

**Keynote Address by Hon Patrick Pule Ralotsia,
Minister, Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food
Security, Botswana – at CABI’s African Regional
Consultation and Invasive Policy Summit: 25 – 28 February
2019, Cresta Lodge, Gaborone, Botswana. Tuesday, 26
February 2019**

Salutations

A heartily good morning to you all,

**Director of Ceremonies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and
Gentlemen,**

I am delighted to officiate at this CABI African Regional Consultation summit. First of all, on behalf of the Government of Botswana, I would like to extend my warmest welcome to all delegates and experts attending the meeting.

I understand that the theme of this meeting is ‘*Working in partnership for a sustainable future*’. This theme seems to be appropriate given that we can only transform Africa’s agriculture through partnerships. This theme is also compatible with Botswana’s Vision 2036 of Achieving Prosperity for all and its pillars (being SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT;

I am told CABI is one hundred and eleven (111) years old today and that throughout its existence CABI has pioneered the delivery of plant health services, ranging from classical biological control to integrated pest management. More recently, Plantwise, a global programme led by CABI with its plant health clinics in countries across the world, provide advice and support to hundreds of millions of farmers through community, national and regional networks, potentially forming the basis for a global pest and disease surveillance system.

I am therefore pleased to inform you that Botswana is one of the members of CABI and has been cooperating with the organisation since 1986. CABI and Botswana have worked in important areas such as capacity building in sanitary and phytosanitary issues to enhance trade, as well as, carrying out training on knowledge management and helping to manage invasive species.

Director of Ceremonies,

The world human population is expected to reach over 9 billion in 2050, farmers need to find new and more productive ways to farm food and also diversify their crops. Therefore, the issue of feeding the world has never been an easier one.

By 2050, agriculture will need to produce almost 60-70 percent more food, feed and biofuel just to meet demand. With climate change having a greater effect on food production and global food security, poverty will remain a major problem for many developing countries. I believe, as we venture into the coming year and beyond, more can and must be done if we are to ensure our food security and protect the livelihoods of our people.

Africa has approximately 930 million hectares of land suitable for agricultural production but more than half of it remains relatively inaccessible to good roads and markets.

Crop diseases and insect pests are major challenges, but I would also like to highlight an issue of critical importance affecting Africa's capability to achieve agricultural transformation - and that is invasive species.

The impact of invasive alien species on agricultural land is vast and growing daily. Their impact to habitat loss, the threat they pose to biodiversity, and the damage they cause worldwide was estimated to be US\$1.4 trillion or 5% of global GDP.

The spread of invasive species is now recognised as one of the greatest threats to the well-being of the African continent and the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals and can also

hamper the achievement of Botswana vision 2036 pillar of sustainable environment. Invasive species create complex and far-reaching challenges that threaten both the natural biological riches of the earth and the well-being of our people. Direct and indirect health effects are increasingly serious and the damage to native biodiversity is often irreversible.

The recent outbreaks of fall armyworm is just a recent example of the problem of invasive species. Since January 2016, the fall armyworm, a caterpillar that is native to the Americas has been devastating maize and other crops in over 44 African countries, including Botswana, placing at risk the food security, and indeed the livelihoods of around 300 million people. The fall armyworm is a forceful reminder that invasive species cannot be overlooked, if the desired agricultural transformation is to be realised.

Introduced pests and diseases such as maize lethal necrosis disease, Panama disease in bananas, fall armyworm, tomato leafminer (*Tuta absoluta*), papaya mealybug, oriental fruitfly, citrus greening, banana bacterial wilt, cassava brown streak virus, coconut lethal yellowing disease and others, are present in the region or on the African continent. These reduce crop yields and increase poverty as they spread and become more abundant. Reduced crop yields result in increased land

transformation and pesticide use, contributing to loss of biodiversity.

To this end, I am confident that in partnership we can help farmers produce more food, reduce food waste and adopt more healthy and sustainable diets and achieve zero hunger by 2030.

Botswana is particularly of high risk to invasive species because of its geographical proximity to South Africa, a country in which more than 350 invasive plant species have already been recorded.

A semi-aquatic shrub, giant sensitive plant (*Mimosa pigra*), one of the most destructive invasive plants in Africa, is rapidly spreading throughout the continent and is abundant in Zambia and parts of South Africa, Mozambique and Malawi and as such poses a significant threat to the Okavango Delta and other wetlands, where it would threaten aquatic biodiversity and food production. In addition, a number of widespread and emerging undesirable plants such as *Cenchrus biflorus*, Kariba weed, *Prosopis* species (locally known as Sexanana), leuceana, Jerusalem thorn, and others threaten biodiversity, agriculture and water resources in Botswana. Additionally, Persian lilac

and jacaranda are invading riparian woodlands in eastern Botswana threatening biodiversity.

Introduced fish such as the common carp, largemouth bass and the alien Nile tilapia threaten aquatic biodiversity. Rising temperatures and increased carbon dioxide levels caused by climate change are likely to make many of these plants even more invasive and damaging.

Consistent with the theme of this meeting, I wish to implore you to find sustainable solutions to enhance food production and to reduce or reverse land degradation in order to feed a rapidly growing African population.

Partnerships between policy makers, researchers and technical experts will be required to ensure that systems are in place to prevent the risks of pests spreading between countries as these know no boundaries. I am sure that CABI, Member countries and Regional bodies have a role to play here and this is yet another example of why a forum like this is so valuable in helping to solve these problems.

To this end, we are pleased that CABI signed an MOU with SADC to cooperate on areas of mutual interest such as food security, trade and environmental management including invasive species. As African countries increasingly build their capacity

to tackle these challenges, we propose to work with CABI and SADC to foster partnerships and projects to accelerate the adoption of solutions to help improve food security.

Director of Ceremonies,

Botswana look forward to working with CABI, fellow Member countries and our partners in Africa and across the world to help our continent ensure food security for the 1.2 billion mouths to be fed.

Finally, I wish this consultation meeting success and hope you enjoy your stay in Botswana.

I thank You!