

WELCOME SPEECH BY THE ED OF ASARECA

Your Excellency the Vice-President of the Republic of Burundi, Dr Rugyikiri Gervis
Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Livestock Development in Burundi – Mrs
Kayitesi Odette

Honourable Ministers present

Honourable Members of Parliament present

Permanent Secretaries

Donor representatives present

The President of the ASARECA General Assembly

The ASARECA Board of Directors

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

I take this opportunity to welcome you all to Bujumbura, Burundi. It is a great pleasure for us to be here for the second ASARECA General Assembly. I would like to thank the government of Burundi through His Excellency the Vice President and the Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Livestock Development for ensuring this General Assembly is organized successfully.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen, the first General Assembly was held in Uganda, Entebbe, December 2011. During that Assembly we presented the progress that had been achieved up to then. Today we are gathered here to review what has been done since December 2011 to date.

I wish to remind members that ASARECA is an association of 11 countries. These are Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. South Sudan joined in 2011. The association has been in existence since 1994 and hence will be making twenty years in 2014. The Secretariat is in Entebbe, Uganda. Our Mission still remains “Enhancement of regional collective action in Agricultural research for development, extension and agricultural training and education; to promote economic growth, fight poverty, eradicate hunger and enhance sustainable use of resources in Eastern and Central Africa. The purpose is enhancing food security and income through equitable access and utilization of agricultural innovations in ECA.

During the first General Assembly we reported on the governance, management and the strategic plan (2008 – 2017) that had been put in place; and that we were mid-way in implementation of operational plan 1 of the strategy. I wish to report to this General Assembly that operational plan 1 (2008 – 2013) is coming to an end in December 2013. Operational plan 2 has already been developed and approved by the Board and will commence in January 2014. During the business committee we shall present this operational plan 2 to you.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen; ASARECA galvanizes collective action to deal with issues that need regional action. The areas of focus are in:

1. Generation and dissemination of relevant technologies, innovations and management practices.
2. Enhancement of enabling policy environment

3. Capacity building
4. Knowledge management and information sharing.

We facilitate, enhance and nurture partnerships involving national agricultural research institutions, extension, universities, NGOs, private sector, farmer organizations, and international research institutions in order to address constraints and/or opportunities across the different countries. These are diverse stakeholders that join hands to address issues of regional nature that provide regional solutions to local problems.

The implementation is within and by the 11 member countries. We also work very closely together with our partners within the region, Africa and internationally. During this period we have strengthened partnerships with other SROs and FARA. We are also strengthening collaboration with partner institutions within the region.

Your Excellency, ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to report that during the operational plan 1 and through the partnerships I have mentioned; ASARECA has implemented over 90 projects and 310 sub-projects in the region and achieved most of the set targets. Through these projects or activities a total of 409 technologies, innovations and management practices (TIMPS) have been generated. These include improved varieties, water management practices, integrated soil fertility management, agronomic and storage packages, value addition technologies and innovative marketing tools. Over 1.45 million small holder households have directly benefited from ASARECA interventions.

Assuming each household has an average of 6 family members; a total of 8 million individuals have benefited. The benefits have been in:

- Improving their capacity in engaging in productive and profitable agriculture
- Assisting in opening up market opportunities for farmers to buy farm inputs and sell their products.
- Enhancing their productivity leading to improved access to food, nutrition and improved income; wealth creation for the households.

Some examples of these interventions are the development and dissemination management packages of major crop pests and diseases such as:

- a) Banana bacterial wilt
- b) Cassava brown streak and mosaic diseases
- c) Striga for cereals
- d) Bean anthracnose
- e) Wheat rust
- f) Maize lethal necrosis

Others are the development of drought resistant maize and sorghum varieties, improved livestock disease diagnosis and management; and genetic diversity and conservation. Over 50 farmer innovation platforms bringing together over 50,000 farmers have been established for collective marketing. Quality seed production innovations have been upscaled along with enhanced exchange of germplasm in ECA. Nutritionally enhanced foods for women and children have been developed and disseminated to stakeholders. In terms of policy ASARECA has facilitated the development and harmonization of policies across the different countries.

ASARECA collaborated with East African Community (EAC) and COMESA in this area. And in total 37 policies, laws, regulations and procedures have been approved by various legislative bodies. Examples are:

- a) Seed for regulation of variety evaluation and release
- b) Seed certification and plant variety protection
- c) Potato and cassava standards in East Africa
- d) Biosafety regulations

These harmonized policies will enhance sharing of technologies and innovations within and across countries. What remains is to domesticate these harmonized policies in the different countries. Training of young scientists, farmers and other stakeholders to face modern research challenges. ASARECA has developed a gender mainstreaming strategy and policy for the sub-region. These are guiding gender mainstreaming in the projects and activities.

Looking into the future, ASARECA's focus in the next five years will be on three broad areas. The first is on sustainable agriculture, food security and nutrition. This will entail developing and scaling up of innovations and technologies that enhance productivity, sustainable intensification of agricultural systems, post harvest handling, processing, nutrition, health, conservation of plant and animal genetic resources. The second area is markets, market linkages and trade which aims at linking farmers to markets; facilitating enterprises development that includes engagement with the youth; strengthening value chains for different priority commodities, policy formulation and harmonization across countries on food safety and quality, and removal of non-tariff barriers. The third area is on natural resource management and ecosystem services; includes climate change

resilience and mitigation, efficient use of water resources, soil health and management and ecosystem sustainance. The area of scaling up and out of technologies will be emphasized and will cut across the three thematic areas.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen allow me to mention the Maputo declaration of 2003, where African countries committed themselves to increase spending in agriculture to at least 10% of their national budgets by 2015. In ECA sub-region, by end of 2012, only Ethiopia had exceeded the 10% mark, while Madagascar, Sudan and Tanzania were operating between 5 – 10%; and the rest investing below 5%. Low investment in agriculture and agribusiness has therefore continued to result in low level of productivity growth in the sector.

African Union has set a target of each African country to spend 1% of GDP to support Research and Development. There is need for the governments in the ASARECA member states to re-examine how to improve the region with the aim of becoming middle-income countries by 2015-2030. Since agriculture is employer of over 70% of the population, it would be the sector to drive this transformation. One of the key areas to drive this change would be to provide funding to enhance agriculture transformation. The challenge for our region is an effective mechanism of providing support to Research and development. This is a challenge that has been a concern of ASARECA development partners who have offered financial support up to date. They would wish to see how the 11 countries are committed to this organization through enhanced funding from the countries themselves.

Your Excellency, the theme for this General Assembly speaks for itself. If the livelihoods of over 350 million people who live in the 11 countries and who depend on Agriculture has to be improved or changed then agriculture has to be transformed from being a subsistence to market oriented and eventually commercial agriculture.

Great attention will also need to be paid to the youth who are actually the majority of the population. Agriculture is uniquely positioned to absorb the youth if it becomes attractive.

I wish to encourage all of us to go home from this December gathering with the will to ensure that, within our lifetime agriculture can be transformed; and hunger and poverty can become history.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you.