

**OPENING REMARKS BY THE VICE CHANCELLOR OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE PROFESSOR LEVI
MARTIN NYAGURA AT THE GMASSURE BIOSAFETY
CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVE IN THE SADC
REGION**

Date : 16 March 2015

Time : 0830 hours

Venue : Cresta Lodge, Harare

SALUTATIONS

- **The Honourable Oppah Muchinguri-Kashiri, MP,
Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science
and Technology Development;**
- **The Chairperson of the National Biotechnology
Authority, Mrs Unesu Ushewokunze-Obatolu;**

- **Senior officials from the Ministries of Higher Education, Science and Technology Development, Agriculture and Mechanization and Irrigation Development;**
- **Our esteemed Facilitators;**
- **The Chairperson of Biochemistry Department, Professor S. Mukanganyama and other academics from the University of Zimbabwe;**
- **Distinguished Participants and Leaders of Delegations from Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and last but not least, Zimbabwe;**
- **Invited Guests;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I feel honoured to join you at this important Workshop hosted by Assuring Agricultural and Food Safety in Southern Africa (GMASSURE). I warmly welcome distinguished participants from SADC countries.

Globally, the area planted with genetically modified crops (GM-Crops) has continued to increase from 175 million hectares in 2013 to 181 million hectares in 2014. The first biotech drought tolerant maize planted in the USA in 2013 covered 50 000 hectares. In 2014, the hectarage increased over five fold to 275 000 hectares, reflecting a high acceptance rate by US farmers. This technology has been donated to Africa through the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) and will be available for use by

sub-Saharan African farmers in 2017 after extensive research in the region.

Honourable Minister, the anti-GM debate continues to rage on, indicating that some issues are persisting. To this end, the project “Assuring Agricultural and Food safety of GMOs in Southern Africa”, a collaboration between the University of Pretoria, University of Namibia and the University of Zimbabwe, will engage in this debate in two ways.

Firstly, through workshops on public awareness and training in biosafety for target groups, and secondly, through training of university staff in genomics as a tool for evaluating safety in these crops. I am

particularly delighted that the University of Zimbabwe is a key participant in this venture. This collaboration should stimulate an open and honest debate around this very sensitive and controversial subject.

Ladies and gentlemen, at the continental level, the Zimbabwe Academy of the Sciences (ZAS), and the Network of African Science Academies (NASAC), are in the process of developing a Policy Framework that will form the basis for a science-based decision-making process on biotechnology at the African Union. Regionally, in the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA), we are informed that a common policy on Commercial planting, trade, and emergency Food Aid involving GMOs has been

enacted, and again UZ staff are involved in this process, aimed at building capacity and sharing expertise at a regional level, in countries that have limited capacity to assess GMOs.

Locally, UZ scientists have been involved in drafting a labelling standard for GMOs in Zimbabwe. In the area of human resources development, UZ has been running a regional Master of Science (MSc) Biotechnology programme since 1991, and some of these themes are actually being taught. To date, this programme has produced 85 graduates. I am happy to report that more than 50 percent of these graduates have already acquired doctoral degrees at various institutions globally, including the University of

Zimbabwe. Some of these graduates are already gainfully employed at UZ, while others form the core of staff at local, regional and international institutions and in industries.

As Zimbabwe implements its economic blueprint, Zim Asset, and indeed as it launches its Bioeconomy Strategy, I have no doubt that our scientists will form the core of this endeavour.

Honorable Minister, I am appealing to you to help us source funding to intensify research and training in these topical issues.

I am informed that amongst us today, are various stakeholders that include scientists, regulators and farmers from eleven SADC countries. This diversity of participants should add great value to our deliberations.

I also wish to inform our distinguished participants, delegates, ladies and gentlemen, that the University of Zimbabwe is celebrating 60 years of service to the nation and beyond. We invite you to join us as we celebrate the momentous events that started in February and will culminate in the Graduation Ceremony later this year.

I wish all of you fruitful deliberations and wish our visitors a safe journey back home to their various destinations.

I Thank You.