

## **Keynote Address by Hon John Mutorwa, MP and Minister of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF)**

In his keynote address, the Minister of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, Hon John Mutorwa, referred to two recently published documents that were important to the topic of food security, namely

- Namibia's Fourth National Development Plan, 2012/13 to 2016/17 (NDP4) and;
- Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Survey (NHIES) 2009/2010.

The Minister thought it fitting and appropriate to add the United Nations' Development Programme's (UNDP) report: Africa Human Development Report 2012: Towards a Food Secure Future to the said two public policy documents.

By way of introduction, Hon Mutorwa extracted relevant quotations from the three mentioned documents, namely:

- "Agriculture will continue to be a priority focus under NDP4. Agriculture remains one of the backbones of the Namibian economy and has the potential to create a substantial number of jobs. The specific desired outcome will be for Agricultural production to increase and result in Agriculture experiencing average real growth of 4% per annum over the NDP4 period. Strategies to be deployed to achieve this outcome will be:
  - The continued promotion of the Green Scheme;
  - Initiatives to increase the land's carrying capacity for livestock;
  - The establishment of Agricultural fresh Produce Markets, and;
  - The establishment of other Agricultural infrastructures such as silos and research stations,"

(NDP4, EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, page XVIII).

- (a) “Salaries and/or wages are the most common source of income in Namibia, cited by 49% of all households. The second most common main source of income is subsistence farming with 23% of households. This is followed by pensions and business income at 11% and 9%, respectively,” (NHIES 2009/2010, page 55).
- (b) “Food security can be defined as: the condition when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life,” (AFRICA HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2012: TOWARDS A FOOD SECURE FUTURE, page 9).

According to the Hon Minister Mutorwa, the quoted definition of food security was comprehensive and all embracing, and the Government of the Republic of Namibia had adopted this definition because of the following:

- it encompassed the availability of food;
- people’s access to such available food; and
- people’s use of such available food.

The Hon Minister elaborated on the definition by stating that all people, anywhere and everywhere, are considered well fed and well nourished when they can obtain safe food of sufficient quantity, variety and quality to sustain their lives. They needed food that provided energy for growth, physical activity and basic human functions - from breathing and thinking, to circulation and digestion. When starvation terminated these vital functions, people die. In its simplest definition, food was a “nutritious substance that people or animals eat or drink; that plants absorb in order to maintain life and growth,” (South African Concise Oxford Dictionary).

Hon John Mutorwa expressed his appreciation with the fact that the dialogue on food security was organized by the Polytechnic of Namibia, one of Namibia’s tertiary

institutions or institution of higher learning. He challenged the institution by posing a number of questions that to his mind a dialogue could help answer:

- What were the fundamental causes of, and reasons for, chronic food insecurity, particularly in many countries within Sub-Saharan Africa?
- Many developed countries maintained agricultural subsidies that benefited rich producers, but that pushed Sub-Saharan Africa's impoverished small holder farmers to the margins. How could such dilemmas and challenges be addressed and overcome? Was it possible to achieve fairness and equity in this time and age of unipolar globalization, whereby the decisions and will of the most powerful reigned supreme?
- Was it true that Africa had the knowledge, the technology and the means to end hunger and food insecurity, and that only the political will and dedication were the missing factors? If it were true, why are some African political leaders' programmes, that were geared towards ensuring food security and food self sufficiency, being attacked and sabotaged by those who are financially powerful?

The Minister admitted that African Agriculture was at the cross roads. It had become common knowledge to observe that persistent food shortages were compounded by new threats arising from the real phenomenon of climate change. Citing Calestous JUMA, Hon Mutorwa nonetheless concurred with the statement that Africa faced three major opportunities that could help transform agriculture in such a way that the sector would become a force for economic growth:

- "first, worldwide advances in science, technology and engineering offered Africa new tools needed to promote sustainable agriculture;
- second, efforts to create regional markets will provide new incentives for agricultural production and trade;
- Third, a new generation of African leaders is helping the continent to focus on long-term economic transformation,"

(Juma, C: The New Harvest: Agricultural Innovation in Africa, page XIV).

The Hon Minister informed that Namibia, both by way of public and private activities and initiatives, was implementing programmes and projects geared towards ensuring national food security. Acknowledging the crucial role that the agriculture sector played in the lives of the Namibian population, the country's constitution called on the Government to promote the welfare of the people of Namibia by adopting policies that were aimed at raising and maintaining an acceptable level of nutrition, food security and standard of living of the population.

