Concluding Statement

The Role of Parliamentary Agricultural Committees in the Africa Region

A Workshop by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Natural Resources Institute of the University of Greenwich, hosted by the Parliament of Malawi

At a Workshop of African Parliamentary Agriculture Committee Chairpersons, hosted by the CPA Malawi Branch on 4-6 of March 2014, held in Lilongwe, Malawi, the following deliberations took place:

Objective:

To bring together leaders of Parliamentary Agriculture Committees and release their potential for increasing the productivity and food security of African agriculture through their leadership of their committees.

Proposals to strengthen the agricultural sector to benefit economic growth and reduce poverty have been identified by delegates from 11 Commonwealth jurisdictions in the Africa Region (Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) together with resource persons from the Natural Resources Institute of the University of Greenwich, the ONE Campaign, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF) and the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD).

The delegates recognised that agriculture offers great promise for food security, economic growth, poverty reduction and the empowerment of women and youth toward the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

- It was recognized that investment in agriculture is up to 11 times more effective in reducing poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa than growth in other sectors (International Fund for Agricultural Development);
- 70% of Sub-Saharan Africans depend on agriculture for their livelihoods;
- Agriculture accounts for 30% of Sub-Saharan African GNP;
Crop yields in Africa have remained at one third of those produced by farmers in other developing countries; 80% of farms in Sub-Saharan Africa are of 2 hectares or less; Post-harvest crop losses in Sub-Saharan Africa range from 20% to 40%

However, agriculture has often been defined too narrowly as related areas such as fisheries, forestry and livestock were neglected. The delegates deemed it as vital that Parliamentary Agriculture committees should also pay attention to cross-cutting issues such as climate change, water and the impact of extractive industries on agriculture.

The delegates were resolute that agriculture has to be re-defined more appropriately as a business venture if the Maputo Agreements of devoting 10% of national income to agriculture are to be properly realised.

It was observed that agriculture’s contribution towards nutrition needs to be assessed in view of the fact that 40% of all children in Sub-Saharan Africa are stunted (physical and mental wasting) due to under-nutrition in the first thousand days of life. Children who avoid stunting perform better throughout their life including at school, receive better wages at work and contribute more to a country’s overall economy.

In addition, it was noted that women are severely disadvantaged although they provide up to 80% of all food produced. They are often penalized by the lack of legal rights in areas such as landownership.

The delegates strongly felt that Parliamentary Agriculture Committees need more essential resources (research personnel, legal and communication expertise etc.) to perform their duties more effectively and deal with the vast amount of cross-cutting issues. Participants agreed that there is a significant policy vacuum in agricultural development strategies that needed to be addressed such as lack of effective seeds policies, supplying and distribution of fertiliser, faults in staple food markets, lack of equity and security of access to land (including of women), the need to build smallholder farmers resilience to climate change, the failure of commercial banks to provide appropriate credit to smallholder farmers etc.

In order for Members to fulfil their respective parliamentary roles of legislation, oversight and representation, they need an increased amount of professional assistance and strong parliamentary infrastructure to support their crucial role in promoting parliamentary democracy.
The participants agreed on the following recommendations:

- Due to the frequent change of parliamentarians, parliaments should consider ways of strengthening the institutional memory of Parliamentary Agriculture Committees by adequate induction courses and information services;
- Parliamentary Agriculture Committees must have access to experts with technical and social knowledge to provide guidance in areas of agriculture;
- There is a need to recognize the essential role of parliamentary support staff in strengthening the Committees by enhancing their knowledge capacity and provide training opportunities to facilitate the Committees’ demanding tasks;
- The Committee should make use of its convening powers by forging linkages with relevant actors from the private sector, universities, scientists, donors, civil society groups and decision makers in the agricultural industry;
- It was noted that there is a need for further collaboration and development of these linkages, including with parliamentary colleagues in other jurisdictions;
- Parliamentarians should strive to advocate women’s rights, in particular in the area of land ownership in Africa;
- Agricultural Committees should be proactive in the formulation of appropriate policies to increase funding for agriculture through public and private financing systems, NGOs and development partners;
- There is a need of a legal framework for sustainability of credit guarantee schemes by ensuring the annual injection of funds, hereby optimizing the multiplier effects on productivity and profit of farmers, especially the small/medium stakeholders;
- Consequently, organisations with technical expertise are encouraged to facilitate an omnibus draft bill for national domestication in this regard.

The Parliamentarians offer these proposals to assist Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures, the Natural Resources Institute of the University of Greenwich, the ONE Campaign, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), the African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) and the wider global community to address the issues around agriculture and development. They recognize that the responses to these issues will vary in each jurisdiction to reflect local
circumstances. However, Parliamentarians see great advantages in strengthening Parliamentary Agriculture Committees in Africa and suggest that Parliaments consider these proposals to maximise the social and economic benefits that can be gained from agriculture.