

Speech by the–USAID Malawi Mission Environment Team Leader

Linthipe field day, 13 April 2018

Supporting Research for Fostering vibrancy in the smallholder agricultural sector in Malawi

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RISING – Research in Sustainable Intensification for the Next Generation  
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Salutations

- District Commissioner
- Senior Chief Kaphuka
- Council Chairperson;
- The Member of Parliament, Hon. D. Chiwere, MP
- The District Agricultural Development Officer (DADO)
- The District Agriculture Extension Coordinating Committee (DAECC) Chair
- Africa RISING Chief Scientist, Professor Bekunda Mateete,

- Ladies and gentlemen

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for coming to attend this field day jointly organized by Africa RISING and the Dedza District Agriculture Extension Coordinating Committee (DAECC). I understand from Dr Chikowo, the Africa RISING Malawi Coordinator, that a key objective of Africa RISING is to “**Foster vibrancy in the smallholder agricultural sector in Malawi**” through research that has immediate relevance to many thousands of farmers. Africa RISING promotes intensified production on farms through increased efficiencies in the utilization and allocation of limited resources as well as appropriate targeting of agricultural technologies to diverse households and communities. USAID has made investments through Africa RISING in six countries (Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, Mali, Ghana, Ethiopia) with participation of over 100 institutions.

Ladies and gentlemen, you are well aware that our world population is growing and food shortages may become worse, with sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) emerging as the most affected region because of its poor and more vulnerable communities. Agriculture is the economic mainstay for most SSA countries, and is the driver for development. Yet this sector is known to receive modest allocation from national fiscal budgets, a process that has tended to internalize hunger and promoted a perpetual dependency on food aid.

Here in Malawi and across Africa, we have a growing problem with poor soil fertility. Fertilizers remain inaccessible to many farmers due to prohibitive prices and lack of manufacturing capacity. Innovations are urgently needed to help available fertilizer to be used efficiently, to maximize returns to this scarce input. Today, we have witnessed very good grain legume crops in the fields. These grain legume crops help with human nutrition but also are the key to improve soil fertility. Maize grown after legumes will do much better than that following another maize crop. Today, we have learnt the lesson of crop production ecology from Linthipe farmers!

The dire need to address hunger and poverty, has tended to promote a wholesale import of foreign technologies and knowledge systems, ignoring locally generated knowledge and technology adaptation processes. More recently, the agricultural problems in Malawi and other parts of Africa are being compounded by the emerging negative impacts of climate change and variability on vulnerable smallholder-farming communities. Through activities such as we have seen today here in Linthipe, I am seeing light at the end of the tunnel.

Africa RISING recognizes that when appropriate technologies and knowledge are put to use by farmers, new economic opportunities are opened on small farms. We have heard clear messages on this subject from farmers themselves.

As Malawi USAID mission, your development partner, we urge stakeholders in agriculture and development to:

1. Promote innovation systems approaches as a means to foster effective partnerships for delivery of agricultural services and benefits to farmers and their service providers.

2. Reduce vulnerability of smallholder farming households by enhancing sustainable productivity, doubling fertilizer returns through good legume agronomy, for improved competitiveness and diversification of cereal-based farming systems
3. Work closely with farmers in developing appropriate technologies that can be adopted. Today we have seen that Africa RISING and its partners widely use the 'Mother and baby' co-learning approach as an interactive and field-based scaling up method that seeks to promote innovations by farmers, communities and stakeholders. We have noted that technologies are being tailored with farmers as active stakeholders. The approach recognizes farmers within the same community have different technology needs but all groups can effectively adapt when equipped with relevant principles behind the technologies. A good case here is how farmers are using good seed germplasm and agronomy to improve productivity
4. Provide farmers with tools to adapt to climate change and variability. Africa RISING is already working with thousands of farmers here in Dedza district and the southern districts of Machinga and Mangochi to improve water use efficiency.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am told that this field day is an outcome of the collaborative alliance of the Africa RISING and government agricultural extension and several partners that form DAEECC. This is the right path to follow when researchers directly interface with development practitioners.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, I want to express our deep appreciation from the USAID mission on this important partnership between Africa RISING, farmers and different stakeholders. You are collectively making a difference.

I Thank You!

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