

REMARKS BY DIRECTOR-KARI ON THE BORLAUG LEAP ALUMNI ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE ON 4TH MARCH 2014

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Organizers of this event for inviting me to make a few remarks. As you well know, KARI is a Public Research Institute with the mandate of developing appropriate agricultural technologies and catalysing the process of technology transfer. The institute contributes immensely to the economic development of this country considering the fact that agriculture still remains the engine of growth.

Over many years, KARI has continued to build effective partnerships that would assist in complimenting the activities of the institute. To fully address our mandate, we need the requisite capacity in infrastructure (labs, buildings) and highly qualified scientists. Hence discharging this mandate will require enormous resources which, the institute alone and Government of Kenya cannot meet. In this regard, therefore we view an Initiative such as the Leadership Enhancement in agriculture Programme (Borlaug LEAP) as a unique programme that provides an opportunity for the requisite capacity to undertake priority research.

KARI continues to benefit from various Programmes that are being supported by key partners. These partners include, among others USAID, the Rockefeller Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates, Canadian Government (IDRC), the EU. We will continue to forge effective partnerships as we seek to address priority farmer concerns, particularly in rural Kenya. We have, in trying to effectively address the constraints affecting farmers re-aligned our activities to constraints along the agricultural value chains for most of the commodities. The APVC are now understood better by many and we feel this will continue to make the differences we have always yearned for at farm level.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted that this LEAP reception coincides with what would have been Norman Borlaug's 100th Birthday. Norman made a visit to KARI in 2001. The visit was to rekindle wheat research in Kenya in the wake of the dreadful wheat rust, ug99. During this visit, he encouraged us that we can contain this disease. It was upon his wise advise that scientists in Kenya invited Scientists from CIMMYT to help fight the situation since all varieties were susceptible. CIMMYT group led by Ravi Singh visited in 2004 and on surveying the situation, reported back to CIMMYT Mexico and to Borlaug in particular. The results of the screening work done in Kenya interested Borlaug and he visited Kenya and participated in taking notes in one of our sites in Mau Narok in early 2005. During his visit he was shocked to see that most of the varieties he thought were resistant to stem rust had eventually succumbed to the disease. After taking notes in all the wheat lines which included the best from CIMMYT, Norman was shocked on the impact of the disease and could not hide his fear when he commented, **"I thought we defeated this monster but it looks like its back"**. He mobilized resources

globally and formed an expert panel to design ways of fighting the disease. He thereafter **sounded the alarm** and a research expert meeting was held in Nairobi.

With the assistance of USDA, the **Global Rust Initiative (GRI)** was established to guide research on stem rust as an outcome of the May 2005 Expert Panel Report of ug99 in Kenya and Ethiopia and the potential for impact in neighbouring regions and beyond.

This was later named The Borlaug Rust Initiative (BGRI), the founder replacing the Gloval Rust Initiative (GRI) established with the aim of:

- 1) Reviewing the characteristics of the disease and its potential for worldwide devastation,
- 2) Assessing the current situation in Eastern Africa regarding the occurrence of new physiological cases,
- 3) Assessing the vulnerability of other geographies to these races, and
- 4) The **propose a** strategies for dealing with the threat

Through **BGRI** the **Durable Rust Resistance in Wheat Project (DRRW)** was born. The Durable resistance in Wheat project, a collaborative effort begun in April 2008, and now includes 22 research institutions around the world, led by Cornell university, sort to mitigate rust threats through coordinated activities. The project aims at harnessing recent advances in genomics to introduce non-host resistance (immunity) into wheat.

The achievements so far include the screening of over 300,000 accessions of wheat germplasm. Over 30 countries participate in the Global screening site at the KARI- Njoro Centre. Through this activity, 8 wheat varieties with notable resistance in ug99 have been released. We view this as a breakthrough and we owe much of this success to efforts by Norman Borlaug.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are here to share on the Borlaug LEAP and it would be fitting to the occasion if I mentioned on what the BGRI project has accomplished in capacity building. Through this programme, KARI in collaboration with CIMMYT and other institutions, BGRI organises for an international annual training course in notes taking scoring and data entry at KARI-Njoro. The course usually trains 30 students in average and so far 150 scientists have benefitted.

Internally, KARI scientists have benefitted from the Programme by training two Doctorates, One Masterate, 5 short courses and undertaken 15 learning visits. Additionally, we have 10 scientists currently training at a Master's level. The BGRI has also facilitated KARI scientists to attend workshops, conferences every year in several countries. These include Mexico, USA, Australia, China, Russia, India, Egypt, Ethiopia et cetra

Ladies and Gentlemen, it would not have been easy to realize these accomplishments without focused leadership and effective collaboration. KARI looks forward to build on the lessons learned from current activities to benefit moer from the Borlaug LEAP. Thank you.

