

**Opening Speech By The Guest Of Honour, *Mr. Wilfred Ngirwa*, Permanent
Secretary, Ministry Of Agriculture And Food Security**

Mr. Chairman,
The scientific Coordinator for PLEC,
East Africa PLEC Scientists and Farmers,
Honorable guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. Chairman, Tanzania is privileged to host the East Africa PLEC General meeting after four years of its existence as a project. I also feel privileged to be with you today for the opening occasion.

On behalf of the Government of Tanzania, The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and the Arumeru farmers, I have the honour to welcome you to Tanzania and Arusha in particular.

Mr. Chairman, this is a remarkable and important gathering of East African farmers, Scientists and Policy Makers from Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya to deliberate on PLEC which is a project on People, Land Management and Environmental Change in the rural farming communities.

Your meeting will make you share experience and be able to know if PLEC has achieved its objectives in areas of :

- Establishment of historical and baseline comparative information on biodiversity and agrodiversity at the landscape level in representative diverse and dynamic sites,
- Development of participatory and sustainable models of biodiversity management based on farmers' technologies and knowledge within agricultural systems at the community and landscape levels.

- Development of recommendations on approaches and policies for sustainable agrodiversity management to key government decision makers, farmers and field practitioners.
- Capacity building, particularly in the area of agrodiversity.

Mr. Chairman, I request you to listen carefully to the farmer's representatives attending this meeting who are the target for this project (PLEC), who have been fully involved in development of participatory and sustainable models of Biodiversity management in-situ on their own fields and at community level. They will be able to tell you the success, the shortcomings and the corrective measures for this project.

It is now an unquestionable fact that farmers, researchers and extension workers have something to learn from each other. This is evident within PLEC whereby expert farmers have emerged and acted as teachers (extension agents) of other farmers and data providers to scientists. This interaction has successfully enabled achievement towards successful technology development and dissemination.

PLEC sites in East Africa have been able to come up with recommendations that sustain crop and management diversity and improved local livelihood. This is a new approach which needs to be replicated in other new areas in the agriculture sector programmes in our countries.

Mr. Chairman, as you all know Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania are basically agricultural dependent economies dominated by small-holder farmers who live in the rural areas. Poverty studies have shown that most of the poor people live in the rural areas (and these are the small holder farmers). Therefore, national poverty alleviation strategies need to be focused and address the problems rural farmers are facing.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security considers PLEC as an important model and contributor in enhancement of food security and alleviation of rural poverty.

Consequently, I would like to thank the United Nations University for their role in the implementation of this project, the Global Environmental Facility for funding the project, the project management for including East Africa among project implementing regions and ARI Ukiriguru for co-ordinating PLEC work in Tanzania. Special thanks to the project management for including farmers in such meetings where they really present their first hand experience, their ideas and defend their interests.

I would also like to thank PLEC hosts in Arumeru mainly the District Executive Director (DED), the Zonal Director Research and Development, Northern Zone (ZDRD-NZ), and the District Agricultural and Livestock Development Officer (DALDO), Arumeru for facilitating the work, researchers, extensionists, expert farmers and other personnel who devoted their time and skills in ensuring success of the project and the hardworking farmers in PLEC sites for their dedication.

Mr. Chairman, Before I conclude, may I remind you that at the end of this meeting we expect you to come up with clear and pragmatic recommendations on the way forward.

Once again, I warmly welcome you. I wish you a successful meeting and I hope you will find Arusha as a home place for your follow-up meetings.

Mr. Chairman, I now have the honour and indeed pleasure to declare the PLEC General Meeting officially open. Thank you for your attention.