

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT  
BY THE  
**MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (MR MTOLO) MP,**  
ON THE  
**FARM BLOCK DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

Madam Speaker, let me thank you and the office of the Clerk, most sincerely, for allowing this segment to also be read today.

Madam Speaker, I rise to deliver a ministerial statement on the matter of the farm block development programme. This is in response to some concerns raised in relation to my statement inviting foreign direct investment in the farm blocks, ...

Madam Speaker, the New Dawn Administration has prioritised agriculture as the engine for economic development, job creation and growth. If there is one programme in agriculture that can help the Government transform that sector, it is the farm block development programme. Since 2006, successive governments have identified farm blocks as among the foundation stones for the country's rural development policy. This has been demonstrated by prioritising the farm block development programme in the Sixth National Development Plan and its revised edition, Seventh National Development Plan, and currently, the Eighth National Development Plan.

Madam Speaker, the basic concept of a farm block is that the Government earmarks land in collaboration with traditional leaders for purposes of promoting commercial agriculture. In this regard, the Government has identified approximately 100,000 ha of land in each of the ten provinces of Zambia. The approach is that a core-venture or core-venture investors in each farm block are expected to coordinate production and provide a market as off-takers for other smaller farms. The Nakambala Sugar Estate is one model for such operations that the Government is pursuing to replicate in the farm blocks. Operated in this manner, farm blocks are expected to accelerate agricultural growth, value addition and generation of much needed export earnings for the benefit of surrounding communities and the country.

Madam Speaker, despite efforts by previous governments to develop farm blocks, not much has been achieved in line with the aspirations. One of the key reasons why the intentions have not

been actualised is the failure to attract credible investors. This has largely been a consequence of lack of infrastructure and an unorganised public support service to attract investors.

Madam Speaker, to this effect, the New Dawn Government of His Excellency, Mr Hakainde Hichilema, President of the Republic of Zambia, has placed the farm block model at the centre of the development and commercialisation of agricultural land using the farm block development programme. The targeted farm blocks include Nansanga in Central Province, Luena in Luapula Province, Mushindamo in North-Western Province, Kalumwange in Western Province, Luswishi in Copperbelt Province, Manshya in Muchinga Province, Musokotwane in Southern Province, Chikumbilo in Eastern Province, Shikabeta in Lusaka, and Kalungwishi in Northern Province.

Madam Speaker, each farm block is designed to have four categories of farms, namely small-scale; 5 ha to 10 ha, medium scale; 11 ha to 101 ha, commercial; 101 ha to 1000 ha, and a core-venture with an allocation of land of up to 10000 ha.

Learning from past mistakes, Madam Speaker, and pursuant to the United Party for National Development (UPND) manifesto's aim of increasing agricultural productivity and profitability, the Government has provided renewed impetus towards development of the farm block. Critical is the issue of attracting and availing land for large scale agri-business investments by both local and foreign private sector businesses. The private sector businesses are expected to work with the small-scale farmers in the localities that they will invest in. The Government is fully aware that for this to happen, we have to systematically invest in basic infrastructure such as trunk and access roads, electricity, communal dams and other social amenities.

Madam Speaker, since 2006, only Nansanga, Luena, and Luswishi farm blocks have had some support towards infrastructure development that stands at about 85 per cent, 40 per cent, and 15 per cent, respectively. The situation in the other farm blocks is not as developed in that only land identification and consent from the chiefs has taken place. In my earlier statements, I alluded to the reasons why this state of affairs has persisted for such a long time.

Madam Speaker, the New Dawn Government has a clear policy direction in terms of how the farm blocks will be developed. The Government will provide basic infrastructure, including other incentives and then invite the private sector who are willing to set up anchor farms and value addition facilities in the farm blocks.

Madam Speaker, for the benefit of the nation, I wish to reiterate that investors could be local or foreign, and must be ready to use their financial and other resources to immediately start developing the land for agriculture production purposes, especially for the priority crops. I also wish to emphasise that there are established laws and procedures for investors who wish to do business in the farm blocks. It is for this reason that whenever we interact with local and foreign investors, we indicate the guidelines that have to be followed to ensure transparency.

Madam Speaker, allow me to conclude by stating that the ministry will continue supporting efforts of our Republican President, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry to ensure that the much needed local and foreign investment is attracted into the farm blocks.

My call, Madam Speaker, to all like-minded Zambians is to support these efforts so that our youths, women and disadvantaged groups in society can benefit meaningfully from this important programme. This can only happen if our local small-scale farmers work in partnership with local and foreign investors. We have seen this happen in other countries, and in the case of Mazabuka. It is our intention to make it happen in the farm blocks.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.

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