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## TRANSFORMATION OF KENYA'S AGRICULTURE

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This timely conference provides an important turning point in the history of Agricultural development in Kenya. The critical responsibility of the intelligentsia is to interpret and change the world. The Senate Committee on Agriculture Livestock and Fisheries which I represent welcomes this important scientific conference as a forum for innovative and creative pragmatic thinking and rejection of old dogmas in Agricultural production and marketing. Kenya's inability to feed itself and to significantly reduce rural poverty is a product of poor policies, lack of political will, institutional failure and failed imposed models of the past.

The Breton woods dogmas of state withdrawal, liberalization and privatization have now reached their point of diminishing returns. Time has now come for a new independent review of these policies and bold action based on our own past successful domestic experiences of the 70's and also useful experiences from other countries such as India and China. For radical agricultural transformation to take place, Kenya needs a strong, visionary determined political leadership committed to prioritizing agriculture as the prime mover of Kenya's economy.

The biggest challenge in Kenya's Agriculture is political visibility, underinvestment and official neglect. Agriculture dominates Kenya's economy feeding over 40 million people, employing 70% of the population, contributing 45% of the total government revenue, 24% of the GDP and more than 50% of the total export earnings. Yet it is consistently ignored and marginalized in allocation of public resources. The share of government spending on Agriculture in this year's budget is a meager 4% compared to education 20%, infrastructure and ICT 16.6%, national security 5.9% and health 4.2%. The question is why should the Government of Kenya (GOK) put such a low priority in public investment in such a major sector of the economy?

The answer is **politics**. Given the cut throat competition for budgetary resources, only well organized sectors can access a reasonable share. Unless the farmers wake up and re-organize themselves and have a strong political voice the way the teachers do, they will continue to be neglected, ignored and squeezed out of the budgetary allocations.

Successive Kenyan political elites have made biased policies and distributed public resources in a discriminatory manner that has retarded both Agricultural growth and rural development. The focus of the much acclaimed vision 2030 is to transform Kenya into a newly industrialized middle income country yet growth in Agriculture is more effective in reducing widespread poverty than growth in industry or service sectors. As leaders in Malawi have clearly demonstrated, what we need is a no-nonsense political leader to champion Kenya's agricultural revolution that will lead the country to an agricultural boom and overcome our chronic food shortage and rural poverty.

The level of public resources allocated to Agriculture has been very low given the centrality of Agriculture and its contribution to Kenya's economy. Food security requires the same commitment and public resources as National security, Infrastructure, Education and Health services. As Chinese and Indian models have clearly demonstrated, to spur rapid agricultural production, the government must reject self interested prescriptions of foreign institutions such as WTO and embark on a program of massive public investment and subsidy support program for Agriculture. The Government must prioritize the fundamental interests of our people.

Such support should sustain farmer's interest in Agricultural production by ensuring that the farmers get maximum return from their farming pursuits. Specific government interventions should include massive expansion of arable land through irrigation. Irrigation has been the Agricultural transforming game changer both in India and China. The Government should treat construction of irrigation infrastructure with same seriousness and urgency as it is treating other public infrastructure projects such as the standard gauge railway, the annuity roads program and energy projects. The investment in irrigation is more beneficial to our people than these other projects which can be done later.

The government must also invest in increasing per unit productivity of Agricultural land through provision of subsidized scientifically produced high yielding seeds, subsidized appropriate chemical inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides, subsidized agricultural machinery and technology for planting, weeding and harvesting. Agricultural research is too important to be left to donors and farmers levies. Government must also provide adequate resources for supporting agricultural research and revitalize agricultural extension and farm outreach services.

Every year in Gujarat, a pre-planting mobilization is carried out in which hundreds of farmers are trained in village training centers on issues of soil health and fertility, best suited crops, planting methods and access to credit which has revolutionized agricultural production. The government must also encourage the private sector to invest in storage, processing and value addition as well as research and development. Companies like Monsanto should be encouraged to produce super high yield seeds. China has successfully turned Agricultural subsidy as a tool for Agricultural development modernization and transformation. The government must also remove negative effects of discriminatory taxation on Agricultural produce and provide tax incentives, price stabilization funds and access to credit to cushion farmers against exposure arising from market hazards. The government must also establish mechanisms to oversee operations of the commodity markets to ensure transparency, fair play and protection of farmers' interests. In appropriate cases government should set the minimum prices and become a buyer of last resort in the cases of severe market volatility or collapse. Government should invest in **RURBANIZATION**. That is creating urban comforts in rural areas through provision of modern public services such as good roads, schools, water, electricity and health services to promote vibrant rural development.

Lastly and most importantly, given the troubled relationships between the national and county governments, the government must establish an effective institutional framework for modernizing and transforming agriculture.

Such institutional framework should take the form of an all inclusive multi-stakeholders umbrella forum e.g. The National Council of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries similar to the National Commission of Science, Technology and Innovation with a broad mandate for developing a comprehensive national agriculture strategy, policy, planning, coordination of various sector institutions, government subsidies, agricultural research and extension, agricultural finance, market oversight and promoting private sector investment in Agriculture.

## **REFERENCES**

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