



Opening Statement

By

**Dr. Stergomena L. Tax
Executive Secretary**

at the

**General Assembly of the
Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and
Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA)**

**Boipuso Hall, Gaborone, Botswana
6 May 2014**

The Honourable Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Botswana,
The Chairperson of the Board of CCARDESA,
The Chairperson of the CCARDESA General Assembly,
The Executive Director of the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa,
The Executive Director of CCARDESA,
Executive Directors of Sub-regional research organisations,
Representatives of the International Development Partners:
The European Union, the World Bank and USAID,
Distinguished delegates from regional organisations,
Distinguished delegates from SADC and COMESA Member States,
Media Partners,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dumelang,

It is an honour and privilege to be given an opportunity to address this important gathering which has a special significance to the SADC region. The holding of this first General Assembly of the Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA), represents the operational realisation of a vision that was conceptualised over a long period of time regarding the management of agricultural research in Southern Africa.

Chairperson,

When SADC was operating in a decentralised manner, with various Member States coordinating specific sectors, the Agricultural Research and training was coordinated by the then Southern African Centre for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Training (SACCAR), located in Gaborone. The Coordinating Unit delivered a number of commendable results to the region, and there was a need to immediately fill a vacuum when SACCAR came to an end.

To this end, a long process of establishing CCARDESA started in 2006 and was only concluded in 2011 when the then Vice President of Botswana launched the organisation. CCARDESA was established as a subsidiary organisation of SADC, an arrangement that was found to be the most appropriate for purposes of ensuring that the organisation maintains strong links to SADC Secretariat and remains a valuable contributor to the regional priorities of food security and poverty reduction. In this regard, CCARDESA is appropriately placed to deliver on the commitments of SADC Member States, particularly those related to agricultural research and development, and indeed CCARDESA has lived to the expectations of Member States within its short period of existence.

It is estimated that 62% of the SADC region's 277 million people are dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. The agricultural sector contributes an average of 17% to the regional GDP, and is

therefore a very important sector to all SADC Member States. It also has immense potential to contribute to food security, youth and women empowerment through job creation and income generation, and as such, wealth creation.

One of the major weak points in the stimulation of agricultural led growth in SADC has been the lack of a strong base for technology generation and public-private partnership models for commercialisation of technologies. I am glad to note that in the past one year of operation of CCARDESA, appropriate attention has been placed on research and technology, as well as support to the private sector. This has been strongly supported by the Medium Term Operational Plan on the strategic direction of CCARDESA. In view of this, CCARDESA has a critical role to play in the agricultural sector and food security, in particular, and it is well positioned to make valuable contribution to the regional priorities.

Chairperson,

SADC is committed to support CCARDESA, and based on the Charter that established CCARDESA, the institution deals with overall coordination of research and development projects, while the SADC Secretariat provides strategic policy guidance and leadership in order to ensure that the regional Research & Development agenda, and priorities thereof are consistent with the SADC mandate, and are realised.

I am delighted to note that in addition, CCARDESA is developing new projects under its Medium Term Operational Plan. The SADC Secretariat is therefore proud to see this subsidiary organisation moving with speed to deliver on its mandate. I wish to take this opportunity to commend CCARDESA for the commendable achievements made so far, and to appeal to the National Agricultural Research Systems in SADC Member States to avail themselves to CCARDESA and establish strong links with them in order to form a strong front for addressing agricultural related challenges of the region.

Chairperson,

The population of the SADC region is growing at an average rate of about 2.5% per annum, while the number of food insecure people has ranged between 12 million and 22 million in the past 10 years. The region not only needs to reduce food insecurity, but also to increase food production to keep pace with population growth. While food production can be increased by increasing the area of land to be used for agriculture, this is not a viable option in the SADC region, the most desirable and sustainable option before us is to increase productivity so that more food can be produced per unit area of land.

Climate change has become one of the main challenges threatening food security in the region. In this regard, the region needs to develop appropriate technologies for adaptation and resilience.

This calls for careful consideration of resource allocation and applied research which can give results of immediate use to farmers in improving the resilience of their production technologies and farming systems to climate change.

In this regard, I wish to take this opportunity to call upon CCARDESA and its stakeholders to place considerable attention on the needs of farmers in the development of programmes. I am glad to note that the Medium Term Operational Plan has an orientation towards farmers' needs, but this has to be more visible in your actual operational work plans and projects. For example, the region urgently requires programmes that can reduce post-harvest crop losses which are currently estimated to be as high as 40%.

Chairperson,

Agricultural-led youth programmes for alleviating youth unemployment in the region should be given the highest priority by CCARDESA. As we celebrate the African Union year of Agriculture and Food Security, we need to launch a SADC-wide youth programme to create opportunities in agricultural value chains and building agricultural entrepreneurs.

It is worth noting that SADC has developed a Regional Agricultural Policy which was approved by the SADC Council of Ministers in 2013. The policy aims at enhancing food security through various innovative routes, including improved productivity

of farm enterprises. The implementation of the specific priorities articulated in this policy is a responsibility of Member States and partner organisations operating in the region. As a subsidiary organisation of SADC, CCARDESA has a significant and indispensable role in driving the agricultural research component of the Regional Agricultural Policy, in conjunction with Member States.

I am certain that CCARDESA, stakeholders and International Cooperating Partners are ready to collectively contribute to agricultural research and technology generation in the region. Your presence here is a clear demonstration of that commitment.

Chairperson

In conclusion, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Government of the Republic of Botswana for hosting the CCARDESA Secretariat and providing logistical support including adequate office space. I am aware that there are challenges; nonetheless, consultations are on-going, the SADC Secretariat in collaboration with the host country is committed to resolve those challenges.

I also thank the inaugural Board of CCARDESA for providing guidance to the CCARDESA Secretariat and performing their functions with exceptional commitment and diligence. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to the development partners/ICPs for their support to CCARDESA and the region as a

whole. In this regard, I would like to recognize the European Union (EU), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the World Bank, USAID, FARA, and all continental and regional partners for supporting CCARDESA, particularly during the entire process of establishing CCARDESA, and thereafter in operationalizing CCARDESA's mandate.

I wish you all a very fruitful General Assembly which will, hopefully, provide a strong reference point for implementation of activities relevant to farmers in the region.

Thank you for your kind attention!