

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, HONOURABLE
LOBIN LOWE, MP AT THE 2021 MALAWI ANNUAL AGRICULTURAL POLICY
CONFERENCE AT BICC, 1ST JUNE 2021**

**Right Honourable Dr. Saulos Klaus Chilima, Vice President of the
Republic of Malawi**

Hon. Lobin Lowe, M.P., Minister of Agriculture

Hon. Sosten Alfred Gwengwe, M.P., Minister of Trade

Hon. Kezzie Kasambala Msukwa, Minister of Lands,

**Hon. Werani Chilenga, Chairperson of Parliamentary
Committee on Natural Resources,**

Mrs. Erica Maganga, Secretary for Agriculture

**Dr. Yanira Ntupanyama, Secretary for Forestry and Natural
Resources & MwAPATA Institute Board Member**

**Prof. Richard Mkandawire, Chair of MwAPATA Institute Board
of Directors & Advisory Board**

Prof. Thomas Jayne, Michigan State University

Prof. Ronald Mangani, University of Malawi

Mr. William Chadza, Executive Director, MwAPATA Institute

**Dr. Thomas Munthali, Director General of National Planning
Commission**

**Dr. Candida Nakhumwa, Country Director, Foundation for
Smoke Free World (FSFW), Agricultural Transformation
Initiative (ATI)**

Academia

The Media

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

My duty this morning is to invite the Vice President of the Republic of Malawi, Right Honourable Dr. Saulos Klaus Chilima to officially open this 2021 Malawi Annual Agriculture Policy Conference. But before I do that noble duty, allow me to say a word or two.

I want to start my remarks by congratulating the MwAPATA Institute; the Ministry of Agriculture; the National Planning Commission; the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources; the Malawi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry; the Civil Society Agriculture Network; and the Donor Committee on Agriculture and Food Security for jointly organizing this colourful event.

Ladies and Gentlemen; the theme for this year's conference is "Supporting Agriculture Transformation in Malawi: Beyond Research to Implementation". As you all know, agriculture continues to be the backbone of the Malawian economy, and as such growth and development in the agriculture sector has paramount economy-wide effects.

Despite its significance, Malawi's agricultural sector continues to operate in an environment that is full of challenges. I focus here on one such challenge, which I see as a precondition for sustaining livelihood improvements in Malawi: raising agricultural productivity of its smallholder farmers. This is consistent with one of the conference sub themes, "Increasing Agricultural Productivity."

Achieving higher rates of agricultural productivity growth will require technical innovation, that is, doing things differently and doing existing things more efficiently. Roughly 80% of Malawi's smallholders are devoted to maize, legumes and oilseed crops. So, to really make progress in Malawi, we must find ways to increase the yields of these fundamental crops in Malawi.

Farmers in this country obtain, on average, 5kg of maize for every kg of nitrogen nutrient in fertilizers. This is very low. The world average is 37 kgs per kg N. Malawi can generate much more crop output per kg of fertilizer used by helping farmers with improved management practices that improve soil health. Even if Malawian farmers could increase the efficiency with which they use fertilizers from 5kgs maize per kg nitrogen to even 20kg per kg nitrogen, this would result in an addition 1.8 million tonnes of maize produced in this country on existing farmland. Here is where we must focus.

Realizing that higher yields of the most fundamental crops in this country – maize, legumes and oilseeds – will be the basis for agricultural transformation and improved living standards, my Ministry is committed to the following:

1. Greater funding for agricultural research and development – generating higher yielding cultivars and more productive and healthy livestock products

2. Raising crop response to fertilizer use. Our challenge is not only to make fertilizers available to smallholder farmers but also to help them use that fertilizer more efficiently.

Investment in agricultural research and development has been consistently demonstrated to be one of the most effective ways to promote agricultural productivity growth.

Malawi devotes less than 3% of its agricultural expenditures to R&D. Most Asian governments spend at least four times more per farmer and per hectare cultivated than African governments. No wonder cereal yields more than doubled over the past 40 years in Asia but rose by only 38% in Africa.

These are not new ideas, but they are long overdue for implementation and sustained support. Donors and policy-makers tend to prefer low-hanging fruit that offers quick wins that are highly visible, avoiding investments that require dedicated long-term support and have long gestation periods before impacts are felt. But if left unaddressed, the constraints posed by the slow pace of technical innovation on Malawian farms will retard the achievement of almost all rural development goals, including those pertaining to reducing inequalities and improving the livelihoods of rural women and youth.

The main ingredients are sustained strengthening of adaptive R&D&E to support farm technical innovation and adaptation, supportive agricultural marketing and trade policies and infrastructural

investments that reduce costs and risks in the food system, promote investment and competition in agricultural value chains, and enable farmers to adopt these technical innovations.

This conference, therefore, ladies and gentlemen, could not have come at a better time. The conference comes at a time when the Malawi 2063 has just been launched, but also when my Ministry is in the process of reviewing the NAP and develop its successor.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now my singular honour to invite the Vice President Right Honourable Dr Saulos Klaus Chilima to officially open this 2021 Malawi Annual Agriculture Policy Conference, Your Honour.