



Since July 2014 Professor Louise O. Fresco has been serving as President of Wageningen University and Research, in the Netherlands. She combines a long academic career as a professor in Wageningen and Amsterdam, with various visiting professorships, and an extensive involvement in policy and development. She is a member of the Dutch Royal Academy of Sciences and of four foreign Academies, as well as Distinguished Visiting Scholar at the Academy of Sciences of South Africa. She served for nearly ten years as an assistant-director general at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN. She received two national prizes – Comenius and Groeneveld – for her work. Professor Fresco serves as a non-executive director of Unilever and is a member of the Council of Advisors of the World Food Prize. She is also involved in many philanthropic and cultural foundations and has twelve non-scientific books published in Dutch, including three novels. She recently visited Addis Ababa as the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Ethiopian government launched, BENEFIT, an agricultural program that focuses on integrating all projects that have already been implemented in five major regions with high potential for cash crops. Henok Reta of *The Reporter* sat down with her for an exclusive interview at Elilly International Hotel during the launch program. Excerpts:

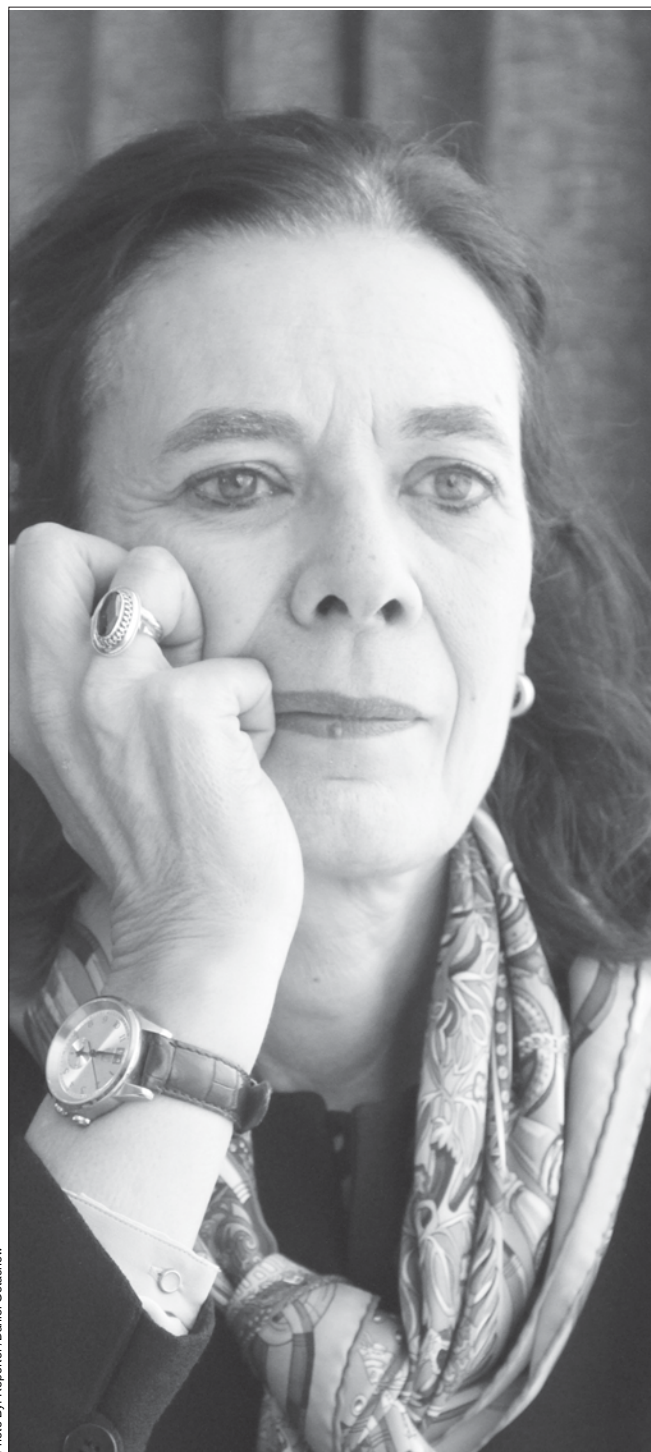


Photo By: Reporter/Daniel Getachew

A concerted attempt to excel in agriculture

The Reporter: For how long has the academic and research cooperation between Wageningen and Ethiopia existed?

