

Professor Monthy Jones Unlocks Ways to Transform the Agriculture Sector In Sierra Leone

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Addressing Scientists and other employees of the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI) at its Tower Hill Conference Hall in Freetown, Special Adviser to the President and Ambassador at Large Prof. Monthy Jones has lucidly explained the frameworks and instruments needed to transform the country's old age subsistence and unproductive agricultural system to industrial society.



Prof. Monthy Jones Special Adviser to the President

He outlined the difficult and daunting challenges facing the sector including poor infrastructure and access to market, deficient soils, low adoption of technology, short duration planning approach based on limited scenarios; poor coordination among actors and stakeholders in the sector resulting to duplication of efforts and waste of needed resources as well as weak human and institutional capacity.

“Despite these seemingly insurmountable challenges, the country has huge potential and opportunities for its agricultural sector to transform from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture, considering available factors such as our huge mineral deposits, large area of cultivable land, reasonably long growing seasons and the many large and small rivers that can be made to provide water throughout the year for crop and livestock production”, Prof. Jones explained.

Though overshadowed and constrained by the Ebola crisis and other unforeseen factors, he argued that policies and programmes put in place including the government's “Agenda for Prosperity” if conscientiously implemented can bring many Sierra Leoneans to middle level income status. “It is inclusive and has the capacity to diversify the economy, create more and better jobs for our youth and mainstream the element of gender, reduce poverty and provide adequate and quality food for all”, he asserted. He cited the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as laudable continental and international initiatives that can play catalytic role in transforming the sector to commercial agriculture.

In all of these, Prof. Jones catalogued and zoomed on the critical role of the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research institute (SLARI) in our 21st Century in upscaling food security and wealth so as to meaningfully contribute to sustainable agricultural growth and effective agricultural research system. He underpinned the need for SLARI to increase smallholder productivity and production by improving on the delivery of its services to them, adopt the Agricultural Products Value Chain approach in its research and development programmes, improve precision farming through nanotechnology; promote results-based research programmes, expanding on areas of commercialization, diversification and intensification, application of best-bet practices and leveraging on existing coordinating mechanisms as well as improve on linkages with regional and international partners.

He noted that there is a huge yield gap in crops and livestock production in Sierra Leone compared to Brazil, Indonesia, Thailand, among others. The Professor emphasized on the need to link increased agricultural productivity with the share of Agribusiness in the agricultural value chain. While he cautioned for the need to create a balance between farming and agribusiness, he pointed out that the country should focus on adding value to its own commodities especially agriculture and mining, even more so in kick-starting its structural transformation.

Urging his audience to support develop the Sierra Leone agricultural sector, Prof. Monthy Jones concluded: “It will be extremely difficult or even impossible to bring about any meaningful change in Sierra Leone if the efforts of the government of President Koroma to transform the agricultural sector that is the livelihood of the bulk of our population as well as the basis for any social and economic development is treated with callousness and levity”.



Some SLARI Technologies displayed during the 2015 World Food Day