Remarks

By

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African Drought Conference:

Launching the Namibian National Strategic Action Plan for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

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18:30-20:00

Windhoek Country Club Resort and Casino

Windhoek, Namibia

Honourable John Mutorwa, Minister: Agriculture, Water and Forestry
Ms. Sophie Kasheeta, Acting Permanent Secretary: MAWF
Dr Ahmadu Babagana, FAO Country Representative, Namibia
Ms Johanna Andowa, Director: Directorate of Agricultural Research and Training
Dr Benedict Malima, Deputy Director: Agronomy (DARD)
Ms Mwangala Nalisa, National Commission on Science Research and Technology (NCRST)
Senior Government Officials
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that I address the launch of the Namibian National Strategic Action Plan for Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA). I thank the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry's for the invitation.

Tonight's launch of the action plan is in line with the theme of the Drought Conference **"Enhancing resilience to drought events on the African continent"**.

The genetic diversity of grains, vegetables and fruits becomes even more crucial for food security in times of drought. Plant Genetic Resources provide the raw material used by farmers and plant

breeders to improve the quality and productivity of our crops. They make them more resilient to the impact of climate change.

The world PGRFA report informs us that by 2050, the world will need to produce twice as much food as was produced in the year 2000[1], but with the same amount of land and using less water.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Namibian strategic action plan is a blueprint that intends to safeguard and scale-up the development of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture-**PGRFA** in this country. It explicitly acknowledges the role of small-scale farmers as custodians of agricultural resources and knowledge. This knowledge is key to confronting the challenges of the future.

The Namibia strategy, is another good example of partnership, led by the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, supported by Gobabeb Training Centre, the International Treaty on PGRFA, through the UNDP and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

The plan is visionary in its intent to marry scientific endeavour with traditional knowledge. For example, the project provided scholarships to Masters Students to study the genetic diversity of Pearl Millet and

[1] The state of world plant genetic resources for food and agriculture

also conducted surveys on farms in the northern, crop-growing regions of Namibia.

Director of ceremonies,

Government, through the MAWF has had some success with conservation initiatives over the past 25 years. The crop improvement programmes resulted in the release of several varieties of pearl millet; the most noteworthy being the 'Okashana variety' developed in the late 1990s. The Okashana has enjoyed wholesale uptake by small-scale farmers, due to its higher yields. This has led to increased household food security.

Ladies and gentlemen

The Strategic Action Plan also recognises the importance of adapting to climate change. In Namibia UNDP is working with Government to implement community based projects that seek to enhance the resilience of communities and their ecosystems to climate change.

For example through the SCORE[2] project UNDP is reducing the vulnerability of 4,000 households to floods and drought. 80 % of these households are female headed.

Some of the project activities include;

[2] Scaling up resilience to climate variability and climate change in northern Namibia, with a special focus on women

- Providing ploughing services to 600 households in each region;
- Supporting small-scale farmers to adopt the drip and bucket irrigation system for vegetable gardens;
- Setting up systems to ensure the timely, appropriate and sufficient provision of seeds.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the important contribution of plant genetic diversity to food security, through PGRFA , conservation, access and benefit-sharing.

This is reflected in targets 2.5 under Goal 2 (End hunger, achieve food security and promote sustainable agriculture).

Target 2.5 calls for the maintenance of genetic seed and animal diversity, and their related wild species. It also calls for equitable sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources; including traditional knowledge.

This is a transformational agenda, universal in scope, and ambitious in its aspiration to 'leave no one behind'.

As I near the end of my remarks,

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, and FAO, for partnering in the development of this important blue print.

It is my hope that these partnerships, including on finance, will continue to grow for the benefit of the communities.

Therefore, let me conclude by stating the critical need for scientists and small-scale farmers to jointly revive and conserve, indigenous seeds. This work is vital in the face of drought and climate change and is essential if we are to preserve traditional agricultural varieties.

If such work is to continue, we need to make smart decisions and leverage environmental finance. The strategic action plan provides a framework and is just the beginning. And the UN, your partner of choice, is committed to sharing knowledge and global best practices to help turn this plan into action.

I thank you.