



**SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE,  
IRRIGATION AND WATER DEVELOPMENT**

**Hon. Prof. Peter Mwanza, M.P.**

*“Making Agriculture in Malawi more Nutrition and Health  
Sensitive”*

**Delivered  
at the**

**INAUGURATION OF THE CONFERENCE ON  
UNLEASHING AGRICULTURE’S POTENTIAL FOR  
IMPROVED NUTRITION AND HEALTH**

**HELD at  
CROSSROADS CRESTA HOTEL**

**on**

**26<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2011**

- The Secretary for Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, Mrs. Erica Maganga,
- The Secretary for Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development II, Dr. J.H. Luhanga,
- The Ambassador for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID),
- Representative of the Ambassador for the Embassy of Ireland,
- The Representative of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)- Washington DC, Rajul Pandya-Lorch,
- Government Officials
- Representatives of the development partners
- Representatives of the Non State Actors
- The Academia,
- The Media,
- All invited participants,
- Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is always a great pleasure and an honour for me to be among the gathering to inaugurate this important conference whose theme is “Unleashing Agricultural potential for improved nutrition and health.” My Ministry (Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development) in conjunction with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) has been tirelessly working on organizing this conference.

The main objective of the conference is to inform, influence, and catalyze action by key stakeholders to better use investments in Agriculture in order to sustainably reduce malnutrition and ill health for vulnerable people in the country. In other words the conference is working towards setting the centre stage for players to work together in coming up with lasting strategies of unleashing the potential of Agriculture for improved nutrition and health in Malawi and not just eradicating hunger.

As already highlighted by the previous speakers Ladies and Gentlemen, this conference aims at domesticating the recommendations that were drawn from an international workshop that was held in New Delhi – India in February this year (2011). Malawi is the first country in the world to organize a similar workshop at the local scene.

The other interesting thing is that the conference is timely for Malawi as the country is in the process of implementing various strategies in these three sectors (Agriculture, Health and Nutrition) and beyond, in order to meet the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) and targets at the sector level. Some of these strategies include the Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Micronutrient Malnutrition (SPCMM), the National Nutrition Education Communication Strategy

(NNECS), the Agriculture Sector Wide Approach (ASWAp), and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), just to mention a few. All these parties were actively involved in the planning process for these strategies and will implement them in a collaborated manner. As such, the conference we are holding today and tomorrow will thus catalyze the collaboration between Agriculture, health and nutrition sectors.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**, with special reference to the SUN, the Agriculture sector falls in each of the three broad areas of the initiative. These are: (i) Food Security for all, which is in line with the Food Security Policy, (ii) Nutrition – Focused Development, which is the essence of our gathering here and (iii) Nutrition – Specific Interventions, which have also been incorporated in the ASWAp. It is therefore clear that the sector is key and indeed committed to the SUN agenda.

**Ladies and Gentlemen:** It is a fact that there exists strong linkages amongst these three sectors (Agriculture, Health and Nutrition) in the country as evidenced by sector policies that talk to each other such as the Food, and Nutrition Security Policies; the ASWAp; the national overarching policy for the Government of Malawi [the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS)]; the other strategies already mentioned above and many more too numerous to mention. As a way of harnessing the thrusts of these respective policies and strategies, a number of committees were deliberately put in place and are represented by members from the three sectors. These include the Information Systems Committee, Food Security Policy and Programmes Committee, and the Nutrition Committee, among others.

Such fora, Ladies and Gentlemen; give the stakeholders opportunities to plan and execute their activities in a harmonious and sustainable manner,

without creating any overlaps. But perhaps as a country, we have not yet exhausted the potential of Agriculture to improve people's nutrition, as well as their health. Nevertheless, I don't think this outstanding issue is a mammoth task for Malawi since we already have existing structures for such initiatives on the ground. What needs to be done is simply to rejuvenate the existing linkages for better outcomes.

The Agriculture sector therefore needs to ensure food and nutrition security in this country, as well as generate incomes that can be spent by people including farmers on health care in addition to other uses. In turn, this will enhance productivity of Malawian people, hence food and nutrition security. It is therefore clear that strong linkages in these three sectors are integral to Malawi's economic growth and should therefore be achieved and maintained at all costs. I have confidence that our interaction in the course of the two days will

unfold tangible ways of bringing out the best approaches that can sustainably achieve this necessary desire.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,** before I go any further, let me remind you of one of the major successes of my Ministry in the recent past. Almost all of us present here are aware that Malawi has been realizing food surpluses since the 2005/2006 Agriculture Season owing to the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP). This is mainly due to the sound leadership of His Excellency Prof. Bingu wa Mutharika, President of the Republic of Malawi. His sound leadership has created a conducive environment for various stakeholder participation in the agricultural sector and beyond. Ever since he came into power; the country has realized maize surpluses of up to 1.3 million metric tones.



However, even if this is the case **Ladies and Gentlemen**, about 41% of the children are stunted, there are high infant and under five mortality rate, and high maternal mortality rates. This is partly due to poor diets that are easily accessible by majority of people in this country. The diet for the country is unfortunately dominated by cereals, primarily maize; roots and, to a certain extent, bananas that are starchy. It is for this reason that the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development has put in place deliberate policies to promote dietary diversification, Agriculture Diversification, and dietary improvement for vulnerable gender categories. The Ministry implements a number of activities including campaigns to teach farmers of the six food groups that are the main sources of dietary diversity. During the campaigns, issues of food safety during food processing, storage and utilization are emphasized to the farmers, in an effort to improve their nutrition

status. To complement this, farmers are encouraged to diversify their food production including rearing of small stock that are affordable e.g. rabbits, goats and poultry as good sources of the food values that are needed by the body.

**Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,** in addition; my Ministry encourages research in commodities that are rich in nutrient values. In this regard, I am happy to report that two of our Research Stations have been working tirelessly in coming up with crop varieties that are rich in micronutrients. Technically, this is bio-fortification which is more sustainable. For instance, Bvumbwe Research Station is working on a tomato variety that is rich in vitamin A while Chitedze Research Station is working on beans that are rich in Zinc and iron.

In recognition of the fact that there is need to upscale these initiatives in order to have an adequate coverage of beneficiaries in the future, the Ministry has highlighted Agriculture diversification, and dietary diversification as one of the priority areas of the sector in the Agriculture Sector Wide Approach (ASWAp), which is the sector's medium term investment plan.

This clearly shows that Agriculture is in support of the linkages that are at the centre of this conference. The sector has brought all these players to work together in order to achieve a Malawi that is free of malnutrition and of good health. However, as already pointed out earlier, perhaps the sort of involvement has not been that concrete enough to enable the Agriculture sector respond to issues of nutrition and health adequately.

I am relieved that one of the expected outcome of this conference is to suggest best approaches of

strengthening the linkages in Agriculture, health and nutrition. I therefore urge all participants to actively participate in this conference and bring forward your ideas in trying to unleash the potential of Agriculture for improved nutrition and health in this country.

With these remarks, Ladies and Gentlemen, I declare this conference officially open and wish you all the best in your deliberations!!!!

**THANK YOU AND GOD BLESS YOU!!**