



SPEECH BY

GOVERNMENT OF MALAWI

'COMMUNICATING AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE FOR IMPACT'

SPEECH DELIVERED BY

**THE DIRECTOR OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICES,
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, IRRIGATION AND WATER
DEVELOPMENT**

DR. WILKSON MAKUMBA

**OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY FOR THE JOURNALIST'S
TRAINING WORKSHOP ON COMMUNICATING AGRICULTURAL
SCIENCE FOR IMPACT**

SUNBIRD CAPITAL HOTEL, LILONGWE

7TH AUGUST, 2017

- Public Relations Officer in the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, Mr Osborne Tsoka;
- All government officials present;
- The Chief of Party of NAPAS, Dr Flora Nankhuni;
- The President of the Network of Agriculture Journalists, Mr Mike Van Kamande;
- Journalists and Media Professionals;
- Representative of Farmers Union of Malawi;
- Representative of NASFAM;
- Representative of the Civil Society Agriculture Network;
- All Civil Society Organizations present;
- Research and Academic Institutions present;
- Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,
- All protocols observed.

Good morning to you all and welcome to this very important training workshop. It is indeed my great pleasure to preside over this official opening of the media training workshop on Communicating Agricultural Science for Impact.

As you may know, agricultural science and research are very important to the advancement of the agriculture sector and society in general. It is also the case that media plays a vital role in the process of agricultural development. As such, the intersection between agricultural science and media cannot be overstated. It is with this in mind that the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development saw it fit to organize this particular training on communicating agricultural science for impact.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, If media is to cover agricultural scientific research and do it in a way that delivers impact to the benefit of the people, it will have to be done in a way that is accessible, so that people are able to digest the scientific information and apply it in their day-to-day lives. There is no doubt that we stand a greater chance of delivering impact to our farmers through agricultural science when we work together. As such I am very glad that you have

continued to work with the Ministry through this capacity strengthening effort and have demonstrated your commitment to working together by coming to this training workshop. This will ultimately enable you and empower you to better communicate agricultural research to the public, resulting in wellbeing for all.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, before I officially open the training workshop, let me take this opportunity to highlight some of the outstanding research that is taking place in the agriculture sector in Malawi. I am delighted to report to you that the Department of Agricultural Research Services in the Ministry is currently undertaking numerous research projects. Several studies are being carried out to look at how we can improve drought- and pest- resilience of our crops. We are also carrying out scientific experiments to find out what kinds of varieties we can isolate and multiply to improve the crop yield performance, including for maize, groundnuts and pigeon peas among other crops.

At the same time, DARS, is working in collaboration with the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and has been conducting a study on optimizing fertiliser response.

This research is expected to inform the Government's future investments in soil nutrition, including the Ministry's fertiliser recommendations and design of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme, which should all result in increased yields for our farmers.

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen, I also want to highlight research that the Department of Land Resources Conservation, also in the Ministry, is conducting on soil loss. This research has discovered that the rate of soil loss, due to land degradation, has increased over the past two decades from an average of 20 metric tons per ha per year in 1992 to 29 metric tons per ha per year in 2014. This is quite alarming and as such our communities need to hear about these kinds of findings, to help reduce land degradation in the country. However, for our communities to begin doing something about the issue, they need to know about the research findings and this is where media comes in; to play the vital role of disseminating the research findings.

Yet another study that I want to highlight, and is also being conducted by the Department of Land Resources

Conservation, is on soil profiling. On this one, soil samples from different districts across the country have been collected and analysed so that we can better understand the nutrient deficiencies of our soils at the district level. Based on these findings we are now coming up with soil maps to inform all relevant stakeholders in the agriculture sector about the nutrients that our soils need in different locations of the country. These are just but a few of the many agricultural studies and scientific discoveries taking place, not only in the Ministry but in the whole agriculture sector; yet sadly they often go undisclosed because no one is paying attention.

As such, it is important for you, the media professionals, to familiarize yourselves with the different technological advances and research studies happening in our agriculture sector. This is because only when you are aware of the studies and scientific inquiry taking place will you then be able to disseminate to the public in a manner that people understand. This in turn can lead to impact on the ground.

Now, for one to grasp the agricultural science, it requires interfacing with researchers and exposing oneself to disciplines that may be new and oftentimes outside your field

of training. Hence, I am very pleased to see that in your workshop training programme you will be having field visits to Chitedze Research Station, where you will interact with the Department of Agricultural Research as well as the international agricultural research centers that are working hand in glove with the Ministry. I am also pleased to see that you will also visit the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) as well as the Natural Resources College (NRC), to interact with professors there together with the professors from Michigan State University in the United States, who are visiting our country. I encourage you all to ask questions, listen and learn intently so that you may make the most out of this special educational opportunity.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the Ministry recognizes the importance of capacitating journalists and reporters on these elements of agricultural science. At the same time, we acknowledge the imperative need to provide platforms and systems for us to interface with media and exchange information and ideas to improve the quality of our reporting in the sector. This is why through the Department of Agricultural Extension Services, and through the support of the NAPAS project, we have made this effort to continue our

previous media training initiative, so that we can continue to engage with you, our colleagues and partners in the media.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have stressed the point of how important the media is to the agriculture sector and how important it is for media to embrace agricultural science. Now, I want to leave you with one final message: Let us seize the moment and embrace the issues that we will learn during this training workshop, with a view of increasing our capabilities to cover agricultural issues in the media based on scientific evidence. I invite you all to engage seriously in the next few days, brainstorm and deliberate in a constructive manner so that all our efforts may be fruitful.

I now declare this Journalist's Training Workshop on Communicating Agricultural Science for Impact officially opened! May God bless us all and Thank you for your attention!