

NB: This is a transcription of a speech given by Dr. Johnson Irungu on behalf of Mrs. Sicily Kariuki

REPUBLIC OF KENYA



KEY NOTE ADDRESS BY SICILY K. KARIUKI (MRS.), PRINCIPAL SECRETARY, STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, DURING THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMME ON INTEGRATED SEED SECTOR DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA (ISSD- AFRICA) ON THURSDAY, 18TH SEPTEMBER, 2014 AT CROWNE PLAZA, NAIROBI.

Representative of the Netherlands Government,

Head of Division- Rural Economy and Agriculture of the African Union Commission

Representative of the Centre for Development Innovation- Netherlands,

Director - Tegemeo Institute,

Invited guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed my great pleasure today to address this important forum to launch the Comprehensive Programme on Integrated Seed Sector Development in Africa. Let me take this opportunity to thank the organizers and welcome all the stakeholders to this important event.

The importance of agriculture to our national economy is well documented and that majority of rural households depend on the sector for their livelihoods with 75 percent of agricultural producers being smallholder farmers. The growth of this sector is highly dependent on a vibrant seed industry that continues to provide good quality seeds to the farmers. However, productivity of many of our food crops is low owing to

challenges that include high cost of agricultural inputs like seed and fertilizers and low uptake of improved seed among others.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Regional integration and international trade together with scientific advancement in the area of biotechnology have also posed additional challenges that require the local industry to quickly adapt to the changing environment in order to remain competitive in this industry. At this juncture, as a government, we commend the many initiatives under CAADP including what we are launching today, that are geared towards food security in the continent.

The seed sector continues to face other challenges including pricing, poor access, distribution and adulteration. At this juncture, I appeal to all stakeholders to support KEPHIS in ensuring good quality seed is availed to farmers. Kenya also experiences shortage of quality seed for potatoes, baby corn, wheat and some pulses. I urge the seed companies to also venture into seed production of these crops that are vital to food security in this country.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The seed industry has undergone dynamic changes in the domestic and regional and global spheres. These include formulation and harmonization of policies and enactment of legislation, institutional reforms and establishment of regional marketing initiatives and liberalization of the seed industry. Currently, the Kenyan seed industry had developed into a vibrant regional player with 73 registered seed merchants operating in the country. I wish to urge both local and foreign seed companies to enhance their seed research, breeding, multiplication and trade in order to improve on food security in our continent.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The national seed requirement for maize alone is about 35,000 metric tonnes per annum which as a country we are able to achieve through local production and imports. Despite this positive position, the seed industry faces several challenges including unpredictable weather that leads to decreased yields and shortage of seed. Lately, as a country we are facing the challenge of the Maize Lethal Necrosis Disease (MLND) that has threatened maize production in this country.

I commend Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Organization (KALRO) and the Kenya Seed Company who have developed tolerant varieties to this disease. These varieties will be released soon once the final stages of testing are finalized. The government is committed to ensuring adequate measures are put in place to curb the spread of this devastating disease. At the same time, we call on seed companies to work closely with both the national and county governments in sensitizing the farmers on the disease and to provide high quality alternative crops to ensure food and income security to our farmers. This challenge among others confirms therefore the need to build up a strategic seed reserve to ensure continuity of production.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Both the formal and informal seed systems exist in Kenya and vast majority of farmers rely on the informal seed system for seed and planting material for most agricultural commodities. Further, farmers often continue to recycle seed that has been exhausted through generations of cultivation resulting to persistently low yields. Sustained increase in agriculture production and productivity is dependent, to a large extent, on development of new and improved varieties of crops and an efficient system for timely supply of quality seeds to farmers.

It is evident that in order to achieve food production targets of the future, a major effort will be required to enhance the improved seed uptake of various crops by farmers. However as stakeholders, we must also find ways of improving the informal seed sector which is providing seed to many farmers.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The goal of the ISSD Africa Programme is to improve smallholder farmers' access to quality seed of superior varieties through the development of a market-oriented, pluralistic, vibrant and dynamic seed sector. This therefore calls for a concerted effort of all players in the seed industry and the private sector is expected to play a major role. It is my hope that through this project we are launching today, the seed industry will grow not only in terms of increased seed production but also in partnerships that will sustainably improve farmers' access to quality seeds.

The government will continue to review and develop policies together with the stakeholders so that the seed industry and other subsectors of agriculture can grow. We must all endeavor to transform smallholder agriculture to a viable business for the farmers through commercialization and linkages with players in the sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The new devolved governance structure has placed most of the agricultural functions under the County governments. The national government has also created a Regulatory Authority through the Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Authority Act (AFFA 2013) within which issues of food crops and seed will be regulated by the Food Crops Directorate. Seed traders through the Seed Trade Association of Kenya (STAK) are urged to play their role in coordinating players in the seed business to ensure high standards are maintained. This will further strengthen the public-private partnership and improve efficiency and effectiveness in the regulatory function of the government. In this regard, it is imperative

that the two levels of government and the seed industry work hand in hand in order to ensure that seed matters are well addressed for improved production.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The National government through the Ministry of Agriculture Livestock and Fisheries will continue to develop and implement national programmes and projects that support use of high quality seed and other inputs at county level. Some of the programmes being implemented currently include: the Agricultural Sector Development Support Programme (ASDSP), National Accelerated Agricultural Inputs Access Project (NAAIAP) the Traditional High Value Crops (THVC) and Njaa Marufuku Kenya (NMK)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, it is my conviction that through this programme, the seed industry in Kenya, East African Community region and Africa at large will enhance farmers' access to good quality seed and improve productivity. I take this opportunity to appreciate the support of the various stakeholders especially Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Director General of International Cooperation of the Netherlands who are funding this pilot phase of the programme. I also wish to thank the organizers for a very successful launch of the Comprehensive Programme on Integrated Seed Sector Development in Africa.

Thank you and God bless you,