



**UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

**REMARKS MADE BY PROF. PETER M. F. MBITHI, DEPUTY  
VICE-CHANCELLOR (ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE) &  
ACTING VICE-CHANCELLOR DURING THE WORKSHOP ON  
DEVELOPMENT OF FOOD SAFETY CURRICULA AT  
UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI HELD ON 20<sup>TH</sup>-21<sup>ST</sup> JULY, 2009 AT  
THE JACARANDA HOTEL, WESTLANDS, NAIROBI**

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The Principal, CAVS

Deans

Associate Deans

Chairmen of Departments

Academic Staff

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

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It gives me great pleasure to warmly welcome you to this function of the University of Nairobi. I especially appreciate the presence of the invited guests from industry and the public service. I thank you for having taken time from your very busy schedules to honour our invitation.

The international community is today focused on attaining the millenium development goals, including alleviation of poverty. One of the economic pillars of Kenya Vision 2030 is “moving the economy up the value chain”. Two of its aims are to:

- Promote an innovative commercially-oriented and modern agricultural sector by, among others, improving market access for smallholder farmers
- Have a robust, diversified, and competitive manufacturing sector through, among others, exploiting

opportunities in value addition to local agricultural produce.

Food safety and quality has become an issue of high priority internationally due to globalization of the food market/chain. Food safety is central to public health, poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Kenya is one of the biggest exporters of food products in this region, with export destinations covering several countries including the EU, USA, Japan, China and Middle East. The major exports include fresh and processed fruits and vegetables, fish, meat, coffee and tea. Two of the requirements to access these markets are:-

- Safety and quality of the food products
- Traceability along the food production and handling chain.

Recent cases published in Kenyan and international media have shown that poor safety and/or quality of food can have adverse

health, political, social and economic consequences. These cases include:

- Deaths as a result of consumption of maize contaminated with aflatoxin.
- Deaths as a result of consumption of high cyanide cassava
- Deaths as a result of consumption of meat not fit for human consumption due to anthrax
- Salmonella in poultry feeds
- Previous ban on fish export

I am informed that the European Union has given notification on presence of *Shigella sonnei* in snow peas from Kenya a few weeks ago and that the matter is currently being discussed at national levels as we are holding this workshop.

Over the years a number of efforts and initiatives have been directed at addressing and improving food safety. In may 2000, the 53<sup>rd</sup> WHO council meeting urged its member states "...to

integrate food safety as one of their public health and public nutrition functions and to provide adequate resources to establish and strengthen their food safety programmes...”(WHO 53.15,20 may 2000). At the fifty-seventh session of the Regional Committee for Africa on August 2007, a regional strategy on food safety was endorsed, which recognized food safety as a critical and fundamental component of public health. Priority interventions include among others the formulation and implementation of food safety policies and regulations.

I am also informed that the Kenyan National Food Safety Coordinating Committee commissioned a committee of experts to draft a national food safety policy which is currently being finalized. Among the issues being addressed in the draft policy are that:

- i) Limitation in the capacity of human resource is a major constraint to food safety operations across the various

agencies mandated to carry out food safety activities. This limitation is mainly in personnel numbers and skills development to cope with emerging issues.

- ii) The human resources capacity varies depending on the mandates of the food control agencies. Professions include public health, food microbiology, chemistry, biochemistry, agriculture, veterinary medicine, environmental health science, and food science and technology. These professional courses are offered within the country's tertiary and higher learning institutions. However, upgrading of knowledge and skills is required to update the personnel on current development on food safety and quality that would enhance their understanding of food safety issues.
- iii) The training curricula at the higher learning institutions have not been adequately responsive to the changing trends in food safety.
- iv) Food safety concept has not been well integrated into the organizational operations of the food control agencies.

v) There is a growing recognition that food safety is an emerging profession in the food production and marketing chain.

In view of the above, the University of Nairobi, with the welcome support from United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), constituted an interdepartmental steering committee to develop draft curricula at MSc., postgraduate diploma, certificate and short courses levels in food safety to address the limitations mentioned above in the institutions of higher learning in Kenya and the region at large. The aim is to have focused training in food safety and quality in the University of Nairobi so that the food sector does not have to source for skills upgrading of personnel overseas with their attendant stress on the financial resources.

I am very grateful to the College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences and UNIDO for initiating this exercise that will play a key role in meeting the goals of Vision 2030 through provision of

safe and high quality food to enhance local, regional and international market access and hence growth of agribusiness in the region.

As you are aware, the University of Nairobi has in its 2008-2013 Strategic Plan and performance contract with government undertaken to continue reviewing its academic programmes to meet the demands of the market and to be benchmarked with the best in the world. This workshop is one of several towards achieving this objective.

I am informed that this workshop brings together various players along the food production and marketing chain.

I therefore welcome your participation and contribution towards improving the relevance and quality of the food safety curricula.



With those remarks, it is now my pleasure to declare this workshop on food safety curricula officially open.