Lousia O. Fresco (Prof.): It has been almost forty years since academic and research cooperation between Wageningen University and Ethiopia existed. Over the years we have seen many alumni from Ethiopia including the current president of Addis Ababa University, Admasu Tsegaye (Prof.). We are the number one institute in the world to have this significant cooperation particularly with Africa. So far, we have admitted more than five hundred PhD candidates from Ethiopia. For us, it is very important to stay close to Africa. I would also like to mention that we have, so far, accepted more than twelve hundred PhD candidates from Africa.

Ethiopia is a special country for us and we want to remain a great partner for its development in the agriculture sector by offering scholarships in specific fields that have, up to now, produced highly qualified agricultural experts and researchers.

How do you evaluate the impact of this longstanding cooperation?

The cooperation has contributed a lot in terms of offering scholarships for African students. The education they received has helped them and their continent realize its massive potential in agriculture. We have always been positive about the potential Africa has in agriculture. However, there are many factors hindering the sector from growing. In fact, most African nations show their commitment for the sector through a program called CAADP (Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Program) of the Maputo Agreement. Ethiopia and Ghana are the leading countries in taking it seriously and have the willingness to work hard in realizing their potential of becoming strong economies.

I'm pleased to see how things have changed since I first visited Ethiopia in the 1980s. I know a lot of things remain to be done but the start is quite good and changes do not come quickly anywhere. I think the country is doing well in making its economy better and there is progress in the agriculture sector, which is the backbone of the economy.

What specific progress have you noticed

and what are the bottlenecks?

As far as I'm concerned, the sector has a contrasting image particularly when highlighting success stories and the current drought. Agriculture is still rain-fed and subsistence despite the government's effort to promote investment in the sector. The crop production in some regions has seen positive results due to the strategy the government has put in place in the Growth and Transformation Plan. However, at the same time, more people are leaving their farms to join the construction sector, which is currently booming in cities, or be employed in one of the large commercial farms.

I think the best way to grow is the one that combines both small scale-farming and large-scale farming. Now more people are out of small-scale farming because of various reasons and one reason is their desire to work on mechanized farming, which is owned by private investors. There would be more production on a small plot when you get the best out of it and that is what's going on in Ethiopia. Access to seeds, fertilizers and modern technology should be fully realized in making the sector better. It requires more effort and time. I think there are problems related to capacity building and perhaps weakness in realizing a holistic approach to managing crop and livestock at the same time. So, there should be a common understanding among the players in the sector. Many developed countries have gone through similar challenges and I think Ethiopia would succeed by putting in place the necessary strategies.

What makes African agriculture students and experts interested in joining Wageningen and are there specific reasons for offering these opportunities?

We do not have a specific western model to teach or train Africans. We stand out as the first destination for the candidates because we know each other very well. We come to Africa and Africa comes to us. We know the problems and what the solutions should be. I have been visiting Africa ever since I was a student and in my trips I have acquired important lessons. I have developed a certain type of understanding about Africa's agriculture. By frequently coming here, we have a lot to provide.

We have many students from different parts of the world including Africa but we are not here to parachute European solutions to Africa. What we do is assist you in finding your own solutions. For instance, Ethiopia learned about the importance of having agricultural institutions from us and that led to the opening of several agricultural research institutes. That is what we have to bring to Africa; that is beyond knowledge and techniques. I think one of the reasons

country in the world has become industrialized without agriculture. You need to exert massive efforts to reduce the enormous loss in harvesting, storage, humidity and transportation. Moreover, isolation in some remote areas, where farmers have no access to information on crop price and disease, has to be looked into.

What is your comment with regard to the criticisms some have towards the government's policies?

the problems of the farmers. However, their work is mostly limited since they do not have well-equipped research centers. They still manage to support the farmers and conduct researches at the universities and other similar institutions. On the other hand, their contributions might not be that noticeable since the problem here is at a national level.

Farming is not an easy job. It has its own difficulties and restricts all the



why African governments like to work with us is because we spend a lot of time creating linkages between government institutions, members of the private sector and universities. We have managed to work with six universities and several other institutions in Ethiopia alone.

But why is the result lagging behind?

I don't think the result is something that happens in a short period of time or in a specific period amidst action. You need time to evaluate your procedures and come up with other mechanisms. There must be a comprehensive approach to develop agriculture. The private sector has a great role to play alongside the government because the government can't always find gold or bake bread. Moreover, you need centers of excellence to prove that you are on the right track ahead of your goals. These centers of excellence are built when you have the exposure and trainings abroad because that is the right platform for interaction and exchange.

