ASARECA Agriculture Ministerial Conference kicks off in high gear
BY BEN MOSES ILAKUT

KAMPALA, UGANDA: The ASARECA Agriculture Ministerial Conference (AAMC) opened in high gear at Speke Resort, Munyonyo in Kampala, Uganda on May 17, 2023 with focus on Building Resilient Food Systems.

Delivering the opening address on the first day of the Conference, Uganda’s Minister of State for Livestock in the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, Hon. Bright Rwamirama challenged researchers to focus on jointly addressing the impacts of Climate change, a crisis which, he said knows no boundaries. He pledged to work with researchers, farmers, and agricultural institutions to fix the challenges.
Hon. Rwamirama listens to a presentation during the planary of the ASARECA General Assembly

Hon. Rwamirama explained how awkward it is for Africa to be a net importer food from elsewhere yet it has all that it takes to feed others.

“The food system in Africa is not working to full capacity, and yet we have the capacity to feed the whole world,” Hon. Rwamirama said. “We therefore need to apply science to agriculture to enable the continent become the world’s food basket.”

Making water available for production

Hon. Rwamirama underscored the fact that Africa has plenty of water, which should be made available for production of livestock, crop, and fish resources.
Delegates during the General Assembly segment of the AAMC-2023

“We don’t have winters, we have good soils, we have free sunshine throughout the year, so all we need is to apply science to agriculture, promote nutrition for both animal and crop resources, and deal with animal and plant health to match international standards,” the Minister emphasised. “It is shameful for Africa to import food from Europe and always have one season a year yet we can improve our production through applying science and get four seasons,” he explained.

Appeal for payment of membership dues

On his part, ASARECA Executive Director, Dr. Enock Warinda appealed to Member States to clear their membership arrears amounting to USD 1.8 million to enable the ASARECA Secretariat implement its mandate on behalf of the countries.

“With such money, we can undertake a joint mega initiative in our countries. If the countries are not able to support the secretariat, we can’t do much,” Dr. Warinda said. “ASARECA is a powerful platform that can make an impact in the world as long as funding is made available.

With better remittances from countries, added Dr. Warinda, ASARECA can generate more innovative projects among its members to support the development, innovation, and uptake of regional technologies which cover crops and livestock, soil fertility, water management, agronomic, policy formulation, advocacy, among others.
Delegates during the ASARECA General Assembly on May 17

Throughout the conference, Dr. Warinda was supported by key stakeholders and leaders including the ASARECA General Assembly President, Prof. Joseph Bigirimana, the ASARECA Board Chairman, Dr. Geoffrey Mkamilo, and Uganda’s Minister of State for Agriculture Hon. Fred Bwino Kyakulaga, among others.

Theme of the AAMC

The theme of the AAMC is *Building Resilient Food Systems to Feed Africa for Generations*. It was informed by the current challenges that the food systems in Africa are facing including the effects of climate change, the Russia-Ukraine war, emerging pandemics including COVID-19, and transboundary pests and diseases among others. These challenges continue to create disruptions in the agricultural food systems thus undermining food sovereignty.

The ASARECA Agriculture Ministerial Conference (AAMC) is a flagship biennial event for the Association. The AAMC comprises the Council of Patron Ministers’ Meeting (CPM), the General Assembly, the and the Scientific Conference.

Prof Joseph Bigirimana, the outgoing president of ASARECA General Assembly said farmers in Africa will need as much as $65 billion in loans annually to produce enough food to curb imports and cushion their economies from external shocks.
He said the continent imports over 100 million metric tons of cereals at an annual cost of $75 billion and is projected to reach US$110 billion by 2030 if urgent actions to increase food production are not implemented.

**South Sudan Minister decries malnutrition**

The minister of Agriculture and Food Security in South Sudan, Josephine Lagu Yanga, said: “We have a lot of work to do but we shall ensure that the arrears are paid in the shortest time possible given the importance of our regional organization.”

Commenting on the food insecurity in Africa, Lagu said: “It is rather shameful, that despite the potential that we have on the continent, at least one-quarter of the 1.2 billion people [in Africa] are still going hungry and our children still suffering from malnutrition. Africa should not only feed itself but also contribute towards feeding the world.”

ASARECA is a sub-regional inter-governmental organization of the National Agriculture Research Systems (NARS) of 14 member countries.


**Role of ASARECA**

The Governments have mandated ASARECA to coordinate and convene human, physical, financial and institutional capital to implement Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D) initiatives in Eastern and Central Africa.

To ensure that ASARECA delivers on its mandate, the Governments and interested stakeholders ensured that ASARECA is governed through an elaborate a hierarchy of four Constitutional Organs namely:

- The Council of Patron Ministers, which is the highest governing organ of ASARECA. It comprises Ministers responsible for agricultural research in the Member Countries.
- The General Assembly, which is the second highest organ of ASARECA. It consists of all registered Members duly admitted to the Association. As you may be aware, I am the serving President of the ASARECA General Assembly, a role I have been honoured to hold since 2013.
- The Board of Directors, which is the third highest organ in the governance hierarchy
of ASARECA.

- The Secretariat, which is the coordinating and operational entity of the Association. The Secretariat is headed by the Executive Director.