



**High Commissioner John Feakes**

**Australia-Africa Plant Biosecurity workshop - Tuesday 18 August, Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi**

I am delighted to be here today to open the Australia – Africa Plant Biosecurity Partnership Inception Workshop in Nairobi.

Australia's support for this workshop is emblematic of the close relationship we enjoy with African partners in the agricultural sector, and our shared understanding of the challenges we face.

Australia's early prosperity depended on agricultural productivity and its ability to trade with the rest of the world.

While in recent decades the minerals boom in Australia has overshadowed agriculture in export terms, Australian agricultural exports still reach hundreds of millions of people around the world.

- Key to ensuring Australian agriculture remains high quality and competitive – and to protect Australia's biodiversity – is effective biosecurity.
- Effective biosecurity – the control of pests and disease – is critical to ensure that trade and development in the agricultural sector is maximised, and that economic growth can benefit those who need it most. We all understand this very well.

Agricultural research and technology capacity has been pivotal to Australia's agricultural success – particularly in a landscape that is often arid and limited in fertility.

Many agricultural zones in Africa share this landscape – and it is this similarity, together with like-minded and strong partnerships, that provides synergies, opportunities and mutual benefits to both Australian and African agricultural development.

Partnerships are not a one-way flow of knowledge and ideas. Far from it.

- African agricultural knowledge and insights have much to teach Australia – including in Australia's own aim to further expand and enhance agricultural production.
- We value people-to-people links and ways in which our activities help projects connect with global networks.

It is with these common landscapes, interests and opportunities in mind that Australia continues to partner in African agricultural research and development.

These contributions to agricultural research and development are a high priority.

- As we mark 50 years of bilateral relations with Kenya we see this initiative as another means of strengthening our ties and supporting intra and inter-regional trade.

You have heard from Dennis Bittisnich of the significant and continuing investments in agricultural research the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and its Food Security Centre have, and will continue to deliver.

- These focus on increasing the utilisation of agricultural research outputs by small holder farmers, engaging the private sector, and promoting and supporting the role of women and youth in agriculture and markets.
- As we all know, African women are the backbone of the agricultural sector, and research that builds the productivity of women farmers builds the productivity of Africa. Closing the gender divide in agriculture could reduce the number of people living with hunger by 150 million, and enabling women farmers to be more productive will help their families have greater access to healthcare, education and better nutrition.

The Food Security Centre project that brings us all here is a further reflection of Australia's desire to share its world-class expertise – in this case in biosecurity control.

- The project – which is led by Australia's Cooperative Research Centre for Plant Biosecurity – is specifically designed not only to build the capability of Senior and Associate Fellows, but to build a long term network where biosecurity fellows from different countries can interact, jointly learn and gain confidence from each other.
- This will result in greater ability for both government and private sector agencies within target countries and the region as a whole to control key plant pests and diseases, and to facilitate trade.

It is especially pleasing to see that the initiative has gained significant interest within Africa at this early stage including from the private sector, the African Union, African trade blocs, and other donor governments and international agencies.

- The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) recognises the value this project will bring to agricultural trade within and outside of Africa and is now a further partner in this project.

Apart from the work of ACIAR and its Food Security Centre, agriculture continues to be a strong focus of the broader Australian aid portfolio.

- Since the 1960s, the Australian Government has supported and trained over 5000 Africans through the Australia Awards program.
- We will provide 95 Australia Awards in the agriculture sector alone across the continent in 2015.
- Through the Awards program, we will continue to offer masters and short-course awards to high-achieving Africans working in the agricultural sector, and ACIAR will continue to support PhD applicants who are actively involved in their projects.

Australian aid funding is also harnessing the power of African businesses to improve farming livelihoods through our \$33 million contribution to the Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund.

- The fund is largely based in Eastern and Southern African countries – from Kenya to Zimbabwe, and is focused on making markets work for the poor, encouraging private sector innovation, and commercialisation of agricultural technologies that benefit smallholder farmers.
- In Kenya alone we support two projects:
  - One aims to contribute towards improving food security through the delivery of affordable quality certified disease-free planting material
  - The other aims to increase the productivity of commercial rose growers through the selection and release of new rootstock cultivars.
- At the multilateral level Australia also contributes significantly to the agricultural centres in the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) system. This includes the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) based here in Nairobi, and to the World Bank's G20 Global Agriculture Food Security Program.
- Australia has been the fourth-largest donor to this G20 initiative, which has allocated over two-thirds of funds to African countries.
- Australia is also an active partner in AgResults, a multilateral initiative that incentivizes and rewards high-impact agricultural innovations.
- One of the five pilots from across the globe is in Kenya. The On-Farm Storage Pilot tackles the post-harvest losses of grain which are extensive and a major threat to food security in developing countries.

The Australian Government has also enhanced agricultural productivity in Africa through Australia's national science agency - the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO).

- In East Africa, CSIRO has partnered over the last few years with the Biosciences eastern and central Africa (BecA) research hub based at ILRI – strengthening the capacity of the hub, and African scientists, in using modern biosciences for food and nutritional security.

With all these activities in mind, I am pleased to officially open this inception workshop.

- I look forward to hearing about the debates and interactions between you all over the next three days, which will strengthen not only this project, but also the partnership between Africa and Australia.

I wish you all the best.