

**SPEECH BY PROF. PETER MBITHI, VICE CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF
NAIROBI DURING THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL
INFORMATION SYSTEM (GIS) LAB AT THE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND
VETERINARY SCIENCES (CAVS), UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI (UoN) ON 11TH
FEBRUARY 2015.**

The Deputy Chief of Mission – USAID

Principal- CAVS

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you during the official launch of the Geographical Information System (GIS) Laboratory at the College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences (CAVS), Department of LARMAT. Indeed the establishment of the GIS Lab at the University presents a significant step in the use of new technologies to build capacity of students and faculty to address emerging issues and challenges facing the Country and Africa as a whole especially in drylands.

From the outset, allow me to sincerely thank USAID and the People of United States for the vital role they have played in supporting the establishment of the Centre for Sustainable Dryland Ecosystems and Societies (CSDES) at the University of Nairobi. I am aware that the Centre was established with funding from USAID three years ago as a partnership between University of Nairobi and Colorado State University. The Centre was set up with a mission to contribute to sustainable dryland ecosystems and improved livelihoods through innovative trans-disciplinary education, research, partnerships, policy dialogue and community outreach

Ladies and gentlemen,

I commend the strong partnership exhibited between University of Nairobi and Colorado State University in implementing the three years project. I am happy to note that out of this partnership a number of accomplishments have been realised. Some of these achievements include; signing of high level strategic partnership agreement between UoN and CSU in November 2012. Among the areas that were stipulated in the signed agreement were; Strategic plan for engagement between the two universities in dryland education, research and outreach, fellowships for PhD students in outreach to dryland communities, internships for undergraduate student, research grants, higher education needs assessment for dryland development and conservation which will lead to development of relevant pre-university diploma courses, distance education and changes in curriculum to focus on dryland issues. With the signing of the agreement opportunities are already opening up for wider collaborations among departments across the two universities.

In addition thirteen UoN and Six CSU Faculty members have participated in the development of a new online distance education course on Sustainable African Dryland Ecosystems and Societies

The CSDES project initiated the Colleges' first seminar series with the intention of bringing practitioners from the field interact with the students and faculty. So far since the inception of the project, CSDES in collaboration with LARMAT has hosted 12 seminars that have been well attended. The seminars provided boundless opportunities for students and faculty to learn the realities in the field and to build ties with the practitioners.

The partnership refurbished the University of Nairobi, Kibwezi field station where students, faculty members, practitioners and even communities are able to comfortably carry out research, training and extension services in southern part of Kenya.

CSDES supported 15 interns from dryland communities with half of them being women. These interns learned how to design research to serve communities. Of significant to note is that most of the interns have enrolled in higher education institutions to pursue different careers.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today, CSDES is recognised and supported far beyond the confines of the University of Nairobi by many Kenyan Dryland Communities in places like Isiolo, Marsabit, Kajiado, Laikipia among others. Policy makers and donors also support CSDES programs because of the focus on critical dryland development issues with high policy relevance. The proof of this support is clearly demonstrated by the ability of the Centre to attract additional funds to its programs for example USD 150,000 (2015-2017) as a part of consortium led by Mercy (DFID) on *“Programme for Resilient Systems (PROGRESS) to build absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacity for 550,000 vulnerable individuals in Kenya and Uganda”*, a grant of \$200,000 (2014/2015) by IGAD applied research on *“Enhancing resilience to Livestock based livelihoods in Northern Kenya”* and USD 30,000 for review of Dryland Resource Management.

CSDES is greatly contributing to the quality of teaching, research and training through various short courses, experiential field courses conferences and seminars. UoN appreciates the role that CSDES continues to play in complementing the university teaching training and research and outreach to the current and emerging challenges and opportunities for partnership with stakeholders in addressing national development agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I understand the process of institutionalizing the Centre is underway. I wish to reiterate the commitment of UoN to support the vision and mission of the Centre. I thank the Principal CAVS for nurturing CSDES which is making great contribution to the University mandate in human capital development and research in drylands. May I also recognize the great role that Colorado

State University has played during the establishment of CSDES and especially, Prof Robin Reid and her team from CSU who have worked close with Prof Jesse Njoka and his team at UoN.

I also appreciate CSDES team including the staff, management committee and the advisory board for working tirelessly to ensure the objectives and the ultimate goal of the Centre has been realized. I know there have been hurdles along the way, but today we celebrate the modest strides that have been made towards the realization of this goal.

I wish again to thank the Deputy Chief of Mission from USAID-Kenya and his team for sparing some time from their busy schedule to come and participate in the launch of the GIS Lab. The University will continue to work together with you to improve the livelihoods of our people