**Introduction Remarks**

**Dennis Rangi, Executive Director - International Development**

**African Member Country Consultation**

**Lusaka Zambia**

**14th October 2015**

The Honourable PS Agriculture and Livestock of the Republic of Zambia, Mr Shawa,

Government Officials,

CABI Liaison Officers,

My CABI Colleagues,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning!

Firstly, let me take this opportunity to thank our host, the Government of the Republic of Zambia through the Honourable PS Agriculture. We are honoured by your presence and on behalf of us all - I would like to offer our sincere thanks to the government for the warm welcome and for hosting us.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the 4th CABI Africa Member Governments Consultation. It is a great honour to be amongst friends and colleagues once again - I am extremely delighted to see such a strong turnout of CABI Member country representatives and development partners.

On my part, it’s always good to come back to Zambia. This is a country where I spent my early days of my career working on cassava in Mansa - Luapula province with scientists from Mt. Makulu. I therefore have good and interesting memories of the place!

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

For those of you who may not be very familiar with CABI, you will be hearing more about us (and some of our success stories) from the CEO, Dr. Trevor Nicholls and my colleagues but I just want to say that as an organisation, CABI is not that huge compared to the likes of the CG, FAO etc - in terms of staff numbers and turnover - but in, our over 100 years of existence, we have always punched above our weight when it comes to long-term impact – and the fact that we are still around and going strong after so many years attests to that! Some of you will have read our 100 years history where our achievements since 1908 are well documented.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

We are today operating in a context that is different from 3 years ago when we met in Ghana. A good number of countries in Africa have shown remarkable progress since then. As we meet here today, I was thinking about the progress we have made as a continent and the statements that have been made from time to time about the progress.

You may recall the Economist of May 2000 when Africa was described as the Hopeless Continent. About the same time, Tony Blair, the then PM of the UK said that the state of Africa was a scar on the conscience of the world. 10 years later in December 2011, The Economist described Africa as the Hopeful Continent - saying that after decades of slow growth, Africa had a real chance to follow in the footsteps of Asia. And in March 2013, the Economist described Africa as the Rising Continent - saying that African lives had already greatly improved over the past decade. And that the next ten years would even be better. Today in 2015, some of the world's fastest-growing countries are African – currently Africa is growing at an average of over 4%!

I think what is manifested by all this, is, there is great promise ahead but we need to see how to put our heads together to really see how we can achieve our dreams in the shortest time possible – at least, in the next 10 years at the very most! But most importantly, this progress is because of the contributions that we have made individually as ourselves sat in this room today and collectively as institutions such as CABI working in partnership with you. However, we have also learnt that development is a complicated business process. And so the management of success and the sustainability of it, is beginning to present us with a new challenge. But that is what I call a good problem. Because it’s a challenge you confront with your stomach full not hungry….!!! Its about where you sell your surplus harvest as we have seen in Zambia!

Africa and agriculture are mutually bound by a strong bond of a developmental agenda for the continent. In their 50th Anniversary celebrations, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU), while acknowledging past successes and challenges, rededicated themselves to the continent’s accelerated development and technological progress and also laid down both a vision and action plan - Agenda 2063. This is an encouraging starting point that offers a solid entry point to translate political statements and commitments into concrete actions, provide the means to track progress and take timely decisions on corrective measures.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

CABI works with farming communities around the world, supporting them as they battle with poor soils, the management of pests and diseases including invasive species to help provide food for an ever growing population. So our work ranges from working directly with farmers to providing innovative solutions at the higher levels in society such as with regional bodies like COMESA.

For example, when we met 3 years ago, our Plantwise programme which is well known to many of you was in its infancy. Today, it is proven to be a great success. You will be hearing from my colleague Dr Washington Otieno, the remarkable progress we have made to date. Plantwise and indeed our other programmes like the Soil Health Programme have taught us the real power of development when people are given a chance to participate.

There is nobility and capacity in people especially the farmers themselves that we are trying to help when we let them participate instead of telling them what to do. Talking their language and recognising them as partners in development, makes a huge difference in achieving the desired impact.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

As you will see from the theme of this Consultation – *Improving Livelihoods through Knowledge Solutions and Partnerships* – we are hoping to identify ways of working with you to support our MCs in their quest to address the challenges that confront them in realizing food security.

So as an intergovernmental organization, CABI’s programmes are driven by the concerns and needs of its member countries. As already mentioned the last regional consultation was held in 2012 and as a result, CABI was mandated by you to provide support in SEVEN priority areas - namely:

1. Trade and market access
2. Knowledge management, communication and use
3. Plant health
4. Biodiversity and invasive species management
5. Climate smart agriculture
6. Institutional capacity building
7. Publication of, and access to, authoritative information resources

The priority areas have helped us to shape CABI’s Medium Term Strategy 2014-16, and you will hear from our Regional Director of the significant progress that has been made in addressing these priority areas jointly by CABI, yourselves and other partners.

So as in previous occasions, this consultation is aimed to help align CABI’s work more effectively with regional needs and strategic plans, and to develop mutually agreed programmes. More specifically, the objectives are to:

1. Review progress achieved in the priority areas identified in 2012.
2. Identify new emerging regional priorities
3. Agree on action plans by linking regional priorities with CABI’s capabilities and strategies and identifying synergies among partners

We have also selected a number of emerging key strategic areas such as open data & mobile information delivery, emerging with Plantwise programme, CABI's role in facilitating trade and market access, CABI’s Policy on Access and Benefit Sharing under the Nagoya Protocol. And lastly, we will have a special session focusing on Invasive Species – the livelihoods threat facing Africa!

As an organisation, we believe in beneficial and smart partnerships, leveraging on the progress that has been made and adding value to ongoing work in the countries. So apart from Member Country and prospective Member Country delegates, representatives of our strategic partners are attending this meeting. Interactions with them will provide us with good opportunities to secure the buy-in and commitment of key development partners whose support we greatly need to pursue the proposals emanating from this meeting. Additionally, the outcomes of the regional consultations will be fed into the bigger CABI Global Review Conference, which is slated for July 2016 in London.

And lastly, you will recall that when we met in Ghana we opened our West Africa centre in Accra. As an organisation, we do not believe in flying people from out to provide solutions locally - so CABI wishes to strengthen its presence as a development partner in this region and thus bring our technical skills closer to the recipients. To that end, we will be signing an Agreement today with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Zambia to launch/establish CABI southern Africa Centre in Lusaka to serve our southern African member countries - another constellation to our wide global presence!!! Zambia’s central location in the region makes it quite ideal for us to establish a base here.

Finally, I would like to thank the ZARI DG Mr. Moses Mwale for organising this meeting and acknowledge the support we have got from all of you including the government – the ministries of Agriculture and Foreign Affairs. My CABI colleagues, who have worked tirelessly over many weeks and to you all, for finding the time to attend. We are very much looking forward to listen to your contributions and the outcomes of the Consultations.

*Thank you very much. Zikomo Kwambiri*