

**SPEECH by the Chair ASARECA BOD to be delivered at the
2nd ASARECA GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

Your Excellency the Vice President of the Republic of Burundi, Excellences present, Honorable Patron Ministers, Members of Parliament, Permanent Secretaries, the President of ASARECA General Assembly, members of the ASARECA Board of Directors, the Executive Director of ASARECA, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

I am greatly honored to welcome you to the second ASARECA General Assembly and Scientific conference. This conference brings together great minds to discuss topical issues about agricultural research and development in the eastern and central Africa sub-region. This gathering also provides stakeholders and our partners a forum where they can share and learn from each other some of the spectacular scientific breakthroughs, successes and lessons learned since the last general assembly held in December 2011.

Ladies and gentlemen, we all recognize the contribution of agriculture to economic growth of the continent as a whole and eastern and central Africa sub-region in particular. In our sub-region, the Agricultural sector is the main source for food and nutrition security, income and overall livelihood for the population of over 360 millions people. Smallholder farmers and pastoralists who constitute more than 80% of the populations of each country in eastern and central Africa, depend mostly on agriculture for their food and income. It is therefore fitting that

the theme of this years' General Assembly is "Transforming agriculture for economic growth in eastern and central Africa".

However, fulfilling these roles is becoming increasingly difficult for the agricultural sector because of numerous challenges. Upper most in the list of challenges is the high growth in population. Out of the nearly 9 billion people in the world, about 1.5 billion reside in Africa and the number is expected to double by 2050. This rapidly rising population, exerts pressure on available resources and constrains efforts to increase productivity in order to produce food to feed more people and contribute to the generation of sufficient income that can help lift more people out of poverty. In many of the eastern and central Africa countries, because of population growth and other factors, farm holdings are getting smaller and the soils are getting more depleted of nutrients, making it even harder to sustain or increase yields. The yields of major staples such as maize, rice milk and bananas remain far below the potential possible with technologies and innovations coming out of research.

As a result, compared to other regions of the world, eastern and central Africa in particular and Africa in general have continued to have low agricultural productivity and have lagged behind in total and per capita food production. For example, in the last decade, Africa's share of world food production was a meagre 4% while Asia, North America and Europe had 48%, 15% and 12% respectively. This has meant that coupled with the high population growth, the region has continued to experience increase in food insecurity and food imports, where for

example, between 1980 and 2007 Africa's total net food imports in real terms grew at a phenomenal 3.4% per year.

Key among the factors contributing to low productivity, is low adoption of productivity enhancing technologies and innovations. ASARECA has facilitated the generation of technologies, innovations and has documented successes in marketing practices capable of transforming agriculture for economic growth in our region. The challenge to this assembly is how to get these widely adopted and how to harness markets when production increases. On its part, ASARECA has developed a comprehensive strategy with which to strengthen its member countries to enhance dissemination, adoption and upscaling of available proven technologies.

Ladies and gentlemen, our eastern and central Africa sub-region, like other parts of the world is grappling with the effects of climate change and variability. These are compounding the situation with merging new and more devastating pests and diseases for example the maize lethal necrosis disease, rising temperatures, and increasingly unreliability of rainfall. Other challenges include, high post harvest losses, limited value addition and linking of producers into agribusiness and food supply chains.

Dear participants, recognizing the critical role of the sector and as a way of providing a strategic vision that can guide African states to improve productivity and contribution of agriculture to economic development, the African Union/New Partnership for Agricultural Development (NEPAD) developed the Comprehensive

Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). As a sub regional research organization, ASARECA is fully committed to contribute to CAADP's objectives. In addition, ASARECA's activities are all aligned to CAADP and follow FAAP principles. ASARECA has been involved in CAADP through:

- Review and drafting of country compacts and national investment plans to ensure pillar IV issues are well reflected. Mobilizing of resources to support implementation of the national investment plans
- Placement of experts drawn from ASARECA's regional pool to support CAADP country teams
- Drafting the regional compact that is being coordinated by COMESA
- Linking advanced research institutes and those of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and CAADP country teams through realignment of the agenda of both parties
- Initiated collaboration among CGIAR Collaborative Research Programmes to contribute towards developing an African Science Agenda for Agriculture

Ladies and gentlemen, ASARECA contributes to these processes through a regional approach based on the principle of subsidiarity by delivering on its core functions. These include:

1. Coordination of collective action at the sub regional level; through prioritized projects and initiatives
2. Contributing to improvement of networking through development of partnerships, cross-cutting issues and capacity strengthening

3. Contributing to development of appropriate knowledge, approaches and technologies through development of partnerships, cross-cutting issues and capacity strengthening
4. Facilitating the transfer of knowledge, information and technologies through partnerships and projects

These are delivered through its research and capacity strengthening programmes and support functions that include knowledge management, information communication and information technology, gender mainstreaming, and monitoring and evaluation. To do that, ASARECA works with a broader range of national and regional stakeholders involved in agriculture to deliver public goods that are beneficial to the region. Partners who work closely with ASARECA include National Agricultural Research Systems, institutions under the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the regional economic blocs such as the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), continental bodies such as the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS) and the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA). We link very closely with our sister SRO's (that is, CORAF, CCARDESA, etc).

Ladies and gentlemen, this mode of engagement with partners is aimed to delivering solutions to common problems that one country cannot achieve alone. The operational mechanism of engagement is based on the subsidiarity principle as espoused in the Framework for African Agricultural Productivity under CAADP. Through this principle, wherever and whenever possible authority, responsibility and accountability are delegated to the lowest level at which it is effective while

maintaining spill over effects. That means, all partners are empowered to make their contributions based on their capabilities and collectively they are strengthened to deliver a common agenda for the region.

Development of a shared vision to produce sub-regional goods is enhanced through the biannual gathering of stakeholders under the auspices of the ASARECA General Assembly. This assembly reflects on the organization and coordination of collective action at the sub regional level, through prioritized projects and initiatives. The general assembly contributes to improvement of networking through development of partnerships, sharing of emerging knowledge and appropriate technologies, identification of cross-cutting issues as well as opportunities for capacity strengthening and mobilization and allocation of resources for research through partnership development and advocacy.

Ladies and gentlemen, I welcome you all to this second ASARECA general assembly. I look forward to your contributions for the betterment of our sub-region. I wish you a fruitful and rewarding experience.