the use of improved agricultural production. This must involve the use of high-yielding crop varieties and improved agronomic practices. Looking for this solution led Mr. Ryoichi to engage the services of a renowned scientist, Mr. Norman E. Borlaug, a Nobel Peace Prize

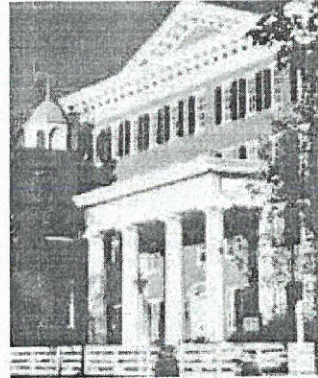


Buffett

winner who eventually became the president, Sasakawa Africa Association, and Senior Consultant, Global 2000. At the same time, former U.S. President, Jimmy Carter, also deeply concerned about Africa's food production crisis and looking for ways to help solve it, offered his collaboration and assistance, especially in the policy making arena and mobilisation of African leaders, which was critical to overcoming the many problems plaguing agricultural development in Africa.

In January 1986, Mr. Sasakawa, President Carter, Dr. Leslie Swindale (director general of ICRISAT) and Dr. Borlaug visited several Africa nations for discussions with government leaders about the prospects of establishing action-oriented, food crop technology transfer projects. They found strong interest for their proposals. Consequently, two agricultural development projects were launched in Sudan and Ghana, which was successfully managed by SG 2000 with gorgeous results.

Dr. Borlaug visited Nigeria in 1992 when SG 2000 came to Nigeria. He saw the successful take off of the SG 2000 in Kano, Kaduna and Bauchi States. He came back in 1993 when he witnessed the field day of wheat in Kadawa, Kano State. To the incredulity of the audience, the trial field of wheat at Kadawa demonstrated the efficacy of Borlaug's wheat variety. The new variety, code named "Seri-82" developed by Borlaug, brought into Nigeria, yielded about four tons per hectare against the 1.5 tons per hectare using local variety under the same farmer's management. Dr. Borlaug returned into the country a year after when he visited Saminaka town in Kaduna State for the maize field day. He discovered another improved variety of maize being promoted by the same scientist that yielded about eight tons per hectare against 2.5 tons per hectare when local variety was used. He made another visit in 2001 when he presented a paper during the



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National Maize Workshop at Assembly Hall of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. It was at that workshop, he told us, the audience (I was one of them) that he was aware of the much talk about "Nigerian potential" but "people cannot eat potential and potential is only useful to us when it is converted into tangible result".

Dr. Borlaug was very optimistic that Africa will make a green revolution with appropriate support and commitment of the African leaders. His famous message at all times even at the time of his demise was, "take it to the farmer". He was certainly a darling to small-scale farmers, a good ally to large farmers and a mentor/inspirer/guardian to the agricultural scientists. No wonder, when one of his students developed a most promising variety of wheat, he code named it "Norman", after the first name of Borlaug. This new variety of wheat gives as much as eight tons per hectare. One of the testimonies showing Borlaug's deep love for Africa was the event of 15th October, 2014 during the launching of innovative social enterprise projects to address hunger and poverty in Liberia, Malawi, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. During the occasion, Amb. Kenneth M. Quinn, president of The World Food Prize stated that "World Food Prize founder, Dr. Norman Borlaug's two most ardent wishes were to promote development in Africa and to inspire



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the next generation". Thus, the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, the Tony Blair Africa Governance Initiative (AGI), and the World Food Prize Foundation named four young entrepreneurs under age 40 as the recipients of \$150,000.

