



REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

STATEMENT

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY

LIEUTENANT GENERAL DR. SERETSE KHAMA IAN KHAMA

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

AT THE

**SPECIAL SEMINAR ON FOOD SECURITY AND POVERTY
ERADICATION**

MONDAY MAY 16, 2016



Honourable Ministers from SADC member States t

**The Executive Secretary of SADC, Dr. Tax and your
Deputies**

**Your Excellencies, Heads of Diplomatic Missions
and International Organisations**

Senior Government Officials;

**Partners in development and Heads of Civil society
Organisations,**

Distinguished Guests,

A very good morning to you all.

1. It is indeed a pleasure for me to welcome you all to Botswana. I especially appreciate the fact that each of you have taken time out from other responsibilities to respond to my invitation to attend this Special Seminar. Your presence here today underscores our shared recognition of a compelling need to address the twin challenges of

food insecurity and poverty in the light of the ongoing drought that is afflicting most of our region.

2. The latest climate data confirms that our region is indeed currently experiencing the worst drought conditions in over two decades. This circumstance will result in a decline in local food production, accompanied by a continued rise in food prices. It is thus expected that our region will be confronted with growing levels of food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition.

3. Given the severity of this looming crisis, this seminar has brought together policy makers and implementers of SADC decisions, as well as independent experts and representatives of civil society, to take stock of the situation and thus enable us to adopt both short and long term mitigation measures. It is my further hope that this gathering will explore practical and innovative ways of accelerating the attainment of our commitment to secure

dignified livelihoods for all of our peoples through the universal provision of their basic needs.

4. Whilst we are going to be presented with a more elaborate overview of the challenges confronting the region during your deliberations, allow me to give a few highlights of challenges facing our region on the agricultural front.

5. Regarding food security, I am reliably informed that the 2015 cereal production decreased by approximately 21% compared to 2014. Crop production during the 2014/15 rainfall season was especially affected by prolonged dry spells in Botswana, Lesotho, and Namibia, which also extended to the maize belt of South Africa, southern Angola and southern Zimbabwe.

6. At the same time, Madagascar, Malawi and Mozambique were affected by both floods and prolonged

dry spells. Consequently, all Member States experienced significant decreases in cereal outputs.

7. It may be further noted that the effect of the recurring droughts in the region has not spared the livestock sub-sector. This fact is reflected in a loss of grazing, diminished water sources and increased incidences and prevalence of animal diseases, resulting in high mortalities in some countries in the region.

8. Consequently, the latest figures indicate slow growth in regional livestock production, while SADC as a whole remains a net importer of livestock products. Such dire reports, of course, have far reaching ramifications given that agriculture, particularly livestock production, remains an economic mainstay for most of us.

9. Turning now to the issue of poverty, I note with grave concern that according to SADC Regional

Vulnerability Assessment and Analysis Synthesis Reports, 40% of all SADC citizens are currently living in abject poverty.

10. It is for this reason that Poverty Eradication has become the overarching objective for the SADC Regional integration agenda. As partners in this initiative our main aim is to enhance the standards of living and quality of life of all our people.

11. As you may recall, it was our recognition of the need to eradicate poverty that in 2008, in Mauritius, we decided to establish a Regional Poverty Observatory (RPO). This regional structure was created to oversee the implementation of the agreed poverty eradication strategies, while managing a region wide poverty information and data base.

12. It may be further noted that three specific objectives of the RPO form part of the basis for my call for this Seminar. These are to:

- Intensify dialogue on regional dimensions of poverty;
- Strengthen our collective efforts to address poverty through regional cooperation and integration; and
- Promote dialogue on the partnerships necessary to obtain our number one United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs), which is to “end poverty in all of its forms everywhere.”

13. Combating regional food insecurity and poverty in all of its forms and complexity requires an array of multifaceted actions. Firstly, the political and policy environments need to be conducive, especially in the case of agriculture.

14. Secondly, food security and poverty cannot be addressed in isolation. It rather requires that the practices

and policies of various sectors be harmonised to address food security and poverty as a common agenda.

15. We must further ensure that we at all times fully engage often marginalized groups, namely the youth and women, as well as the poor, in our efforts to improve agricultural production and distribution. It is, therefore, imperative that we enhance policies and avail the necessary resources that facilitate their access.

16. Let us remain cognisant of our ongoing regional efforts to address the above challenges. In terms of poverty, these include the development of Regional Poverty Eradication Frame Work, the establishment of the RPO with its steering committees; the development and adoption of the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) as an alternative poverty measure for member states and stakeholders.

17. In terms of food security, let us be mindful of the Food and Nutrition Strategy, as approved by the SADC Summit in 2013; and the Regional Agricultural Policy (RAP), which was endorsed by the SADC Council of Ministers in August 2014. I here note that the RAP Investment Plan is yet to be finalised.

18. I am sure you will all agree with me that these commendable milestones must now be further translated into actions that will positively impact on the lives of our people.

19. While elements of the strategies I have highlighted are understood to have a long-term dimension, it is my earnest hope that this forum will propose short to medium term interventions that will cushion and assist our people in coping with the immediate impact of climate change.

20. Let me conclude my remarks by declaring this Special Seminar on Food Security and Poverty Eradication officially open. May your deliberations be fruitful.

Thank you for your attention.