

**OPENING REMARKS BY THE EU AMBASSADOR AND HEAD OF
DELEGATION TO MALAWI, H.E. MR ALEXANDER BAUM**

**On the Occasion of the opening ceremony of the CISANET Annual General
Meeting at the Malawi Institute of Management on 16th May**

2012 starting from 9:00am

Theme: Reclaiming Agriculture Policy Space

- The Chairman of CISANET, Mr. Edson Musopole
- The Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, Mrs. Erica Maganga
- The Principal Secretary for Irrigation and Water Development, Mr. Sandram Maweru
- The Principal Secretary for Trade and Industry Development, Mr. Newby Kumwembe
- All other Principal Secretaries present here
- Representatives of the Development Partners
- Representatives of all Civil Society Organisations in Agriculture
- Senior Government Officials
- Members of the Press
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I am grateful for this opportunity to make a few remarks on the occasion of the opening of CISANET's Annual General meeting today.

I am happy to see that this annual General Meeting, which has not taken place for some time I understand, could now be organised. I believe it is indeed important that you have this opportunity to come together, strategize and claim your role as important and representative voice in the national policy debate in agriculture.

CISANET provides a platform for a large number of civil society Organisations who are members of the network and the impressive turnout this morning of both Civil Society and Government of Malawi is a clear recognition of CISANET's role and an expression of your commitment and contribution to agricultural development in Malawi.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, we are all aware that agriculture is a vital sector for Malawi, employing over 85% of the country's workforce and contributing to at least 90% of the country's export earnings. The importance of the sector for food security and economic growth in Malawi is more than obvious. Government has recognised this importance and give it a high priority in both the past and the new Malawi Growth and Development Strategy. In addition to the Agriculture Sector Wide Approach, Government has developed a number of the other key strategic documents to guide the sector, most notably the Green Belt Initiative and the Medium-Term plan for the Farm Input Subsidy Programme, which constitutes cornerstones of

the Government's food security strategy. Even internationally, Malawi has played its role in pushing food security in Africa, playing its role in the CAADP process and putting agriculture in the centre of the development agenda, from where it had almost disappeared for a number of years.

There is a question that the policy documents I just referred to are key to sound operational decisions including resource allocations. It is for this reason that the country has to get it right in these big game plans. Policies and plans have to be technically sound, realistic in what can be achieved, realistic also in the resources that can be mobilised, be rigorously prioritised, understood and accepted by all stakeholders. I leave it to your judgement of whether the FISP or Green Belt Initiative responds to all these criteria.

But even more important than writing it all down is to actually do it.

I believe that we would find many reasons to congratulate each other for the successes in the agriculture sector of Malawi: the drafting and adoption of the above documents, the Farm Input Subsidy Programme, the achievement of national food security. My approach would however be more nuanced. I feel that we have not enough reason to be satisfied. In fact, I believe we should never be completely satisfied, but not to be discouraged ourselves from trying to reach the sky but to develop the ambition and the determination to do it.

The reality of Malawi's economic situation today is that agriculture has not played the role it could play; it has not reached the potential we all know exists. There is too much dependency on tobacco, which has made the whole economy too vulnerable to external shocks. As the same time the potential for tobacco itself is seemingly not exhausted either. Food production is focused too much on maize while food security at household level is not satisfactory and the nutritional status of the populations has not sufficiently improved. Real diversification of crop production and exports has not taken place. The vision of turning Malawi from a predominantly importing to a predominantly exporting nation has not materialised, quite the opposite. The mess in the economy today is to quite some extent attributable to the fact that Malawi imports more than it can afford by means of exports.

But how can this be changed? I guess by the right policies and planning, by hard work, by focusing on doing rather than talking, by leadership and collaboration, and by dialogue and consensus. Things never happen just because someone at the top of the hierarchy commands that they shall happen. All stakeholders have their role to play: the government and civil service, the private sector, the farmers, the development partners.

Distinguished Guests Ladies and Gentlemen, this is where CISANET come in. CISANET provides important policy input regarding the concerns of the poor Malawians in the Agriculture Sector. CISANET has certainly made its contribution, for example, towards influencing increased annual budgetary allocations to the agriculture sector in Malawi, this is inline with the CAADP recommendations of the minimum of 10%. I would like to commend CISANET for the work already done and urge you to continue representing the voices of the marginalised in the agriculture related policy formulation processes.

I have noted that the strategic plan of CISANET covers the following themes:

- 1. Market Development and International Trade**
- 2. Climate – Smart Agriculture**
- 3. Livestock and Dairy Development**
- 4. Nutrition and Social Protection**
- 4. National Agriculture Budget Lobby and Analysis**

I believe that you have chosen crucial areas, both in terms of their relevance for development of Agriculture in Malawi as well as for the potential contribution CISANET can make to the policy formulation but also to the follow up on implementation or ...the lack of it. As Civil Society Organisations, you have the tremendous advantage of working directly with rural communities, which cannot articulate their problems and influence the formulation of pro-poor policies directly. Neither government nor development partners can play this role, and your advocacy and lobbying contributes considerably to the overall results in the sector.

It is in recognition of this role that the European Union has supported CISANET through the “Local and Global Action for Food Security in Africa” project, which is implemented through CARE. I guess you are aware that the role of Civil Society Organisations is well recognised in our “bible” of partnership, the Cotonou Agreement. Both the EU and the ACP countries have subscribed to this, even though by some oat times with reluctance. This is why in practice we provide significant support to CSO’s for advocacy and more so for implementation of projects mainly in the agriculture and food security sectors, but also projects in the fields of governance and the rule of law, health, water and sanitation, hygiene, sustainable energy just to mention but a few more. As CSO’s cannot replace a government, advocacy and lobbying is as important as implementing grass root projects. Grass root projects in turn are more successful and sustainable when they work in tandem with government efforts.

Distinguished guest ladies and gentlemen, I don’t wish to bore you with the long list of programmes and projects the EU is funding in the agriculture in Malawi. What is important is that it has been the major focal sectors of EU support to Malawi for along time. In future, we hope that our collective efforts as government, CSO’s and development partners will deliver results more effectively and efficiently through the Agriculture Sector Wide Approach. We have also hopes that the ASWAP will provide for a more open minded and genuine policy dialogue among all stakeholders in the sector.

In this context, we will also continue to provide sizable grants to CSO’s for example, under the Farm Income Diversification Programme Phase II (FIDP II) under which Euro 3,000,000 have been allocated for this purpose and calls for proposals have been launched already. Other calls for Proposals are in the pipeline in the areas of climate change adaptation, nutrition and other sectors. I would like to encourage the CISANET members to always be pro-active to frequently check our websites where all centralised or decentralised calls for proposals as well as those managed by our headquarters in Brussels are published.

In conclusion, ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to express my profound gratitude to Mr. Tamani Nkhono of CISANET secretariat and his wonderful team for inviting me to this meeting. I wish you profound and productive deliberations.

THANK YOU

ZIKOMO KWAMBIRI