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**Speech by Honourable Patrick Pule Ralotsia**

*(Minister of Agriculture Development and  
Food Security of the Republic of Botswana)*

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**SPEECH BY HONOURABLE**  
**PATRICK PULE RALOTSIA**  
**Minister of Agriculture Development and Food**  
**Security of the Republic of Botswana**

**at the**  
**“South Africa-Italy Summit”**

*Johannesburg (South Africa), 18<sup>th</sup> October, 2016*

***“SHARE EXPERIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY TO FOSTER  
COMPETITIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY IN AGRIBUSINESS”***

Honourable Minister Nomvula Paula Mokonyane

Distinguished panellists and delegates

Ladies and gentlemen

Good afternoon

I have been invited to share experiences and technologies from Botswana that could benefit others in improving competitiveness and sustainability in agribusiness. I think I should be quick to point out that I will be limited in sharing knowledge about suitable modern technologies that truly result in competitiveness, simply because we are at the initial trial stages and still have to appreciate the benefits. Being a farmer myself I certainly will share observations that I have made over time on our agricultural system in general, which I think are hindering development of agribusiness in my country, and indeed in other developing countries in the region. I will also share some initiatives that my government has put in place to facilitate development of agribusiness in the country.



Like in many African countries, in Botswana agriculture has mainly been practised as a social and cultural dispensation, and in some cases even as a hobby. As a result, the sector is dominated by small-holder and subsistence farmers who account for about 80% both in numbers and in production output. Commercial farmers account for the remaining 20%, they dominate in terms of productivity. I know this is a trend across the region, and I think the question we should ask ourselves is whether this kind of setup is good for competitive and sustainable agribusiness, or not. If this is the kind of trend we should continue to embrace, then what should we do to improve performance of agribusiness in the region?

As we ponder on this question we should be mindful of the numerous agriculture related challenges that besiege our region. To highlight a few, they include;

- Vulnerability to natural disasters, including frequent droughts, floods and cyclones that affect agriculture productivity.
- Land issues (land distribution, tenure, utilisation, administration and adjudication).
- Limited access and availability of inputs (finance, technologies, improved seeds, fertilisers etc), leading to low productivity and marginal yields when compared to developed countries.
- Water scarcity and low rainfall, as well as limited water management systems.
- Low level of mechanisation across value chains. This shortfall is exacerbated by relatively high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the agricultural sector that impacts on production and productivity due to loss of productive labour force.
- Under-developed product value chains with very limited agro-processing. This limits the economic benefits which could otherwise be derived from agriculture and results in high post-harvest losses. Vibrant agro-processing widens product variety, results in long shelf-life products that meet consumer demands, and creates employment.



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- Barriers to market access, especially for new entrants are rampant. Intra-regional trade remains low at 10% of total trade versus 30% in the Association of South Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, due to tariff and non-tariff barriers, lack of addition on agriculture products, etc.

These bottlenecks limit the contribution of agriculture to GDP and should be addressed to foster economic development of the regional countries. For example, in Botswana agriculture currently accounts for 2.2% of total GDP against 40% at independence and is dominated by the beef exports, while other agricultural sectors, such as horticulture, hold great potential to contribute significantly.

**Chairperson**, allow me to now share some of the initiatives that my government has started to facilitate development of agribusiness in Botswana.

The Botswana government has prioritised agriculture, and four other sectors, for extensive development to facilitate economic diversification. Increased investment is being directed towards the sector to facilitate agribusiness development. This is being done to specifically to achieve food security, facilitate local production and manufacturing, and employment creation.

We recognise that to achieve improved and sustainable agriculture, educated, skilled and competent workforce AND FARMERS are pre-requisite. Therefore, in effort to build skills base, my ministry recently upgraded our only agriculture training college to a university, the Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources. It is our expectation that this university will inject appropriately trained human capital into our agricultural sector.

We have also noted that research and development are essential ingredients in driving agribusiness and keeping the country abreast of emerging climate change challenges. To this end, my Ministry has undertaken to establish a strong agricultural research institution, the National Agricultural Research and Development Institute. This



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institution is a result of a merger between three institutions with various research mandates that existed under my ministry for several years now.

