

**COMPETENCE PLATFORM ON ENERGY CROPS AND AGROFORESTRY SYSTEMS FOR
ARID- AND SEMI-ARID ECOSYSTEMS – AFRICA (COMPETE),**

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND POLICY DEBATE ON 'BIOFUEL
SUSTAINABILITY SCHEMES – AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE
THE NGURDOTO MOUNTAIN LODGE, 16–17 JUNE 2008, ARUSHA,
TANZANIA**

OPENING SPEECH

Hon. Mr. William Ngeleja (MP)
(Minister for Energy and Minerals)

**Chairperson/Chairman,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

It is a pleasure for me to be afforded this opportunity of opening this important conference on policy debate for biofuel sustainability schemes—an African perspective. I understand that the purpose of this conference is to establish a platform for policy dialogue and capacity building and identify pathways for the sustainable provision of bio-energy. I am also informed that the conference will provide inspiration and background information for policy makers, investors and service providers. This opening session is partly an opportunity for me to participate on behalf of the Government of Tanzania in this important conference.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you all to this conference and also to thank TaTEDO, Imperial College and WIP for their efforts in organizing the conference on behalf of other COMPETE project partners. I would also like to thank the European Union (EU) for co-financing the conference.

Mr Chairman, I am glad to note that the theme of this conference will debate on Biofuel Sustainability—An African Perspective. For the government as well as the donors and civil community in this country, biofuel development and the sustainable development are concerns, which are on top of our development agenda today. We are all aware that energy is a crucial input to all income earning and poverty eradication initiatives. The use of biofuel as an alternative to mineral fuel for transport and industries to a large extent, could contribute to increased productivity and reduce high expenditure of importation of fuel for African countries, which in turn could stimulate economic growth and thereby contribute enormously in the war against poverty.

Mr. Chairman, There has been growing interest in liquid biofuels in Africa and rest of the world in recent years. As Africa has a large arable land resources and favourable climate for growing energy crops, there is no doubt that this continent has the potential to provide the much-needed energy for transport, industrialisation and poverty reduction efforts at the same time contribute to the climate change mitigation and adaptation.

It is worth little that African countries are party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol, which demands for cleaner fuels to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, if there are no economic and environmental gains to the people in Africa.

Mr. Chairman, We have all seen the contradicting views on growing crops for food or for biofuel production and there is no doubt that the vast tracts of land are required to replace mineral petrol to any significant degree. There is need to provoke debate on research and development for biofuels that are cleaner, more versatile, and can be used on more semi-arid marginal lands.

However, we are aware that biofuel development can present a number of connected challenges that oblige the African governments to be very keen in formulating and implementing the right policies. However, provided we develop and implement biofuel policies intelligently, biofuels can be positive both for the environment – and for sustainable development. There are off-course other considerations linked to agricultural policy and issues of security of energy and food supply. But our fundamental benchmark in biofuel policy must be an environmental one with social and economic consideration to the energy and food security.

Mr Chairman, Many African countries have spare agricultural land resource and a genuine comparative advantage in biofuel crop production. Biofuels can be produced from competitively locally grown plant oil as well as sugar and starch plants and can reduce foreign exchange expenditure on the imports. Growing crops for biofuel will not be meaningful, if biofuels cannot contribute to the tumbling down the fuel expenses in economic sectors. A welcome side effect of increased growing in biofuels is the fact that African countries stand to gain from biofuel expansion.

Mr Chairman, Despite the potential of biofuel development available in Africa, production has not reached the commercial levels. Efforts of developing biofuels are still at infant stages. There are number of investors interested to come in from abroad and other few are already active in the field. Due to the fact that the

local market is being developed gradually, it is anticipated that biofuels could be produced for both local and foreign markets.

Mr. Chairman, the efforts of COMPETE project to formulate, create awareness and implement a strategy for creating biofuel sustainability through establish a platform for policy dialogue, capacity building and identify pathways for the sustainable provision of bio-energy will definitely result into a positive contribution to the overall socio-economic development of the African countries. I am sure African Governments will benefit from recommendations which will result from this conference. The key issue is to share skills, experiences, guidance on what works required and benefits for our continent.

Mr. Chairman, your programme, shows a number of topics that will be discussed during the different conference sessions. I humbly suggest that debate should also be directed to the better ways of improving the quality of energy services for poor especially people in rural areas to use biofuels to generate electricity, process agricultural products and create income in order to improve their livelihoods.

Mr. Chairman, given the potential of biofuels in addressing Africa's energy challenges and associated risks and trade-offs, it is critical that the biofuel development efforts are targeted to maximize the benefits while minimizing the risks and trade-offs.

Mr Chairman, I hope that over the next two days the conference will not only come up with a comprehensive resolutions for achieving the objective of developing biofuel on sustainable basis in Africa and to offer support to policy making activities, but also come up with sound recommendations and commitment from the partners to effectively put into actions such resolutions.

Finally, **Mr. Chairman**, distinguished participants I would like to wish you fruitful discussions in the next two days of this conference. With these brief remarks, I have the pleasure to formally announce this conference open.

Thank you for your kind contribution