

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE HON. LOBIN C. LOWE, M.P,
MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE AT THE POLICY RESEARCH
SEMINAR ON THE FUTURE OF SMALLHOLDER
FARMING IN MALAWI**

Date: Thursday, **11th February 2021**

Venue: **Virtual**

- **Salutations**
- **PS Agriculture – Mrs Erica Maganga and all officials from Ministry.**
- **MwAPATA Advisory Board Chairperson, Prof Richard Mkandawire,**
- **NASFAM – Chief Executive, Dr Betty Chinyamunyamu and your team.**
- **MwAPATA Acting Executive Director, Mr William Chadza and your team.**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good morning to you all,

- It is an honor for me to be with you this morning on this auspicious occasion where we are having a policy research seminar on the future of smallholder farming in Malawi. I would like to thank MwAPATA for inviting me to this very important discussion which is touching on the heart of the agriculture economy.
- Looking back since I was appointed Minister of Agriculture on 9th July, 2020, I have been privileged to interact with many stakeholders in the agriculture sector albeit amidst growing challenging context with Covid 19. In all my interactions, it has been clear to me about the central role of smallholder farmers in agricultural transformation and in many instances, how that role is harnessed and supported has raised many questions.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- The viability of the smallholder-led agricultural transformation strategy in Malawi faces several challenges including low productivity, dependence

on rain-fed production systems with only one growing season, and limited use of irrigation. For this, I am pleased to note that MwAPATA Institute and NASFAM have jointly organized this seminar to explore transition pathways and strategies for smallholder farmers. It is recognized that smallholders are diverse and there is a need for different combinations of policy strategies to help tackle the challenges that they face.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- As you are aware, agriculture remains the key sector of Malawi's economy. It is vital for the livelihoods of most Malawians. Agriculture is important for household and national food, income, and nutrition security. Over the years, we have all noticed that this important sector is being challenged by persistent emerging problems like that of climate change which are impacting on the contributions of the sector towards Malawi's development agenda. In addition, now, we have this new Covid 19 challenge. It is for this reason, with a clear understanding that we all have to address these challenges and develop resilience.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Farmers and in particular, smallholder farmers play a significant role in the economy of this country. Smallholders tend to spend their incomes on locally produced goods and services, therefore stimulating the rural non-farm economy and creating additional jobs. In recent years, we have been talking about agricultural transformation and this is well articulated in the recently launched Malawi 2063, and more elaborated in the National Agriculture Policy (NAP).

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- The National Agriculture Policy guides all sector players towards increasing production, productivity, and real farm incomes. We now have an opportunity to contribute to new policy as the policy is drawing to an end. My Ministry will be looking forward to receiving and engaging in dialogue on the outcomes from this seminar.
- Moreover, my Ministry realized that there is need to have a coordinated approach to agricultural

development and in conformance to the Malabo Declaration developed the National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP). The National Agricultural Investment Plan prioritizes interventions aiming at enhancing market access, value addition, trade, and access to finance among other priorities. I am therefore pleased that this seminar has drawn together institutions and more so representatives of smallholder farmers who will share ideas on aligning their programmes to these NAIP focus areas.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am reminded that the “*Whole is greater than the sum of its parts*” and therefore this calls for all of us to play our part with greater collaboration in thought, process, and implementation.
- Specific to smallholder farmers, low productivity is the underlying challenge which undermines smallholder participation in markets, low agro-processing and value addition. Indeed, how can one talk of value addition when the yield is not even enough to last to the next season? How can domestic industries grow

amidst uncertainty of supply, and indeed how can we guarantee markets season after season amidst of all these uncertainties?

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- This seminar is timely, as you are all aware to date, my Ministry has facilitated access of over 342,000 metric tons of fertilizers to 3.4million smallholder farmers through the Affordable Input Programme. With good rains, as is being experienced in most parts of the country, we will register bumper harvest for both food security and markets.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Before I conclude, I wish to inform you that my Ministry, together with other Ministries are eager to pursue policies that lead to the transformation of smallholder farming. Our aspirations as reflected in the Malawi 2063, will be attained if the future for smallholder farming, we are deliberating today is inclusive (women and youth), climate smart and commercially oriented.

- I encourage everyone on this seminar and those who subscribe to the agricultural transformation to reflect on the future of smallholder farming, not to be displaced but to draw synergies with the medium and large-scale farmers.
- Finally, my sincere gratitude goes to the Agricultural Transformation Initiative (ATI) for their financial support towards this policy research seminar.
- With these remarks, it is now my pleasure and singular honor to declare this policy research seminar officially open and I encourage you all to actively participate.

I wish you success. God bless you all! God bless Malawi.