

Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2020

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

ON

2019/2020 AGRICULTURAL INPUTS AND PAYMENT TO AGRO-DEALERS

BY

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, HON. KATAMBO, MP

Mr Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to render a ministerial statement on the distribution of agricultural inputs for 2019/2020 Agriculture Season and also, the payments to agro-dealers.

Sir, before I proceed with the statement, allow me to join my colleagues, hon. Members of Parliament in congratulating Hon. Fube, the newly elected Member of Parliament for Chilubi Parliamentary Constituency for his resounding victory.

Mr Speaker, it is important that I update the House and the country at large on the distribution of agricultural inputs for the 2019/2020 Agriculture Season and also, the payments to agro-dealers.

Sir, allow me to reiterate the Patriotic Front (PF) Government's continued commitment to supporting the farmers through the Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP). We acknowledge that the smallholder farmers are the backbone of this country's agriculture sector and ultimately, the national food security. The support under FISP therefore, enables farmers to have access to affordable agricultural inputs and in turn, guarantee household and national food security.

Mr Speaker, I wish to remind the hon. Members that in the 2019/2020 Agriculture Season, FISP was implemented using two approaches namely, the direct input supply and the Electronic Voucher (e-Voucher) modalities. We targeted 1 million farmers in the 2019/2020 Agriculture Season. Of the 1 million farmers, a total of 382,455 farmers were under the e-Voucher mechanism in forty-two districts while the remainder was on the direct input supply mechanism.

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Sir, I am happy to report that all the targeted farmers managed to redeem their inputs for the 2019/2020 Agriculture Season for both the e-Voucher and the direct input supply modalities. In addition, for the 2019/2020 Agriculture Season, we delivered inputs to the districts before the onset of the rain season.

Mr Speaker, such is a commitment from the PF Government under the leadership of His Excellency, Dr Edgar Chagwa Lungu, the President of the Republic of Zambia to support our farmers. As a result of this early distribution of inputs, the good rains received to date, the crop in most part of the country is looking very good. Despite some successes in implementing FISP, the programme faced some challenges. These challenges particularly, affected the e-Voucher modality. Some agro-dealers redeemed the farmers' vouchers but did not issue them with all the redeemed inputs.

Sir, I wish to state that the ministry is addressing these reports of agro-dealers who did not issue inputs to farmers. Where such reports are verified, the erring agro-dealers will face legal action and the ministry will reverse all such transactions to allow the farmers to collect inputs from alternative agro-dealers. There have been Mr Speaker, several questions on the Floor of this House on payments to agro-dealers. Allow me to give an update on the efforts we are making to ensure that agro-dealers are paid. At the end of 2019, the total invoices amounted to K1.9 billion. So far, we have paid out over K1.1 billion. We are currently owing about K781 million.

Mr Speaker, as I conclude, I would like to assure the Members of this House and the agro-dealers that we are doing everything possible to dismantle the arrears to the agro-dealers and we are cognisant of the challenges facing agro-dealers. Therefore, I appeal to the agro-dealers to remain patient as we dismantle these arrears.

Sir, further, I wish to encourage the members of the House to engage district authorities within which their constituencies fall to raise issues surrounding the programme. We realise that some problems can be addressed more effectively and efficiently by our district offices and the district administration.

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Mr Speaker, I thank you.

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