

AGRICULTURE POLICY AND STRATEGIES

Honourable Mao Zeming¹, MP.

Provincial Agriculture Chairmen, Chairmen of Industry Corporations, Head of Provincial Administration, Agriculture Advisors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The last two-day's discussions have highlighted various issues that are facing agriculture sector development in PNG.

The purpose of this conference is to identify the issues and constraints and formulate policies and strategies to overcome them for implementation.

A major concern that has been highlighted throughout the two days presentations is inadequate funding for the agriculture sector as a whole. Here I must plead guilty and submit that things have not been well with the national government accounts and it is only now that we are on a somewhat solid grounding. But this also, as the Prime Minister indicated sometimes ago, can change for bad or worse with one single wrong move.

Extension has been singled out as a major component needing funding and re-organization. Here the government would seriously consider the recommendations arising out of this conference.

Another major bottleneck faced by all sections of agriculture sector is the crumbling road transport. I am glad that this conference has recommended the possibility of putting a railroad system in place, which would transport agriculture produce, forestry products, livestock and passengers. We would consider this recommendation seriously.

The FAO recommendations on coffee industry have caused serious concern among the growers. Let me assure everyone here that NEC would take a decision in this matter only when various views have been debated exhaustively.

Agricultural Research has been highlighted as an important area of attention by this conference. The Morauta Government is seriously committed to research and training of national research scientists. It is time to seriously implement trainee scientist cadetship schemes, one already operational in NARI so that innovation can flourish in PNG.

Effective and efficient farmer training programme needs to be implemented to upgrade the farmer's skills, to undertake agriculture as a commercial enterprise.

I have directed DAL and the Commodity Boards to give greater attention to this aspect. This will make our farmers to face the changing world with confidence.

Revitalization of the agriculture information system at all levels to be urgently addressed. The government would encourage this and provide adequate funding to ensure this is implemented as soon as possible. This area cannot be neglected any longer.

As PNG is a member of the WTO and APEC, it is imperative that our agricultural exports need to be of high quality to reap maximum benefits under the trade agreements. To this end every effort would be made to achieve this goal. And farmers should be trained and facilitated.

Further, the government will ratify an international Biosafety Protocol in relation to the import of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and

¹ Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Papua New Guinea.

food (GMF) and on agriculture, the environment, and human health.

A National Biosafety Guidelines and National Biosafety Committee need to be established to deal with imports causing biosafety concerns. This should protect public and national interest and foster a better position for PNG in the world trade market.

Down-stream processing of agricultural products is another area that requires urgent attention. This will add value to the products, and provide not only additional income to our farmers but also create employment opportunities in the rural sector.

Agriculture development in Bougainville is a priority. The government with the help of the donor agencies would implement a range of agricultural development programmes to provide food and cash that is urgently required to revive the economy of this province. This would certainly enhance the peace process.

The two day Conference has been a success. I would like to see recommendations arising from this conference to be submitted to the Government, which hopefully, should form the basis for Year 2001 budget for the agriculture sector.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your contributions.

For those conference participants who are returning to their respective provinces, I wish you a safe journey back.

I now declare the Policy and Strategy conference closed.