



**SPEECH BY THE CABINET SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE
LIVESTOCK AND FISHERIES ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL
LAUNCH OF KENYA NATIONAL STRATEGY ON GENETIC RESOURCES
WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE 2016-2020 AT THE
INTER-CONTINENTAL HOTEL, NAIROBI, ON WEDNESDAY, 27th
JANUARY 2016**

Fellow Cabinet Secretaries

Principal Secretaries present

Director –General, KALRO

Representatives of International Research Institutions

Development partners

Representatives of County Governments present

Government Officials and Research Scientists,

Distinguished Guests,

And any other species in this room, but not listed above ----- Good morning.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are aware, our main task this morning is to launch the first ever Kenyan strategy on genetic resources within the context of climate change. That title is loaded with two critical statements which are; The Strategy on Genetic Resources, and, Climate Change. Therefore, with the talented brains in this room, I don't need to stress how auspicious this morning is.

This morning is about science, research, strategy, genetic resources and climate change. This makes me take pride in being here because;

- Science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition,
and

- Research is what I do when I don't know what I am doing, while
- Strategy is about making choices, trade offs and deliberately choosing to be different.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you may be aware, Kenya has a rich diversity of genetic resources. These resources include a diversity of plants, animals, insects, aquatic and microbial organisms found in terrestrial, aquatic and below ground habitats and ecosystems. The resources constitute a rich national heritage that need to be conserved and harnessed to sustain human livelihoods in terms of food, shelter and medicines. Indeed, biodiversity is a valuable asset, which if appropriately leveraged will provide most solutions to impacts of climate change and other social hardships.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Kenya constitution, 2010 recognizes the critical role that genetic resources, as a collective heritage of communities and our nation, play in supporting food security, ecosystem services, environmental quality and sustainable livelihoods. The importance of biodiversity and genetic resources, especially indigenous seed, and the need to protect it for use by Kenyan communities is underscored in various Articles of the Kenya Constitution 2010.

For example, Article 11 (3) (b) of the Constitution requires the enactment of legislation to provide for the "protection of the ownership of indigenous seeds and plant varieties and their use by communities of Kenya" while Articles 71 and 72 under the Chapter on environment and natural resources require the enactment of law on biodiversity as one of the consequential Bills to be passed

into law within five years following the enactment of the constitution. I am glad to note that my Ministry together with other stakeholders have made significant advances towards getting this law enacted.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Taking cue from the Constitution, the Ministry of agriculture, livestock and fisheries places a lot of importance to genetic resources as a basis for seed. Towards this, the ministry launched a National Seed Industry Policy in 2010. One of the strategic objectives of this policy is to facilitate provision of quality inputs, especially seed to farmers. This is because seed is one of the most critical inputs in agricultural production and has a significant potential in increasing on-farm productivity and enhancing food security. In the words of Michael Pollan " Seeds have the power to preserve species, to enhance cultural as well as genetic diversity, to counter economic monopoly and to check the advance of conformity on all its many fronts".

The basis and source for the development of quality seed or planting materials are the genetic resources or germplasm which are maintained for the purpose of breeding, preservation and other research uses. These resources may take the form of seed collections stored in seed banks, trees growing in nurseries, animal breeding lines maintained in animal breeding programs or in gene banks. They may also take the form of collections of wild species or elite and domesticated breeding lines that have undergone extensive human selection and breeding.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am cognisant of the numerous challenges that Genetic resources, and by extension, biodiversity, the conservation, utilization and sharing of benefits of plant genetic resources continues to face. These include:

- (i) Excessive degradation of plant biodiversity and over exploitation, which has led to depletion of some species and narrowed their genetic base. This has been further exacerbated by the effects of climate change.
- (ii) Increasing over-exploitation, bio-piracy and destruction of habitats as well as loss of indigenous knowledge.
- (iii) Multiplicity of institutions with legal mandates to regulate various aspects of genetic resources leading to inadequate coordination and conflicts in management of genetic resources;
- (iv) Lack of a comprehensive biodiversity conservation facility for animal, microbial and aquatic genetic resources. This compromises germplasm security.

Ladies and Gentlemen

In a bid to address these challenges and strengthen this sub sector, the Ministry has instituted the following five (5) measures;

- (i) Enactment of the National Seed Policy in 2010 in which the Government outlined the direction and specific interventions for realizing sustainable seed industry development. These include availing adequate high quality seed and planting material to meet the Country's seed requirements and position Kenya as a regional leader in the industry.

Am proud to assert that we are indeed leading the region as at now.
The challenge again is to maintain the lead.

- (ii) Reviewing the Seed and Plant Varieties Act, Cap 326 through amendments effected in 2013 to provide for among others, best practices in seed certification procedures, plant variety release protocols, plant breeders rights and anchorage of regulations on management of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture
- (iii) Strengthening the institutional capacity of the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS) and providing for structured engagement with industry stakeholders (e.g. Seed Traders Association of Kenya (STAK) and Plant Breeders Association of Kenya (PBAK)) through enactment of the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service Act, 2013.
- (iv) Enactment of the Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Research Act, 2013 which establishes the Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO) with semi-autonomous Research Institutes.
- (v) Creation of the Genetic Resources Research Institute under KALRO charged with the responsibility of conserving genetic resources.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The establishment of the Genetic Resources Research Institute is expected to coordinate and legally operationalize and align genetic resources management to international best practice that provide for conservation, access and benefit sharing arising from the use of Plant Genetic Resources. Through a consultative process, the Institute and its partners have developed a 5 year national

strategy and action plan on mainstreaming conservation of genetic resources into climate change adaptation planning, strategies programmes and projects.

The strategy and action plan identifies 5 strategic objectives, defines key issues and proposes intervention options to be undertaken to improve the management of genetic resources in Kenya. The strategic objectives include:

- Promoting *in situ* conservation of plant animal, aquatic and microbial genetic resources
- Promoting *ex situ* conservation of plant animal, aquatic and microbial genetic resources
- Strengthening policy institutional capacity
- Improving access and sustainable use of our rich genetic diversity
- Enhancing knowledge management and information dissemination

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Strategy alone without implementation would be worthless venture. I have noted that today, we are launching both the strategy and its action plan. This gives me the confident that, if implemented fully, then we will be able to address current challenges and position the country to effectively conserve, utilize, and benefit the country as a whole.

This is also the strategy to ensure that we maintain our leadership in the region. It is therefore my hope that the strategy and action plan will be a rallying point for all stakeholders, development partners, government ministries, NGOs, universities and others to pull together to enable Kenya make best use of its genetic diversity while fulfilling its international obligations. The proposed stakeholder's platform, whose cardinal function is resource mobilization, is indeed one avenue of achieving the envisaged partnerships.

My ministry pledges to support KALRO to facilitate the Institute to foster effective management and utilization of animal, aquatic, and microbial genetic resources in Kenya. I appeal to development partners and all stakeholders to join us in delivering this noble endeavour.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is now my pleasure to declare the Kenya National Strategy on Genetic Resources within the context of climate change officially launched

Thank you.