He stressed the fact that, in line with this provision of the constitution, the Namibian Government approved a National Agricultural Policy in 1995. One of the objectives of this Policy was to ensure food security and to improve the nutritional status of the Namibian population. Furthermore, complying with the same constitutional provision, the Government also approved a Food and Nutrition Policy for Namibia during the same year. Again, the overall objective of this Policy was to improve the nutritional status of the population. As a demonstration of its commitment towards the eradication of hunger and malnutrition in Namibia, the Namibian Government declared the period 1993-2002 a Food and Nutrition Decade.

According to the Minister, in order to achieve the specific objectives of the mentioned policies, particularly the objective of ensuring national and household food security, the Namibian Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, was implementing two main Agricultural production programmes, namely the Green Scheme Programme and the Dry-land Crop Production Programme. The main objective of the Green Scheme Programme was to promote agricultural production under irrigation, focusing on high value cash crops. The Dry-land Crop Production Programme aimed to support crop production in the communal areas under rain fed conditions. Hon Mutorwa believed that food and nutrition security challenges can only be fully addressed if production programmes were complemented by Agro-Industry Development Programmes. In recognition of the importance of linking down-stream with up-stream activities within

the value chain, the Namibian Government embarked on the development and construction of Strategic Food Reserves Facilities as well as Cold Storage and Processing Facilities in the main production areas of the country. So far, Government had constructed silos in Rundu, Okongo, Omuthiya and Tsandi with a combined capacity of 15400 tons. The Minister informed that the construction of Fresh Produce Hubs at Ongwediva and Rundu were nearing completion, while the construction of a third one will start in Wanaheda and the Khomas Region.

The Hon Minister reported on further strategic directions taken by the Ministry in support of production and processing activities in Namibia, namely the promotion of agricultural mechanization, the creation of Agro-technology Centers, the establishment of a comprehensive agro-financing scheme (covering both land acquisition and the financing of agricultural inputs), crop insurance and the acquisition of appropriate technologies by farmers. Hon Mutorwa was convinced that these strategic measures would boost agricultural production and contribute towards the enhancement of national food security.

Hon John Mutorwa cautioned that food availability alone was no guarantee for food security, particularly in view of the challenges of poverty that were encountered by some sections of the Namibian population. The Minister was adamant that it was the responsibility of the Namibian Government to ensure that all members of society had both physical and financial access to food at all times. For this reason, Government had put in place various measures as safety nets to ensure food security for all. These included:

- The removal of taxation on basic food stuff to mitigate against increased food prices.
- All Namibian citizens were entitled to a monthly cash income of N\$ 500.00 on attaining the age of 60 years.
- Monthly cash income and food support for vulnerable groups, such as orphans, disabled and those living with the HIV and AIDS.
- Emergency free food distribution programmes in the event of natural disasters such as droughts and floods.

- School feeding programmes for school children, especially in rural areas.

The Hon Minister believed that the above-mentioned programmes, apart from contributing to food security and nutrition, also played a role towards the achievement of the goals contained in the NDP4, particularly those regarding employment creation, economic growth and the reduction of income inequality. In addition, these programmes supported increased production and processing activities, which were the key drivers of employment in the agricultural sector.

In conclusion, the Hon Minister pointed out that the promotion of agricultural production in general, and food security in particular, was undertaken in a challenging climatic environment. As Namibia was classified as the driest country in Sub-Saharan Africa, crop farming was regarded as a challenging activity due to erratic rainfall patterns, recurrent droughts and floods. Hon Mutorwa advised that such an environment of uncertainty called for a constant review of policies and strategies, innovation and creativity. In this regard he welcomed initiatives such as the Development Dialogue Forum as essential platforms to provoke thoughts and to inject new ideas in his Ministry's strategic thinking and debates on issues related to agriculture and food security. He expressed his appreciation towards the Polytechnic of Namibia for taking the initiative to have organized the dialogue. He believed that this type of dialogue would strengthen cooperation between Government and Institutions of High Learning in the search for solutions to issues of common national concern. Minister Mutorwa was confident that the outcome of the dialogue on food security would go a long way in contributing to combating hunger, malnutrition and poverty in Namibia.