



REMARKS BY

**HER EXCELLENCY, DR STERGOMENA LAWRENCE TAX,
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF SADC**

**AT THE SADC MINISTERIAL WORKSHOP
ON FOOD SECURITY AND POVERTY ERADICATION**

HELD ON THE

16TH MAY 2016

GABORONE, BOTSWANA

Theme: “*Towards Poverty Free and Food Secure Region*”

Your Excellency, Lt. Gen. Dr Seretse Khama Ian Khama, President of the Republic of Botswana and Chairperson of SADC;

Honourable Ministers of Agriculture and Food Security;

Honourable Ministers Responsible for Poverty;

International Cooperating Partners;

Permanent Secretaries;

Chief Executive Officers;

Representatives of the Non-Governmental Organizations; and

Distinguished Ladies and Gentleman;

Warm greetings to you all this morning!

It is my singular honour and privilege to officially welcome you at this momentous workshop on Food Security and Poverty Eradication in the region whose theme is “***Towards Food Secure and Poverty Free Region.***” I wish to express my sincere gratitude to each and every one of you, for honoring the SADC Chairperson’s call to attend this workshop which offers a platform for all of us to discuss the dire situation of food insecurity and poverty in the region.

Your Excellency,

Food is fundamental to our regional stability. The region is home to 292 million people, 61 percent of whom live in rural areas and derive their livelihood from agriculture. The importance of agriculture to social and economic growth, poverty reduction, food security, and nutrition remains central to the SADC’s overall developmental agenda.

A large majority of our citizens do not have access to food and live in abject poverty. According to the Regional Vulnerability Assessment and Analysis of 2015, on average, 25.2 million people have been vulnerable to food insecurity annually during the past five (5) years. In addition, twelve (12) of the SADC Member States have stunted growth rates of above 20 percent. This level is deemed unacceptable. By the World Health Organisation

(WHO) standards, this level indicates chronic malnutrition. Furthermore, poverty headcount of people living below the poverty line of \$1.25 a day was at 43.6 percent in the region in 2012.

It is in recognition of these challenges that the Chairperson of SADC His Excellency, Lieutenant General Dr. Seretse Khama Ian Khama, President of the Republic of Botswana, has called for this forum to engage different stakeholders and different sectors to act collectively in addressing the prevailing food insecurity and high poverty levels. The workshop offers us an opportunity to deliberate on persistent bottlenecks and challenges and come up with practical solutions.

The workshop comes at a critical moment when the region must rise above these challenges that render the region food insecure and poverty stricken. Although the 2005 – 2015 SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) had stipulated an agricultural growth rate target of 6 per cent per annum, the region has only realized a 2.6 per cent annual growth rate. This affects the regional economic growth given its strong linkages and multiplier effect with other sectors of our economies.

Food security and poverty eradication measures, and the growth of agriculture sector are also vulnerable to natural hazards such as droughts, cyclones and floods. Today, we are all witnesses of what climate change can do to farmers, rural communities and our economies. The prevailing drought and floods induced by the El Nino phenomenon continue to cause havoc, and will most likely further exacerbate the already volatile situation of food shortages in the region. At the moment at least six (6) Member States of SADC, (Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe) have declared national disasters as a result of 2015/2016 El Nino phenomenon.

Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Participants

Allow me to take this opportunity on your behalf, to thank His Excellency, Lt. Gen. Dr. Seretse Khama Ian Khama, President of the Republic of Botswana and Chairperson of SADC, for convening this important and timely workshop, that affords us an opportunity to contribute to efforts that are geared towards addressing the situation.

I wish to end my remarks by appealing to Honourable Ministers and all Stakeholders to actively participate in this workshop and come up with practical solutions, and also to implement the resolutions from this unique workshop in order to improve livelihoods of people of this region.

On this note, it is my honor and pleasure to invite His Excellency, Lieutenant General Dr. Seretse Khama Ian Khama, President of the Republic of Botswana and Chairperson of SADC, to deliver his Keynote Address.

Your Excellency, Sir.