UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

REMARKS BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR, PROF PETER M.F. MBITHI DURING THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF SEMIs BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI COUNCIL ON MONDAY, JANUARY 30, 2017 AT 10.00 A.M. AT THE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND VETERINARY SCIENCES
The Chairman of Council

The College Principals

Deans and Directors

Invited guests

Members of staff

Ladies and gentlemen
The Seed Enterprise Management Institute program (Popularly known as SEMIs) was started to facilitate capacity building and support quality seed production for increased food security and poverty alleviation in Sub Saharan Africa.

In agriculture, seed represents living genetic material to be exploited, and holds the ultimate benefit to be expected from all other farming activities. Acquisition of seed of an improved
variety symbolizes the potential to improve agricultural output, and very often access to good seed differentiates between good and poor farmers in Africa. Research to generate new seeds has not, however, produced much impact in terms of food security in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) households mainly because seed supply chains have either been lacking or are inappropriate to support a vibrant and productive agriculture especially at small holder level.
In the SSA Region, where all development plans assume a positive agricultural upturn as a precursor to industrialization, a re-examination of the seed-systems was needed as a starting point towards agricultural rejuvenation.

The seed systems adopted therefore have to be both responsive to the needs of the farmers and the industry and must also be dynamic enough to bring about the required or anticipated changes. Traditionally, improved seed systems
existed to service better-off farmers but this has to change to accommodate all farmers if agriculture has to effectively address the problems of poverty through income generation and food and nutrition insecurity among the farming communities.

To produce the needed change, there is need for radical change both in government and in the private sector in SSA so as to promote efficiency in management of the seed industry.
Development of a workable seed program involves many interrelated factors. In seed production, emphasis is laid on the techniques and practices essential for increasing the tiny quantities of seed obtained from the breeder to the tons needed to make an impact at the farmer level.

Maintenance of seed quality and good post harvest handling procedures are key because
seed must be kept in viable form to produce vigorous plants.

Our SEMIs as a program was started by Prof. Agnes Mwang’ombe with the support and guidance of Dr. Ngongi. Dr. Ngongi, The First President of AGRA was very instrumental in the establishment of SEMIs.
The Overall Goal for SEMIs program remains the eradication of food insecurity through capacity building of seed actors for improved seed systems to better deliver high quality seeds to small scale farmers at affordable prices.

This SEMIs program has therefore focused on:

1. Capacity building for seed merchants/ seed company personnel and postgraduate students pursuing plant breeding and seed related disciplines,
2. Establishment of seed training institute at University of Nairobi with a seed processing unit,

3. Seed production and processing to support training

4. Establishment of a SEMIS infrastructure which included seed processing factory and seed quality laboratories.

Short skills courses developed at SEMIs include the following:
I. Seed Production

II. Seed drying processing and storage

III. Seed marketing

IV. Seed Business Management

V. Seed Quality assurance and Seed Enterprise Quality Management

VI. Field Pests and Disease Diagnostics in Seed Crops

VII. National Plant Protection Organizations (NPPO).
These courses are in high demand in Sub Saharan Africa. SEMIs so far has trained 866 private seed sector personnel and National Plant Protection Organizations personnel under phase one and two. The private seed sector personnel are from 214 Small and Medium Enterprises from 22 Sub Saharan Africa countries. Training under phase III has just started and first workshop took place in SEMIs infrastructure from 16th - 21st January 2017.
Besides the training programs, AGRA funds under phase I and II have included infrastructural development and equipment. The buildings were the seed factory, offices, seed quality laboratories, seminar rooms, large lecture hall, cold rooms and associated facilities.

In addition, to the buildings, the funds were to procure a fully fledged seed processing line up to packaging, specialized seed quality equipment,
computers and furniture. The seed factory is now fully operational.

The SEMIs infrastructure design was done by Iowa State University and it is appropriate to acknowledge the technical input from Dr. Manjit Misra, Director, Seed Center at Iowa State University and Dr. Yuh Shyy who made several trips here to SEMIs as this was challenging even to the Contractor who finally left out sinks needing more adjustments.
The University of Nairobi management and staff have also walked with the SEMIs team in the implementation of the programme.

Thank you.

PETER M.F. MBITHI, PhD, EBS
VICE CHANCELLOR
AND
PROFESSOR OF VETERINARY SURGERY