



## TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES

### **Opening Remarks of the ECOSOC President**

### **for the Global Expert Meeting on “Agriculture and Agro-industries Development towards Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems”**

**24 April 2017, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe**

Honourable Dr. Obert Mpofu, Minister of Macro-Economic Planning and Investment Promotion,  
Dr. Desire Sibanda, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Macro-Economic Planning and Investment Promotion,  
Colleagues and Representatives of the UN system,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to warmly welcome all of you to the Global Expert Meeting on “*Agriculture and Agro-industries Development towards Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems*”.

I am honoured to be convening such an accomplished group of experts to discuss this important topic. Thank you for your participation. I am equally honored to do so at one of the Seven Wonders of the World which is domiciled in my own country, Zimbabwe.

It is not very often that we are able to hold meetings of the Economic and Social Council away from New York, so this is quite a special occasion. I trust that our discussions will be as inspiring as the beautiful surroundings here in Victoria Falls.

Allow me to thank the UN system for their committed efforts to supporting this meeting, in particular FAO, UNIDO, UNDP and DESA. I am also grateful for the contributions of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and the Office for the Special Advisor on Africa, among others.

As we begin our deliberations, I would also like to set the stage by providing some context for this meeting, and underline why the Council is so eager to engage your expertise in these discussions.

When I took up my role as President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), I proposed that the Council pay special attention to the question of infrastructure, industrialization and innovation. To this end I proposed that a sequence of inter-related meetings to address the issue be held as part of the Council's work in 2017.

We began these discussions last month in Dakar, Senegal at the regional meeting on "Innovations in Infrastructure Development and Sustainable Industrialization".

At that meeting, we concluded that there is strong consensus among policy makers and experts on the importance of sustainable industrialization for growth and development. We agreed that infrastructure serves as a necessary enabler in the quest to achieve this.

At the same time, we identified challenges that continue to limit progress in achieving these aspirations, including a lack of financing skills and institutional capacity constraints. Strong national ownership and committed political leadership were identified as essential ingredients for building capacities, mobilizing resources and forging partnerships.

Beginning today and continuing over the next two days, we will dig a bit deeper into the infrastructure-industrialization nexus by

focusing on the potential of agriculture, agro-industries and food systems.

Our agenda was developed to facilitate the sharing of expertise and knowledge on key questions in this sector, and to collectively propose or put the spotlight on solutions.

These outputs will then be integrated into the next and final part of this initiative, which is the Special Meeting of ECOSOC, to be convened at the UN Headquarters in New York on 31 May.

At the high-level meeting in New York, I intend to bring the key messages and recommendations emanating from each of these preparatory meetings to the attention of ECOSOC and relevant partners from the business community, finance sector and international organizations.

I also intend to highlight a few concrete initiatives on infrastructure, industrialization or innovation that are underway or could be scaled up for greater progress. I hope our discussions here will help in identifying such initiatives.

Distinguished delegates,

The background paper that was prepared for this meeting clearly articulates the importance of agriculture, agro-industries development and resilient food systems to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Expanding opportunities in agri-business and integrating agriculture, industry and services has positive impacts in the economic, social and environmental dimensions. The potential for these impacts is especially great in emerging and least developed countries.

Additionally, improving agricultural value chains and linking them to local, regional and global markets holds great potential for improving people's well-being.

At each link in the agricultural value chain – both food and non-food based – agri-businesses can help to generate employment, raise incomes, reduce poverty and contribute to food and energy security.

Sustainable agriculture and the development of agricultural value chains can be particularly beneficial for small holder farmers, particularly rural youth and women.

Without a doubt, developing value-adding activities and agri-business within these value chains unleashes new job and income opportunities for people previously relegated to lower-productivity and lower-wage activities.

Many of you have extensively studied these issues and have seen the potential benefits this sector can have for developing countries and poor households.

While the evidence base is well founded and recommendations have been made, there is still a lot of scope for improvement. I hope that our discussions will focus on what accounts for the lack of progress and how such obstacles can be overcome.

It is well known that within the agro-industry sector, value is added to raw agricultural materials through processing, preservation, preparation and other handling processes. These are engines of future growth in developing countries.

If we look at Africa, agricultural and food exports from the region are largely unprocessed. As a result, the region fails to capitalize on adding value locally.

We need to step up efforts to address this over-reliance on the export of commodities. We need to build strong capacities and innovative partnerships to move up the value chain across African countries and in other countries in special situations, such as the least developed countries (LDCs), the small island developing states (SIDS) and the landlocked developing countries (LLDCs).

Mobilizing such efforts is an urgent priority if we want to create jobs and prosperity for our populations.

Succeeding on this front would also lead to other improvements, including the reduction of post-harvest losses; enhanced food safety and quality; improved export performance; and overall economic development.

Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am confident that we will generate strong recommendations and potential solutions over the coming days. Some of these might rely on “tried-and-tested” measures.

But I also want to encourage you to be daring! You might be aware that Victoria Falls is an international magnet for adventure sports, such as whitewater rafting and bungee jumping. Perhaps we can imbue our discussions with some of that same daring spirit and determination.

It is important that we learn from each other and consider steps that could be taken by various actors -- Governments, the private sector, the United Nations and the diverse stakeholders assembled here – for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I am deeply convinced that we will only achieve our goals through collective efforts characterized by the engagement of the

best researchers, practitioners and innovators working in these areas.

In this connection, I thank you again for your participation and look forward to the discussions.

Thank you.