More than half of the students we have are from outside of the Netherlands. That will help them discuss their problems and look for a means of tackling it. Ethiopia, in particular, should work on increasing its efforts of solving the problems through capacity building at regional levels as it follows a complex administration structure. It has to be understood that agriculture is the only way to develop. No other

I think the policies have to be exclusive and they should be carved from deep analyses and experience to bring about change. In my experience, the policies would be nothing if they fail to make the private sector vibrant. The private sector is instrumental in attracting investment. The Ethiopian government has been doing good but the gaps that exist with key stakeholders should be thoroughly looked into. We have to know that there is no magic solution elsewhere but the solution is not far away from us. Yes, the yield is very low at the moment and you may need more effort to increase production so by applying the stated recommendations you will be able to find the solution.

Ethiopia is a very diverse country with different weather conditions so you need to have a specific application for every situation. You need to have quality application that go in line with the situation on the ground. The other most important thing is transforming smallholder farmers into entrepreneurs in farming. I have never found a small-scale farmer in my life who wants to remain a farmer and they all told me they want to move up to entrepreneurship. So that is something policymakers should consider.

What contributions have your candidates made so far? Do you follow their progress?

We closely observe some of the progresses the candidates have made in Ethiopia, particularly in solving

players. When they get the time and space their contribution will indeed be witnessed. I understand the concern but it has to be understood that the problem is vast. There should be a massive coordinated effort at all levels and the sector has to be demand driven and not a supply driven one. You don't have to import food while having a tremendous potential of exporting it to the larger part of Africa. You have to know that Sub-Saharan Africa only produces 13 percent of the food with the remaining imported from other parts of the world. I think this has to change and if agriculture is going to take the lead, it should be given due attention from every stakeholder.

There have been arguments from both sides of the aisle over the introduction of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in the country. What is your take on this?

That is a global trend happening almost everywhere but there has to be a specific purpose to have these things. For example, you have a crop disease that affects a certain crop in a specific area and you need to develop a gene that can resist the disease or the bacteria. Or, you produce enormous amounts of potato almost every where in the country but a huge loss occurs because of storage and transportation issue again you might need a potato gene that stays longer on a shelf. So, in

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Exporting...

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One Road meets Chinese planners' expectations, the whole of Eurasia, from Indonesia to Poland will be transformed in the coming generation. China's model will blossom outside of China, raising incomes and thus demand for Chinese products to replace stagnating markets in other parts of the world. Polluting industries, too, will be offloaded to other parts of the world. Rather than being at the periphery of the global economy, Central Asia will be at its core. And China's form of authoritarian government will gain immense prestige, implying a large negative effect on democracy worldwide.

But there are important reasons to question whether One Belt, One Road will succeed. Infrastructure-led growth has worked well in China up to now because the Chinese government could control the political environment. This will not be the case abroad, where instability, conflict, and corruption will interfere with Chinese plans.

Indeed, China has already found itself confronting angry stakeholders, nationalistic legislators, and fickle friends in places like Ecuador and Venezuela, where it already has massive investments. China has dealt with restive Muslims in its own Xinjiang province largely through denial and repression; similar tactics won't work in Pakistan or Kazakhstan.

This does not mean, however, that the US and other Western governments should sit by complacently and wait for China to fail. The strategy of massive infrastructure development may have reached a limit inside China, and it may not work in foreign countries, but it is still critical to global growth.

The US used to build massive dams and road networks back in the 1950s and 1960s, until such projects fell out of fashion. Today, the US has relatively little to offer developing countries in this regard. President Barack Obama's Power Africa initiative is a good one, but it has been slow to get off the ground; efforts to build the Fort Liberté port in Haiti have been a fiasco.

The US should have become a founding member of the AIIB; it could yet join and move China toward greater compliance with international environmental, safety, and labor standards. At the same time, the US and other Western countries need to ask themselves why infrastructure has become so difficult to build, not just in developing countries but at home as well. Unless we do, we risk ceding the future of Eurasia and other important parts of the world to China and its development model.

Another slow....

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These problems are now being compounded by the growth slowdown in China, the fulcrum of global trade. And the worst is yet to come. China's huge industrial overcapacity and property glut needs to be wound down; the hubris driving its global acquisitions must be reined in; and its corruption networks have to be dismantled.

In short, the factors that dragged down the global economy in 2015 will persist – and in some cases even intensify – in the new year. Emerging economies will remain weak. The eurozone, having enjoyed a temporary reprieve from austerity, will be constrained by listless global trade. Rising interest rates on corporate bonds portend slower growth in the US. China's collapsing asset values could trigger financial turbulence. And policymakers are adrift, with little political leverage to stem these trends.

Ed.'s Note: Francis Fukuyama is a senior fellow at Stanford University and Director of the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law. His most recent book is Political Order and Political Decay. The article was provided to The Reporter by Project Syndicate: the world's pre-eminent source of original op-ed commentaries. Project Syndicate provides incisive perspectives on our changing world by those who are shaping its politics, economics, science, and culture. The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views of The Reporter.

