

Statement by, the Minister of Agriculture and Animal Resources of Rwanda; Honourable Anastase MUREKEZI at the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme Roundtable on the Implementation of the Strategic Plan for Agricultural Transformation Programmes

29 March 2007

Kigali Serena Hotel

**Honourable Ministers,
Honourable members of the parliament of Rwanda,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen;**

We are privileged here in Rwanda to host this important gathering of stakeholders in African agriculture; namely African Union (AU) Commission, New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) Secretariat, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Secretariat, its Member States, our Development Partners, Officials from Rwanda, Private Sector and Civil Society representatives .

I welcome you all to our capital Kigali, and look forward to a productive discussion and a roadmap on how to proceed with the challenge of transforming our agriculture into the basis for greater prosperity on our continent.

I am convinced that this assembly of experts and political leaders gathered here today should chart a decisive course for agricultural transformation on our region and continent; it can hardly be emphasized enough that such change is fundamental

for improving African lives as most of our economies are based on agriculture.

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before addressing the topic at hand, it is important to look back at where we have come from in terms of agricultural development, as a means of drawing valuable lessons for future policy development and execution. I hasten to add that most lessons I am afraid are essentially negative. The truth of the matter is that agriculture on our continent in both colonial and postcolonial periods, has not been given its due importance, and therefore this vital economic sector has never reached its full potential in driving in creating wealth.

Agriculture in post colonial Africa did not differ significantly from the pre-colonial period. In some cases it worsened, often leading to massive food imports, as well as dependency on food assistance to stem starvation and hunger. In response, African leaders periodically devised national, regional and continental strategies to address this predicament. A case in point was the

Lagos Plan of Action adopted by the Organisation of African Unity in 1980.

This Plan rightly decried the fact that African countries had not actively promoted agricultural productivity. It was observed at the time that African agriculture was still characterised by chronic shortfalls in food production and severe shortages – which led to increasing dependence on food imports and assistance. This in turn resulted in a consistent drain of foreign exchange that undermined the financing of development priorities.

That was the backdrop of the call by the Lagos Plan of Action for improved policy that promotes productivity in agriculture, greater investment in the sector and its general modernisation including infrastructure, research and extension services – and most importantly, the integration of agriculture into other economic plans, especially industrialisation.

Twenty years later we were once again at the drawing table. In the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), African leaders and experts described the state of the continent's agriculture in the same terms as in 1980, and

called for essentially the same corrective measures. NEPAD documents of the early 2000s highlight the state of agriculture in Africa as unproductive

Fortunately, this meeting is taking place at a time when we are beginning to discern some change for positive growth rates in the economies of our countries.

Today, the majority of African countries, accounting for more than 70% of the continent's population, have recorded an average economic growth rate of 3% or higher over the last ten years.

In addition, the overall average rate of economic growth for sub-Saharan Africa has been around 5% over the same period.

The last ten years, therefore, demonstrate the longest period of sustained positive per capita income growth with net per capita food production also increasing steadily.

The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development (CAADP) is one of the key programmes of NEPAD initiative.

Firstly, the emphasis on agriculture, the leading private sector in most African economies, illustrates further, a major change in the way Africa's leadership looks at the sector and its role in the efforts to end poverty and hunger.

Strong agricultural performance remains a critical component in the battle against poverty reduction and food and nutrition security.

This is so because agricultural growth contributes more than any other sector to overall economy.

Secondly, agricultural growth contributes more than any other sector to overall income growth in rural areas, where the bulk of the poor and vulnerable live and work.

Thirdly, agricultural growth contributes to growth in other sectors of the economy by creating the demand for goods and services that are produced outside of the sector.

Lastly, agricultural growth reduces overall poverty, hunger and malnutrition by raising the supply of food while at the same time improving access to it through higher incomes in the rural and other sectors of the economy.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

In the developed world, agricultural production is today increasingly being dictated by what the consumers want in terms of quality, safety and high production standards.

In the developing world, and Africa in particular, our farmers are left behind by the supply chain developments and the technology revolution; and there has been a steady decline from our development partners in their assistance to agricultural and rural development.

While Africa is expecting to receive more external assistance, it remains Africa's view and indeed that of NEPAD that we must remain in the driving seat in evolving a new relationship that requires that external support come in support to and be aligned with country choices and options.

The implementation of CAADP, clearly now underway, is one of the strategies through which NEPAD can fast track our continent's development efforts through improving our agricultural production.

Over the last two years, the NEPAD Secretariat has worked closely with leading bilateral and multilateral development partners to secure their commitment to align future assistance to the sector with the CAADP targets and principles as well as the programmes that are defined at country level by national governments.

In this regard, Rwanda has been at the forefront in launching the process. We are organising the first CAADP round table to support the implementation of its Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture (PSTA), which is the agricultural sector component of our Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS).

This strategy originates from our Vision 2020 agenda and translates our long term drive for economic and social development. Together with PSTA, it goes further to illustrate our commitment to transform and modernise the agricultural sector as well as to improve the livelihood of our people.

I take this opportunity, therefore, to invite our partners present here today, and those not present, to pro-actively support and facilitate the implementation of the EDPRS/PSTA plans that will be presented to them in order to achieve an agricultural growth rate of 7% during the next five years..

In view of the importance of regional complementaries and the significant gains of working together, I also invite you to join COMESA and work towards implementation of regional CAADP agenda.

I call upon the private sector to play the critical role that it has in working together with our farmers to increase investments and raise the competitiveness of our domestic sectors.

The private sector remains at the frontline in the battle to integrate fully our economies in the global economy. We stand ready to partner with the agribusiness sector to facilitate the transformation and modernisation of our agricultural sectors and promote value addition in this sector.

During this Kigali meeting, a draft of Rwanda CAADP Compact will be presented for your deliberations, suggesting commitments on our side and on the part of the development partners as well as the agribusiness and farming communities.

I encourage you to discuss it exhaustively as you give it your endorsement.

Honourable Ministers,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this Kigali meeting, the main issue to be discussed is “- since the adoption of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) in 2003, how far have we gone in implementing it?

This Kigali meeting is aimed at being the stepping stone for implementation in COMESA in general and in Rwanda in particular. In other words, this assembly comprising AU, NEPAD, COMESA and development partners constitutes a major milestone – that is, it is a point of departure from debate to implementation of targeted, focussed and indeed comprehensive agricultural policy and programme.

We all look upon these three days with anticipation in terms of commitment, milestones as well as a roadmap of how CAADP is to improve lives; how it will lead to enhanced infrastructure, innovation, shared vision among agriculture stakeholders, and resources mobilisation for the sector’s transformation.

We also look forward to a follow-up gathering in the near future to report back on concrete achievements as well as outstanding challenges.

Only then can we convince African people and our partners that we are serious about development and execution of transformation policies with a sense of commitment and urgency that is commensurate with challenges our continent faces.

I thank you for your kind attention.
