



*Republic of Namibia*

**FORGING LINKS BETWEEN AGRICULTURE AND HEALTH**  
**LUNCHEON PANEL DISCUSSION**

BY

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Statement by:

The Honourable Dr. Richard Nchabi Kamwi, Minister of Health and Social Services, Namibia

Distinguished Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to participate in this important discussion on agriculture and health. I would like to thank the organizers for bringing us together here today to explore the linkages and synergies between those two critically important sectors for national development with the view to improving the policy framework for the attainment of the internationally agreed development goals including MDGs and sustainable development.

Agriculture, nutrition and health together are integral to survival, good health, and sustainable economic and social development. The complex two-way linkages between agriculture and health are inextricable. Agriculture is the responsible sector to produce the quality and quantity of food required for good health nutritional status. Insufficient calorie intake is often used as a measure of food insecurity and malnutrition, but the impact of malnutrition on human health and productivity is devastating.

Agriculture and health are inter-dependent and mutually reinforcing priorities for Namibia's development. The government of Namibia therefore attaches great importance to strengthening both sectors. In fact, the country's Third National Development Plan which provides the

development framework for Namibia, identifies agricultural and rural development as key strategic entry points for economic growth and poverty reduction. Health and health care are important components towards achieving this national goal. Indeed, it is healthy people who can produce and contribute to development. Productivity in Agriculture declines with deteriorating health of the people.

The Government of Namibia had a long standing commitment to improving the lives and circumstances of its people. I am pleased to note that our efforts produced positive results. : Relative poverty has declined by 10% between 1993/94 and 2003/04 but significant differences in the incidence of poverty remain between rural and urban areas. Namibia has also made considerable progress in decreasing both infant and under-five mortality rate. But while Namibia has achieved major gains in reducing mortality among children, life expectancy in other age groups has not improved. In Fact, the average life span of the Namibian population has declined over the past decades.

Distinguished colleagues,

HIV/AIDS is one of the greatest challenges to the agricultural sector causing labour shortages for both farm and domestic work. HIV/AIDS has quantitative and qualitative impacts on labour in rural communities by i) reducing the household's workforce, as people die or spend time on mourning, attending funerals and caring for sick household members; and ii) by reducing skills and changing the gender division of labour depending on how the farm-household members are affected. These effects

of HIV/AIDS on rural labour have, in turn, severe consequences for the livestock sector and livelihoods.

Collaboration between agriculture and health in the prevention and control of zoonotic diseases such as Avian influenza is key. While the health sector's major concern is on human health, the first line of defence rests with the agriculture sector that has to control the disease in animals. Effective collaboration between the sectors could have a saving on resources: if the health sector is aware of effective control by the agriculture, fewer resources will be spent in controlling the human side.

### Distinguished Colleagues

Our strategies in the health sector emphasize, among other, primary health care; increasing training of health professionals, scaling up of support and protection of rights for people living with HIV/AIDS, broadening access to health care in rural areas and strengthening the income base of the rural communities by participating in non-farm activities; and strengthening Namibia's safety nets for the protection of the temporarily and chronically vulnerable, including those affected by HIV/AIDS.

Yet, notwithstanding the Government's commitment and best efforts to improve health facilities and outreach services in the country, the costs of providing quality health services are very high because of the dispersion of Namibia's relatively small population over a wide area. The country therefore needs financial assistance in the form of ODA targeted at the health sector as well as access to innovative technology to support health care such as through e-health.

Distinguished colleagues,

About 70% of the people of Namibia depend directly or indirectly on agriculture. Development of agriculture through enhanced agricultural productivity, promoting rural development and improving rural people's livelihoods, is critical to overcoming poverty. But people need to be healthy to be able to take advantage of economic opportunities. Better access to health care and improved nutrition and diet are key prerequisites for a long and productive life.

However, promoting cooperation between the two sectors is challenging. Some of these challenges are of structural nature while others emanate from competing priorities. To overcome these challenges, it is of paramount importance to put in place an enabling policy framework and institutional arrangement based on the recognition that both sectors will benefit from greater cooperation to achieve the set goals. Equally important is capacity building for inter-sectoral research, planning and programming.

Finally, the promotion of synergies between agriculture and health will benefit the development process. Strategic utilization and strengthening of the linkages between agriculture and health offers particularly strong opportunities for achieving poverty reduction and health goals in developing countries. The linkages and synergies could also be explored and supported at the regional and international levels. In short, it is important that the partnership for development at the international level (or the implementation of MDG 8) takes into account the linkages between agriculture and health as well as the other targets.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to share a few thoughts on this important subject and look forward to a fruitful exchange.

I thank you.