**Ladies and gentlemen**, you will agree with me that agriculture, and indeed agribusiness, can only thrive under conducive policy environment. In admission of this fact, my government recently resolved to review the mandate and the name of my ministry to emphasise its functions in Agriculture Development and Food Security. We have established policies and plans and programmes that we believe are adequate to catalise agribusiness growth. They include the National Policy on Agricultural Development of 2014, the Research, Science, Technology and Innovation Policy of 2011, the Economic Diversification Drive, the Economic Stimulus Programme, and the five year Education and Training Strategic Sector Plan. In addition to these, the country is a signatory to several regional and international protocols and agenda that promote agriculture development. I however need to state that there is still need for policy reforms, because agribusiness (and/or food security) cannot be addressed in isolation, it requires that practices and policies of many sectors be in harmony with those geared towards addressing agribusiness.

It is important to highlight that farmers are being responsive to this government commitment, and are gradually transforming from subsistence type of agriculture to commercial agriculture. However, a general concern is that most of the farmers are still only concerned with adopting technologies (some of which are retired in developed countries), and are not yet focusing on profitability and sustainable commercial practices. A lot still needs to be done to make agribusiness more attractive by farming more efficiently, more productively, and certainly, more scientifically using modern farming methods and inputs. I am very convinced that great lessons can be learnt from advanced countries such as Italy, South Africa and Israel, to mention a few, in making agribusiness in developing countries much more attractive.



The following are some specific strategies on agriculture development that my government has adopted;

1. To address constraints associated with barriers to enter existing markets by farmers and agro-processors, government established preferential procurement scheme for inputs and consumables used in government institutions and projects. This approach is aimed at creation of sustainable jobs, reduction in the import bill, and ensuring local food becomes a first choice in our diet, while mindful of the notion of comparative advantage.
2. To commercialise and diversify the agriculture production: regardless of scale (i.e. whether small or large. As this is seen as having a great potential to:
  - a. *improve livelihoods of citizens a majority of whom reside in rural areas and earn a living through agriculture either as producers or employment in the sector.*
  - b. *diversify the national economy which has been dependent on the mining sector, particularly diamond revenue accounting for 18% of GDP. To facilitate value addition and promote distribution of the products to high population areas, the Ministry of Agriculture Development and Food Security has assisted farmers groups and investors to establish collection centres, product markets, abattoirs (cattle, small-stock and poultry) and agro-processing facilities around production areas across the country.*
3. Adoption of Climate smart agriculture: appropriate varieties, machinery and tillage methods. E.g. partnership with Argentina on this initiative.
4. Mind-set change to view agriculture as a business and a full-time job.
5. Youth empowerment in the wake of an ageing farming community. Examples of initiatives include *financial support programmes; mentoring of young farmers by established farmers, provision of social amenities to entice them to stay in the farms.*



6. Provision of infrastructure in clustered production areas: that is roads, electricity, water, and telecommunication and market facilities.
  - One envisaged projects that is expected to significantly change the face of agriculture in Botswana is the Zambezi Integrated Agro-Commercial project.
  - We plan to draw about 495 million cubic metres of water per annum from the shared Zambezi River (riparian states endorsement obtained).
  - To irrigate some 45 00 ha of land.
  - An Italian company successfully conducted a feasibility study for the Botswana government in 2014.
7. Support programmes for farmers such as provision of inputs.
8. Mapping value of chains for main agrifood subsector to provide practical and actionable recommendations for a sustainable and inclusive complete strategy that will lead to the development and the growth of the sector.

**Ladies and gentlemen** let me conclude by challenging you to ensure that we play our part in implementing the following regional instruments;

- The SADC Regional Agricultural Policy, endorsed in August 2014 by SADC Council of Ministers, whose goal is to contribute towards attainment of SADC Common Agenda that promotes sustainable and equitable economic growth and socio-economic development.
- The Food and Nutrition Strategy that was approved by SADC Summit in 2013 to promote availability of food through improved production, productivity and competitiveness; improve access to adequate and quality food and ensure its sustainable availability.

***I thank you.***