

Distinguished guests from eleven countries across East, Central, West and Southern Africa, Representatives of organizations based in Uganda,

Ladies and Gentlemen –

Welcome to Uganda, our beautiful and fertile country. “The PEARL of AFRICA”.

Welcome to the Sweetpotato Seed Systems Community of Practice: Seventh Consultation, taking place for the next two days in Mukono.

I am honoured to welcome you on behalf of the Uganda National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO), and one of our key private sector partners BIOCROPS (Uganda) Limited.

Uganda is a land of many staples: matooke, cassava, potato and sweetpotato – as well as those “other” staples such as maize, rice, sorghums and millets....

So we could say that we are the home of roots, tubers and banana crops. As you know sweetpotato is so much part of our daily diet – that we often just call it “potato” – but we do fully recognize the important role of sweetpotato in contributing to Uganda’s food and income security.

We are also immensely proud of the contributions, which our team of scientists have made in breeding beta carotene rich varieties of orange-fleshed sweetpotato. Many of you will know of NASPOT 9 “O” and NASPOT 10 “O” also known as Vita and Kabode – which have now spread beyond Uganda’s borders – to Ethiopia, Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya.

The contribution which these biofortified varieties are making to reducing Vitamin A Deficiency Diseases and malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa is now recognized globally.

For this we sincerely congratulate our four colleagues from HarvestPlus and the International Potato Center for championing this work and for being awarded the World Food Prize, 2016.

In particular, among us now – we salute two of the 2016 co-laureates from the International Potato Center (CIP), Dr Jan Low and of course our own Dr Robert Mwanga – a son of Uganda – “born and bred” out of our Ugandan national agricultural research system.

However, we cannot remain content with this great honour. This success, places the bar even higher and sets us new challenges....

So, I am pleased that our meeting here in Mukono is going to be addressing some key issues in relation to sweetpotato seed systems:

As members of the **Sweetpotato for Profit and Health Initiative** (the SPHI), we have a target of reaching **10 million households in sub-Saharan Africa by 2020**. The provision of quality sweetpotato seed (or planting material) is critical to this.

Firstly, this requires strong seed systems. So, I look forward to learning of the experiences across the 11 countries participating in this meeting – about how they are **scaling up their sweetpotato seed systems** – not only about the technologies, but also the factors which create an enabling policy environment, the social and behavioural change and new organizational arrangements which are needed, so that farmers can **access quality sweetpotato planting material of the right varieties, at the right time**.

Secondly, we talk about “quality planting material” – but what do we mean by this? Quality starts at source and I am very pleased with the steady progress which the sweetpotato team at NaCRRRI has been making, in implementing our **business plan for sustainable sweetpotato pre-basic seed production**.

However, we need to ensure that the quality of seed is maintained through the seed system, and at farmer level.

So, here in Uganda, under the leadership of Professor Settumba Mukasa of Makerere University and working closely with the Phytosanitary and Quarantine Services of the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF), and seed system stakeholders, we have developed and piloted **seed standards and inspection procedures for sweetpotato**. This is an important step, and we soon hope to join our colleagues in Ethiopia and Tanzania with the official announcement that the sweetpotato seed standards have been gazetted.

We look forward to an approach where vine multipliers can get their quality seed inspected quickly and at reasonable cost, so that the implementation of the seed standards, becomes a positive driver of the seed system, and not a bottleneck. In this respect, we are privileged to have participation and feedback in this meeting from the chairpersons for the Western, Eastern, Northern, North Eastern and Central **Seed Multipliers Associations in Uganda**, and local government extension officers.

Thirdly, we will only achieve our ambitious targets to make a difference across sub-Saharan Africa, if we can collaborate and work effectively in partnership with all seed system stakeholders. This means that we need to use opportunities such as our **sweetpotato seed systems community of practice** to share experiences across countries and organisations. I am happy that our sweetpotato family is expanding, as I understand that we have researchers not only from the National Agricultural Research Institutes (NARIs) in 11 countries, but also colleagues from: Catholic Relief Services, Farm Africa, Farm Concern International, HarvestPlus, VEDCO and World Vision International. Please reach out to seek new friendships and linkages, which will enrich your work.

In Uganda, NARO, NaCRRI, and many of the Zonal Agricultural Research and Development Institutes, have enjoyed a long and productive collaboration with the International Potato Center, with activities under ASARECA, HarvestPlus, DONATA, SASHA, in addition to collaboration on potato. I know that you will have rich interactions with each other, not only in this conference hall, but also during your “learning journeys” to visit NaCRRI, BIOCROPS and Mr Lwanyaga’s home in Mpigi District where HarvestPlus has been supporting commercial sweetpotato seed systems.

So, finally, colleagues - I urge you to take full advantage of the opportunities for learning and developing further research questions in this Community of Practice. I urge you to benefit from this annual consultation and trust that you will take back ideas to your country communities to test and put into practice for the benefit of sweetpotato farmers across sub-Saharan Africa.

Together, yes, we can reach 10 million households!

With this I declare the 7th Consultation of the SPHI Sweetpotato Seed Systems and Crop Management Community of Practice OFFICIALLY OPEN.