The IMF should stop forecasting renewed growth and issue a warning that the global economy will remain weak and vulnerable unless world leaders act energetically to spur innovation and growth. Such an effort is long overdue.

Ed.'s Note: Ashoka Mody is Visiting Professor of International Economic Policy at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and a visiting fellow at Bruegel, the Brussels-based economic think tank. The article was provided to The Reporter by Project Syndicate: the world's pre-eminent source of original op-ed commentaries. Project Syndicate provides incisive perspectives on our changing world by those who are shaping its politics, economics, science, and culture. The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views of The Reporter.

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these situations you need to have GMOs to reduce loss. In specific cases and for specific purposes it's important despite being a complicated issue not only here but in many countries as well.

I think your government appears to be reluctant and there is lack of understanding amongst the politicians. Issues related to this are awaiting political decisions by African governments and that is excluding the continent from the rest of the world. It

has been exactly 20 years since GMOs were introduced in the world and I have never heard of any noticeable problem with it. Cassava – a popular African food for five hundred million people – has a couple of diseases that could be treated either through GMOs or hybridization. The concept of hybridization is also known in Africa for about seventy five years so why shouldn't GMOs be considered. Again, I would like to say that it has to be applied in a specific way for specific

Media council...

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The Code of Conduct and the Articles of Association of the Media Council are both expected to be endorsed at the meeting.

The issue of legal registration remains unresolved as the Charities and Societies Agency said that it is not within its mandate to register the Media Council. However, members of the organizing committee said that the government has promised to look into the matter.

The Council hopes to get its finance from three main sources including membership contributions, donations from domestic sources and fundraising activities.

Regarding the issue of external source of finance – including that of the government – the organizing committee indicated that they might use the democratic fund upon the approval of the general assembly.

According to the final draft Articles of Association, publishers, broadcasters, professional journalists' associations as well as private and public journalism schools can become members of the council on a voluntary basis.

By establishing an independent Media Council, the industry avoids a possibility of having a mandatory statutory media council which the government warned it would promulgate.

purposes.

There was a certain patent right saga a couple of years ago between Ethiopian experts and a Dutch company on Teff – an endemic Ethiopian crop. Do you have any information on that?

Actually, I don't know more about it but I heard something and I just want to say a patent right in agricultural products has its own methods to deal with. For example, there is a Monsanto patent right working in many countries worldwide and at the same time countries may have their specific patent right procedure and I think Ethiopian lawyers have the knowledge and understanding to deal with the matter.

A year of...

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adequate to rule out an outright default.

It should be noted, however, that while such a "credit event" would obviously be a big problem, creditors may be overstating its potential external impacts. They like to warn that although Puerto Rico is a commonwealth, not a state, its failure to service its debts would set a bad precedent for US states and municipalities.

But that precedent was set a long time ago. In the 1840s, nine US states stopped servicing their debts. Some eventually settled at full value; others did so at a discount; and several more repudiated a portion of their debt altogether. In the 1870s, another round of defaults engulfed 11 states. West Virginia's bout of default and restructuring lasted until

1919.

Some of the biggest risks lie in the emerging economies, which are suffering primarily from a sea change in the global economic environment. During China's infrastructure boom, it was importing huge volumes of commodities, pushing up their prices and, in turn, growth in the world's commodity exporters, including large emerging economies like Brazil. Add to that increased lending from China and huge capital inflows propelled by low US interest rates, and the emerging economies were thriving. The global economic crisis of 2008-2009 disrupted, but did not derail, this rapid growth, and emerging economies enjoyed an unusually crisis-free decade until early 2013.

But the US Federal Reserve's move to increase interest rates, together with slowing growth (and, in turn, investment) in China and collapsing oil and commodity prices, has brought the capital inflow bonanza to a halt. Lately, many emerging-market currencies

have slid sharply, increasing the cost of servicing external dollar debts. Export and public-sector revenues have declined, giving way to widening current-account and fiscal deficits. Growth and investment have slowed almost across the board.

From a historical perspective, the emerging economies seem to be headed toward a major crisis. Of course, they may prove more resilient than their predecessors. But we shouldn't count on it.

Ed.'s Note: Carmen Reinhart is Professor of the International Financial System at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. The article was provided to The Reporter by Project Syndicate: the world's pre-eminent source of original op-ed commentaries. Project Syndicate provides incisive perspectives on our changing world by those who are shaping its politics, economics, science, and culture. The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views of The Reporter.

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