

Allow me to acknowledge the presence of Hon. **Calle Schlettwein**, Minister of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform,

Her Excellency, Mrs Antila, the EU Ambassador in Namibia will also be here any time

To all the distinguished speakers, and guests present here and to all how are watching to online,

A very good morning to you all and a warm welcome to our Conference.

Now, I believe that we all agree that agriculture plays an important role in Namibia. In our economic Development.

It is the biggest employer in the country, and it is the back bone of the rural economy, where half of Namibia's population live. And about 70% of the population, depend on farming for at least part their food supplies. The sector is also, an important source of export earnings. In 2019, *the sector* contributed N\$3.4 billion to foreign earnings, N\$ 1.9 billion of which came from meat exports.

So agriculture already plays a significant role player in our economy.

But I believe that the sector has much more potential. It can contribute much to the economy and become a catalyst for economic growth and development.

In fact, if you look around the world, you will see most countries developed on the back of strong very farming sectors. Almost all the advanced economies, such the EU, the US and so on, all have very strong farming sectors, and these sectors played a very important role in their economic transformation and industrialization.

And so agriculture has the same potential here in Namibia: The sector can contribute to much more to job creation and boost economic activities in the rest of the economy. It can unlock value chains in the manufacturing and services sector and propel the country towards industrialization. So really great potential, here...

However, despite this potential, the sector has challenges. Immense challenges...

The main challenge is the hostile climate in Namibia. Namibia is mostly a dry and the rainfall is very low. And every few years we need with recurrent droughts, which cause immense losses to livestock and crops, and leave many farmers destitute.

The sector is also characterized by low skills levels, low investments and inadequate deployment of modern technologies and farming methods.

So what do we do about this? What solutions can we come up with to tackle challenges. I believe none of us wants to give and say well Namibia is too dry, lets close shop and move everyone to cities – I don't think that's the way to go. Solutions need to be found:

And that's why the EAN organized this Conference: It's to bring various experts together to exchange ideas and learn other countries about what can be done.

And so we will talk about

Smart agriculture, we will talk about productivity in the beef industry, crop production, agribusiness, and of course, finance.

Some of the questions I hope this Conference will answer is:

- What is already happening out there, what is the nature and size of the sector
- What new value chains can be unlocked

- What are the exact challenges that prevent us from growing the sector
- And how to we resolve those challenges

I think if we can do that, we would have achieved objective of the Conference.

Well, I am happy to point out that we have lined up great speakers, national and international experts in various fields to help tackle some of these questions.

We have also created enough time for all of you contribute towards the conversation.

Please join us in finding solutions.

And most importantly, we honoured to have the Hon Minister opening this Conference. That is an indication that government is open to new ideas and listen to contributions form the public and how to tackle our development challenges. We really happy about this.

And with those few words, let me wish us all a great discussions, lets think together and ponder together on finding ways how we can grow agriculture and move the country forward.

I thank you.