

1st STUDENT-LED CONFERENCE held at College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences 29th to 30th May, 2013

Opening Speech by Prof Isaac M. Mbeche, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs

Governor Kajiado County, Dr. David Nkedianye,

USAID Representative, Mr Isaac Thindeu,

Executive Secretary of IGAD- representative, Prof Laban Ogalla,

IUCN Coordinator on Dryland Global Initiative, Dr. Jonathan Davis,

Colorado State University students and faculty,

Principal, College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences- Represented by the Dean Faculty of Agriculture- Prof Shibairo

All invited Conference participants,

Students,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to preside over the opening of this important Student led conference. I am pleased to note that indeed the students have participated and led the planning and implementation of the Conference. This would however not have been possible without the mentorship and accompaniment of the faculty members of staff and the CSDS Secretariat and most important by the Principal and staff of the College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences.

I also wish to thank USAID- HED Africa Initiative for the generous financial support of the Dryland Development Program. I also wish to pay special tribute to USAID Mission to Kenya for the very supportive role you have played in advising and overseeing the implementation of the partnership activities and in particular for attending this conference

The theme of this Conference: *“Transformative education, research and outreach for enhancing resilience and risk reduction in drylands”* which is addressing key issues in the following conference sub-themes –namely

- 1- *Sustainable land management and valuation of dryland ecosystem services*
- 2- *Livestock production, drylands agriculture, food security and sustainable livelihoods*
- 3- *Resilience, risk reduction and climate change adaptation*
- 4- *Drylands governance, rights and local institutions*
- 5- *Access to higher education for under-represented groups*

Indeed these are current issues that are cross cutting in all dryland in Kenya, IGAD region and in the global arena. In Kenya, dryland constitute 89% of land mass and is home to about 14 million people or about one third of Kenya population. The discussions of research findings and research ideas that will be sharing in this conference will contribute to renewed thinking on how we can *“release the potential of drylands”* anticipated in the Sessional Paper No. 8 of 2012 on the National Policy for Sustainable Development of Northern Kenya and other Arid Lands” .

This sessional paper is responding to the three pillars in Kenya Vision 2030, namely; social, economic and political pillars. The sessional paper also highlights the need to accelerate the dryland development which has been historically marginalized in the national policy frameworks. Past inappropriate development approaches have increased vulnerability and loss of social and ecological resilience of dryland communities and especially pastoralists leading to food and nutritional insecurity, high poverty levels and over-dependence on external food handouts.

One of the major constraints in the development of drylands is lack of human capital – poor education background and lack relevant skills needed to adapt to technological change and climate change among other factors. It is therefore appropriate that the motto of this conference is *“Preparing the next Generation*

for sustainability". Transformative education and leadership skills are critical for equipping the young generation and particularly pastoral communities. I am very pleased to note that this is one of the major thrust of the UON-CSU partnership on dryland development. I understand that most of the presenters in this conference have received some support in one way or another from the UON-CSU Partnership project through the Centre for Sustainable Dryland Ecosystems and Societies and therefore this is a good opportunity to share your experiences in dryland research and field experiential training.

I am pleased to learn that UoN-CSU Partnership with support from the sponsor USAID-HED Africa Initiative is addressing the underlying factors for underdevelopment such as the quality of education offered in our institutions of higher learning; action research on dryland sustainability and development; information sharing, and the improvement of access to education for under-represented groups from drylands. I commend your partnership for your accomplishments, some of which will be shared during this conference.

As I conclude, allow me take this opportunity again to thank all the participants who have travelled from different parts of Kenya and outside the country to attend this conference.

I also wish to thank the University of Colorado professors and students who have come to witness the launching of our first student led conference under our partnership. Colorado State University has provided good benchmarking and lessons from annual student led conferences you have held over the last 20 years.

Thank you all invited speakers and conference organizers for the hard work in the preparation of your presentations and papers that will make this conference a great success.

The road to leading to sustainable dryland ecosystems and improved livelihoods is long and very challenging. I therefore urge the development partners to continue joining hands with us preparing the next generation to address these challenges. We need more support especially in providing scholarships for under-represented groups from the dryland areas.

With these remarks, it is with great pleasure that I declare the Conference on Transformative Education, Research and Engagement for Dryland Resilience and Sustainability **open**.

Thank you and May God bless you all as you continue in your deliberations.