Mr. Howard G. Buffett is another dignitary among the four men of fame whose significant contribution brought the World Food Prize Foundation to its current global rating. Howard Graham Buffett was born on 16th December, 1954 to the billionaire investor, Warren Buffett. Mr. Howard is an American businessman, former politician, philanthropist, photographer, farmer, and conservationist. He was named after Howard Buffett, his grandfather, and Benjamin Graham, Warren Buffett's favourite professor. He is the chairman of Howard Buffett Foundation, which was established in 1999. The foundation mission is to "catalyse transformational change, particularly for the world's most impoverished and marginalised populations." The online 2015 annual report of the foundation states that fund is invested in three main areas: Food Security, Conflict Mitigation and Public Safety. The support for global food security "is directed toward agricultural resource development and management for smallholder farmers in the developing world". The report added "We support a range of investments in agriculture including research, conservation-based production practices, water resource management and advocacy to promote the best ideas that will have the broadest impact on the most vulnerable and under-resourced producers". The Foundation started with total assets of less than 50 million USD in 2000 but rose to over 250 million USD in 2015.

By all measures, Mr. Howard G. Buffett is a humanitarian per excellence, this is better understood when you read his famous book "40 Chances: Finding Hope in a Hungry World". Part of the title for this article is borrowed from the title of Howard Buffett's book. This is because the overall goal of World Food Prize Foundation is to provide food to the weak and hungry through various strategies. The lesson from this book is clearly stated, "Each of us has about 40 chances to accomplish our goals in life. This is a lesson Howard learned through his passion for farming. All farmers can expect to have about 40 growing seasons, giving them just 40 chances to improve on every harvest. This applies to all of us, however, because we all have about 40 productive years to do the best job we can, whatever our passions or goals may be". This was certainly an inspiring statement that moves one into action (To be continued next week).

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inkothman@gmail.com

## Meeting American Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn: Finding Hope In A Hungry World III

Mr. Howard G. Buffett is a humanitarian per excellence and a first class photographer, a realist whose spoken and unspoken messages are strong enough to move "mountains". He wrote in his famous book; "I have found once I witnessed unnecessary death in our world, complacency is no longer an option. Once I met children who were drugged and turned into killers, I couldn't pretend it should be someone else's problem. And once I saw an entire generation of children in a refugee camp who had their future stolen, it changed me forever. I couldn't just go home and forget they existed". His altruistic demeanor took him to 130 countries working and living out of his comfort zone, sometimes in life threatening circumstances, witnessing many things that continue to hunt him - "small children with shackles around their feet, slaves both to hunger and those who captured them". He met many individuals who struggle on daily basis - a victim of human trafficking, forced prostitution, HIV, yet remain determined to press onwards in life - "hopeful that things will get better".

The Buffett's book, "40 chances: Finding Hope in a Hungry World" is a book with real-life pictures that speak loud and clear messages on the sturdy need for the world to address human tragedy. A tragedy of "sleeping with empty stomach" in midst of plenty, a tragedy of questioning the "humanity in us", deliberate creation of conflicts to serve human ego and many similar antecedents. In those 44 years when he crisscrossed 130 countries in six continents, Buffett's defined moment came, he was faced with sardonicism of life that malnourished people could be seen anywhere, even at his backyard, West Virginia where he spotted Everett in 2001. "We visited Everett for a long time, and learned of his service in World War II and his love for his country; but also learned that his country had forgotten his sacrifice. He was old, tired and hungry". The Everest case might be an isolated one in a developed country like USA but it is a most common case in our countries. One can vividly remember the case of retired men and women who littered the streets of Abuja some years back. They were dejected, homeless, and hopeless; in miserable conditions with no gratuity or pension and ignored by the society. They were symbols of national disgrace. Thank God that the situation is changing. Another defining moment when Buffett met Dennis Avery; "sometimes in life, someone makes a statement that changes your thinking, may be even your direction in life...in 1992, I had focused my philanthropy on



Ruan

conservation initiatives such as cheetah preservation and mountain gorillas... but Dennis' statement that "no will starve to save a tree" became a clarifying moment". It made him to understand that "maximising agricultural production on a well-suited land can meet the food needs of people while preventing the conversion of important ecosystems into farm lands". These defined moments made Buffett to invest millions of USD in philanthropy to create hopes for the hopeless while protecting the world's most endangered species and natural habitats. The phrase "no one will starve to save a tree" has made him to accept that the world contains some people who have little choice in how they treat nature but there are millions with options who must demonstrate the will to stand "our ground to put the future of our planet ahead of our own self-interest" as failure will disrupt life's delicate balance with severed consequences. This was the story of one of the four men of fame, the pillars of World Food Prize Foundation at Des Moines, Iowa State, USA.

