

SPEECH BY THE CHIEF, AGRICULTURE BUSINESS AND ENVIRONMENT OFFICE, USAID MISSION TO KENYA, MARGARET BROWN, DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF TEGEMEO CONFERENCE ON “INTEGRATING CONSUMERS IN THE POLICY AND PROGRAM AGENDA IN KENYAN AGRICULTURE” ON 19TH APRIL 2005 AT SAFARI PARK HOTEL, NAIROBI.

The minister for agriculture, Hon kipruto arap kirwa, permanent secretary ministry of agriculture, Mr. James Ongwae, vice chancellor Egerton university, deputy vice-chancellors, director of tegemeo, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I am delighted to be here with you today to attend this conference. I would like to thank the Vice Chancellor of Egerton University and the entire staff of Tegemeo Institute of Agricultural Policy and Development, for organizing this conference. USAID is pleased to be associated with this fruitful cooperation with Egerton University’s Tegemeo Institute and Michigan State University’s Department of Agricultural Economics.

The theme of this conference is relevant and timely considering the price dilemma that characterizes policy formulation in any one country. On one hand, producers need to receive fair and adequate prices so they have incentive to continue to produce surpluses for sale. On the other hand, consumers, particularly the poor, need to be able to afford access to food. We also know from Tegemeo’s and MSU’s previous research that some 68% of Kenyan maize farmers actually buy more maize than they sell, and thus are negatively affected by high maize prices even when they are producers.

The conference addresses issues of raising agricultural productivity and alleviating poverty at a time when the government is implementing the Economic Recovery Strategy and the Strategy for the Revitalization of Agriculture (SRA). Kenya has also been selected for special attention on the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations, and is taking up the challenge of decreasing poverty and hunger in Kenya by half by 2015. There should be high demand for empirical policy research and analysis to inform the implementation of these strategies. Tegemeo Institute has taken

up a research agenda over the past several years that can be and should be used to the maximum by Kenyan decision makers to undertake policy reform using these research results to inform the design and tracking of policy reforms. Today's agenda of presentations is just a sampling of topics relevant to agriculture and Kenyan poverty that are available for the asking.

The SRA calls for radical changes in the way government does business – by recognizing the roles of private sector – and calls for major increases in agricultural productivity, competitiveness, increased growth, and poverty reduction. It has been hailed as a major effort to “get agriculture right” for Kenya. The Government now is grappling with how to implement the multi-tiered strategy so that it does not die on the shelf along with many other high quality Sessional Papers and strategies. One of the key issues is the deliniation of the appropriate roles of government versus the roles of private sector in service provision to small farmers. To achieve this, it will be necessary to learn from the past mistakes and develop sensible and sensitive exit strategies for government services and entry strategies for private sector.

The formation of the Agricultural Sector Coordination Unit (ASCU) to oversee the implementation of SRA and the reorganizations of the Ministry of Agriculture are major steps forward towards implementing the strategy. I note that ASCU has quite a full plate of policy reforms related to the fast-track items of the SRA and the MDG, including rationalization of agricultural legislation, increasing farmer's access to inputs, harmonization of agricultural extension. USAID, through Tegemeo, will continue to assist in the area of policy and legal reform particularly in developing the modalities of unified legislation in agriculture.

USAID has funded policy research and analysis in Kenya through Egerton University's Tegemeo for over the past 10 years, and the Institute has become a respectable home-grown policy research institute. Over the years, in collaboration with US-based institutions such as Michigan State University, Tegemeo has collected a wealth of data giving it a strong database from which to carry out empirical evidence-based policy research. The Institute has developed a rural household data panel that is being used to monitor the impacts of various interventions by donors and government on rural incomes. They have also developed a methodology of proxy indicators that are faster to collect yet provide high quality estimates to monitor welfare, income, and income components. Tegemeo's research has provided important input in the preparation of key government documents such as the

Economic Recovery Strategy and the Strategy for Revitalizing Agriculture. The Institute has also played a catalytic role in the public policy debates and meetings with senior government officials and parliamentarians. On occasion, the Institute has received requests to participate in initiatives aimed at certain sub-sectors such as the Seed and Pyrethrum Task Forces.

The challenge ahead for all of us is to use the information and analyses that we are about to be presented with today, to make better and more informed decisions. Of course, we live in a world where politics will always have an influence on decisions, but if we are truly dedicated to making inroads on poverty in Kenya, we all should be concerned with making as sound decisions as possible based on as good information as possible. Many countries in Africa do not have the benefits of having think tanks such as Tegemeo and others – Kenya is extremely lucky in this respect. Yet collaboration between researchers and decision makers is weak at best. With the SRA to guide the process, we must improve this kind of information sharing and debate that Tegemeo has always offered and is offering us today.

I hope you all are looking forward as much as I am to learning more today about issues that affect agriculture and food security, and that we will actually put some of this information to use in the near future.

I wish you a very successful conference

Thank You.