

# CHUKA



# UNIVERSITY

## **Opening Remarks by Prof. Dorcas K. Isutsa during the 16<sup>th</sup> Horticultural Association of Kenya Workshop on Sustainable Horticultural Production in the Tropics held in Chuka University from 28<sup>th</sup> Nov., to 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec., 2016**

Esteemed guests, participants, ladies and gentlemen, I am glad to welcome you all to Chuka University. This is a happy re-union for me since there are colleagues I have known over the years in your midst but whom I have not been able to see face-to-face in many years. I hope you will feel at home here in Chuka University. This University is associated with a seer who proclaimed that everyone who “perches” here goes back feeling absolutely happy! I hope the same shall apply to all of you after your week-long stay here.

We are honoured by your choice of Chuka to host the 16<sup>th</sup> HAK Workshop. It shows how well you are achieving the mission of these workshops by taking them closer to stakeholders through rotation of the venues. I most sincerely appreciate the Organisers and Sponsor, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), for remaining steady fast in the support of HAK to achieve its vision of becoming the leading voice for horticulture in Kenya, in particular, and in the region in general; 16 years is not a short time and, therefore, I really applaud DAAD.

To the Executive Committee, that is steering the growth of HAK, I say thanks for keeping HAK alive; it is almost already 20-years-old. For some of us who were the founders and then took off to steer other things, it delights me to note that HAK is still going strong under your able leadership. Kindly keep it up and make sure you continue handing it over to the able upcoming horticulturists.

As we are aware, horticulture contributes immensely to the wellbeing of economies of many countries, but it is little well understood, particularly in Africa. Worse still, its differentiation from agriculture is vague, making its billion contribution to economies and livelihoods remain unrecognized. To me, I can say *horticulture is the spice that makes what we consumer tasty and what we see pleasant*. You can imagine someone just heaping a plate of *ugali* or rice before you without any vegetables, fruits and flowers on the table. Where would you start? The appetizer is usually what falls under horticulture; that tantalizing soup at the beginning, the aromatic flower in the vase on the table, and the sweetener fruit at the end of the meal. But still after all that; the leisurely walk outside among the

well-manicured lawns and trimmed flowers that makes you relax completely and be at peace with nature, is also what defines horticulture. This latter effect is in other words referred to as horti-therapy. It is very rare, but did you realise it is used to welcome visiting dignitaries, or cheer up the sick in hospital, when words can't suffice? Well I could go on and on justifying why horticulture, but let me end it here and say that I am proud of all of you for choosing and supporting it. Keep up popularizing it and making it to be clearly known and embraced.

I take cognizance of the diversity of issues you have been researching that you have converged here to share and reminisce about. They are contemporary and topical. I really appreciate the fact that you have managed to attract many students to pursue horticulture as a career. But having taken note of that, allow me to note that much still needs to be done to focus on all horticultural branches. Reading through the titles to be presented, I have noticed skewness towards vegetables and postharvest handling. In that case, pomology, floriculture, ornamentals, landscaping, value addition, plant-waste processing are lagging behind.

Such a narrow view is what is making us Kenyans not demand for the same standards as are demanded for by EUREPGAP adherents. We now have KENYAGAP, but has its presence started being felt by improvement of conditions under which we market local horticultural crops? How we package our local produce? The quality we are offering to local consumers? Are local consumers aware of their food safety rights and are they demanding them? So, if we protect and conserve the environment through landscaping, beautification, decoration, and sustainably produce all horticultural crops, that is when the standards under which horticulture is being done will be high, balanced and safe.

On that heart-warming note, allow me to welcome our Vice-Chancellor Professor Erastus Njoka, to officially open the workshop. Let us give him three hearty claps.

Prof. Dorcas K. Isutsa, Ph.D.

**Deputy Vice-Chancellor (ARSA), Chuka University**