

**Draft Speaking points for the Ambassador for CISANET Annual General Meeting to be held on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012 at Malawi Institute of Management**

- I am delighted to be here this morning for this important event. In my remarks, I want to speak about two very important aspects of Good Governance:

**Voice and Accountability**

- The core mandate of CISANET is to play a lead role in policy advocacy in agriculture and food security and to provide a forum where debates and ideas on agricultural policy among Civil Society Organisations can be shared. This is a very important role.
- And with this role comes great responsibility to the farmers of Malawi and to the public at large
- I am aware that in seeking support from Irish Aid, CISANET recognised that although a major player in agricultural policy formulation and dialogue in Malawi, its approach to issues over the years has been reactive rather than proactive.
- CISANET contribution to policy development must be based on research and evidence and draw on the experiences of the people most affected – smallholder farmers, particularly women – by enabling them to have a voice. It is a well established fact that when women (and other vulnerable groups) gain a voice in decisions affecting their lives and livelihoods their capacity to produce nutritious food and to trade is greatly enhanced.
- The recently launched 2012 UN *Human Development report: Towards a food secured future*, notes that empowerment of the rural poor, especially women, who play the major role in food production is central to improving agricultural productivity and increasing food security.
- It recognises the evidence that shows that all else being equal, when women receive equal inputs, average yields of basic staples rise substantially. Access for the rural poor to information, technology and markets also promotes equitable allocation of food and resources within families and across communities.
- CISANET's wide membership of NGOs, farmers organisations, international research institutions etc provide it with the means of ensuring that it has links at local level and at national and global level and can make the connections between these different levels, but also and very important – can support the development of horizontal relationships among the NGOs and farmers through district networks. These networks

are used as dialogue platforms through which CSOs and farmers discuss policy and other issues affecting them and can engage government and other stakeholders in addressing them.

- These networks allow CISANET to be a participant in the development of government policies but also to take a leading role in ensuring their implementation. They are an important channel for disseminating information and sharing experience and learning: through the policy platforms, policy briefs, radio programmes etc.
- Partnership and collaboration are central to CISANET's way of working and crucial for success. Constructive engagement with Government as well as organisations like the FUM and NASFAM is essential for effective policy dialogue and advocacy.

### **Why is Irish Aid a Partner with CISANET?**

- The Goal of the Irish Aid Country Strategy is to ensure that household in Malawi are better nourished food secure and less vulnerable to poverty
- The strategy recognizes the critical role that Civil Society Organisations play in the development of the country through among others advocating for effective service delivery, promoting pro-poor development policies and holding government to account.
- While this role is very critical, it was observed during the development of the Irish Aid strategy that often civil society organisations are constrained by challenges of legitimacy, technical capacity, weak structures of internal governance and generating evidence to support their advocacy role.
- Additionally, low levels of cooperation and collaboration amongst different CSO's and national networks working at various levels in the country, especially the community level, limit their potential to contribute to improvements in service delivery and fulfilment of their watchdog mandate
- We are therefore pleased to be supporting CISANET to develop its capacity to undertake its important mission: *to promote agricultural development and sustainable livelihoods for the poor by influencing desirable change in policies, practices and attitudes of Government, donors, civil society and private sector through effective advocacy.*
- A pre-requisite to effective engagement with policy makers is institutional capacity to present evidence based information that can influence policy development
- Irish Aid support to CISANET under the Policy Dialogue Platform Project is intended to further build its capacity to effectively engage with stakeholders so that, when it influences policy, particularly in the area of

Agriculture, it does so based on solid evidence and experience of smallholder farmers and rural communities.

- Again, I would like to stress the importance of ensuring that policy decisions made are based on accurate information and reflective of the issues and responsive to the needs of women smallholder farmers.
- If the CISANET organisations are to be important and effective allies of farmers, particularly women farmers they themselves must have the capacity to engage and must be accountable
- The core values subscribed to by CISANET: accountability and transparency, gender equality, integrity, independence and pro-poor and quality service delivery are values that are particularly important to Malawi today.
- Recognizing the importance of strong internal governance structures for any institution to deliver on its mandate and remain true to its core values, Irish Aid also provides support to CISANET under the project for vital institutional processes such as external audit to ensure accountability and also support for this Annual General Meeting which we see as an important platform for review and reflection. In summary:
  - Give voice to women and smallholder farmers
  - Be accountable – make sure you get the message right
- I am therefore very pleased to be part of this AGM and I believe that it will go a long way in strengthening CISANET's legitimacy and internal governance so that it can better deliver on its mandate.
- I wish you well with you deliberations.

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