

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ON

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE PREPARATIONS FOR 2019/2020 FARMER INPUT
SUPPORT PROGRAMME

BY

BY THE HON. MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, MR KATAMBO, MP

Mr Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to issue a ministerial statement on the preparations that the Ministry of Agriculture is making for the 2019/2020 Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP). It is important that I inform the nation on the preparations we are making for the programme, especially with the prolonged dry spells experienced in some parts of the country in the last agricultural season.

Sir, the Patriotic Front (PF) Government remains committed to supporting the smallholder farmers through FISP. The smallholder farmers are the backbone of this country's agricultural sector. The support under FISP will enable our smallholder farmers to have access to affordable agricultural inputs and in turn, guarantee household and national food security.

Mr Speaker, in the 2018/2019 agricultural season, FISP targeted to provide support to 1 million farmers. I am delighted to report that over 990,000 smallholder farmers accessed inputs in the 2018/2019 agricultural season. You may note that this represents over 99 per cent of the targeted beneficiaries. In the 2018/2019 agricultural season, the country experienced prolonged dry spells in some parts of the country, particularly the southern and western parts. The prolonged dry spells affected the production of most crops and affected the household food security of most farmers in these areas. In addition, in the 2018/2019 season, the country experienced excessive rains in some parts of the northern and eastern parts of the country and an outbreak of fall armyworms in some parts of the country. With regard to FISP, the key challenges were delayed payment to agro dealers by the ministry as well as agro dealers failing to stock adequate quantities of the agricultural inputs needed by the farmers.

Sir, the ministry has taken lessons from the challenges encountered in the 2018/2019 agricultural season. In addressing the challenges both in terms of the weather and the implementation of the programme, we have resolved to continue implementing FISP using both the direct input supply and the Electronic Voucher System (e-Voucher System). These two modalities give the ministry as well as the farmers' flexibility to respond to the challenges of climate change and technological challenges that affect the programme. Further, we have noted that continuously giving huge volumes of fertilisers to farmers in areas that have been experiencing prolonged dry spells is not serving the farmers well. Therefore, there is need to support farmers in areas that experienced prolonged dry spells with a flexible input support system that allows them to respond to challenges of climate change. Farmers in areas that are prone to prolonged dry spells will therefore be supported through the e-Voucher System or card less redeeming modality. This will provide the farmer with an opportunity to select climate-smart agricultural inputs.

Mr Speaker, the ministry is also aware that farmers in the parts of the country that received relatively good rainfall in recent years deserve to be supported with inputs that will help them successfully grow our staple crop, maize, and other crops. The ministry will, therefore, implement a deliberate policy of promoting the growing of maize in these areas in order to meet the national demand and to have a renewed focus on the export market demand for agriculture especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

These two approaches to FISP are expected to leverage the comparative advantage that the different regions of the country have. It is through this understanding of the production capacities of the various regions that we can attain a diversified and export-oriented agricultural sector.

Mr Speaker, in the implementation of FISP, the following measures have been put in place:

- (a) the FISP will be implemented using the direct input supply and e-Voucher modalities in the 2019/2020 agricultural season. Both modalities will be implemented through the Zambia Integrated Agricultural Management Information System (ZIAMIS);

- (b) the ministry is finalising the engagement of input suppliers under the direct input supply modality;
- (c) farmer deposits of K400 for the 2019/2020 farming season was opened on 1st July, 2019 and is expected to end on 30th September, 2019. This period coincides with the agricultural marketing season which is the period when farmers have money;
- (d) farmers will be able to access their inputs from 1st September, 2019 which is way before the rainy season; and
- (e) for the 2019/2020 farming season, FISP will target to provide input support to 1 million beneficiary small scale farmers across the country. The details of districts that will be serviced through the e-Voucher System and those to be serviced through the direct input supply modality will be communicated to all districts through the respective provincial agricultural co-ordinators.

Sir, we are committed to ensuring that our farmers receive their inputs on time so as to increase their production and productivity. We are also alive to the challenges that we encountered in the previous seasons, and we have been working to resolve them. The Ministry of Agriculture is in constant engagement with the Ministry of Finance to resolve the problems related to agro dealer payments. We have initiated plans to ensure that in the coming season, there are minimal delays in payments to agro dealers.

Mr Speaker, with these measures outlined, the ministry hopes to improve the performance of FISP.

Mr Speaker, I thank you.