Mr. John Ruan is the last but not the least in the four men of fame as mentioned in the first part of this article. He was an important pillar to the Foundation, in fact, he was acclaimed to be the founder of the World Food Prize Foundation and a longtime sponsor for its annual Prize. In 1997, Ruan endowed the World Food Prize with a \$10 million gift. Since then, the Foundation had grown from strength to strength and became a global symbol for the creation of hopes for the people down the ladder, looming in abject poverty and misery across the world. Ruan was born in 1914 in Iowa State, had his university degree in Business Administration, Northwestern University, and was a graduate of the Program for Management Development at Harvard Business School. He was a consummate business icon who established his business outfit at the age of 18 during his undergraduate program. Ruan started his company on July 4, 1932 when his university tuition money



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ran out. He traded the family car for a truck and quickly found success, growing to three trucks hauling coal within a year. At the time of his demise, Ruan employed more than 4,700, operated 3,300 power units, 5,400 trailers and managed over 550,000 logistics shipments annually with revenues exceeding \$860 million. Of course, his business empire was built over many decades through dint of hard work, dedication, acumen and destiny. John Ruan was driven by grit and determination during the period of economic depression, he ventured a one-truck business into Ruan Transportation Management Systems that became one of the American leading trucking, leasing, and logistics companies. The trucking business made John Ruan one of the wealthiest and most influential personalities in Iowa. That was the foundation for his vast fortune, which included interests in insurance, banking, financial services, international trade, and real estate.

In the 1970s and 80s, Ruan led Des Moines's renaissance with the construction of the 36-story original Ruan Centre, the Marriott Hotel tower, and the Two Ruan Centre office complex. In addition to successful management of Business Kingdom, Ruan sought out ways to help the less fortunate, privileged people. He recognised hunger



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and poverty as a major challenge in the world, Ruan set up the World Food Prize Foundation in 1990. Each year, the organisation awards the international World Food Prize to acknowledge individuals who have advanced human development by improving the quality, quantity or availability of food in the world. His humanitarian mien made him establish other philanthropic outlets. The John Ruan Multiple Sclerosis Golf Exhibition, is one of the largest charity fund-raising events in the United States. Ruan used the fund raised from the event to support ongoing research at Rush-Presbyterian-St. Lukes MS Clinic in Chicago, Illinois. Mr. Ruan also sponsored the Ruan Neuroscience Centre at Mercy Medical Centre in Des Moines, Iowa. One of the top-ranked facilities of its kind, the Centre provides quality care for people around the globe. Mr. Ruan passed away on February 13, 2010, at the age of 96. More than 600 people paid him tribute at a Celebration of Life ceremony held on February 18, 2010. He left his wife, Elizabeth; son, John III, six grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren. His daughter, Elizabeth Jayne Ruan Fletcher, and son Thomas Ruan died before him. Accolades on Mr. John Ruan are the testimonies of life of a great man whose legacy outlived him. "John Ruan was a recognised leader in business, education, and community, he was the visionary who formed the World Food Prize. But most importantly, he was a man of courage and conviction, a leader who made others stronger and better because they knew him," said Thomas Donahue, president and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce who was quoted by an online publication. "John knew what the Prize could become. He knew it would be the centerpiece to help solve world hunger and bring glory to Iowa," said Ambassador Kenneth M. Quinn, president of The World Food Prize Foundation.

The collective breakthrough by the four men of fame is inspiring with many lessons for us in Nigeria. The major lesson is how four men with diverse professions; two accomplished business men (Buffett and Ruan), a renowned scientist (Borlaug) and a retired diplomat (Quin) linked by personal desire to fight hunger and poverty at global level, built the world food prize foundation to its current efficacious status. Nigeria is blessed with men and women who excelled in their various disciplines at global arena. These distinguished personalities could come together to establish a joint foundation for the facilitation of community development programs, conflicts resolution and promotion of unity in diversity. I hope the Dangotes, Adetolas, and many others are hearing me. The history can start today.

Temper is so good a thing that we should never lose it.