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**Opening of the dryland community voices workshop at the African Advanced Level Telecommunication Institute (AFRALITI) on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2011 by prof. Agnes Mwang'ombe the Principal, College of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences, Upper Kabete Campus, University of Nairobi.**

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**Workshop Theme “Dry land Community Voices: Setting a Joint Agenda in Higher Education and Development, from the Ground up”.**

USAID- Higher Education for development-Africa Initiative Representative

Dryland Community Representatives from the various parts of Kenya,

The members of the Advisory Board for the Center for sustainable Dryland Ecosystems and Societies,

Government representatives,

non-governmental organizations,

members of the press,

Student representatives and all invited Guests,

**Ladies and gentlemen:** Let me start by welcoming you all to this auspicious occasion of the opening of this very important workshop on the theme “Dryland Community Voices: Setting a Joint Agenda in Higher Education and Development, from the Ground Up”. This workshop presents a very important opportunity in setting the course of the newly launched initiative to transform higher education in Africa to better respond to the needs of Africa’s dryland ecosystems and societies.

As I open this forum, I wish to acknowledge our key financial partner USAID-Higher Education for Development Initiative. I also acknowledge the university of Nairobi for supporting the establishment of the Center for Sustainable Dryland Ecosystems & Societies and the Colorado State University for partnering with the University of Nairobi in enhancing capacity for sustainable dryland development.

May I also acknowledge the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), a consortium of 29 universities in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa for Designating University of Nairobi as the center of excellence in Dryland Resources Management and in participating in the development of the curriculum for PHD in Dryland Resource Management which has been offered at the University of Nairobi since 2008.

**Ladies and gentlemen.** As the world population continues to surge a number of challenges also emerge which include among many; climate change and variability, loss of ecosystem resilience, land degradation, loss of biodiversity, land fragmentation, land tenure and land use changes, conflict over natural resources, increasing vulnerability of dryland livelihoods to droughts and floods and loss of access to global markets.

If deliberate attention is not directed to managing impacts of climate change/variability, majority of poor farmers and pastoralists especially in the arid and semi-arid areas will continue to face higher food insecurity in food, incomes, environment and the natural resources will be degraded further, leading to declining agricultural production, reduced assets, and thus increased vulnerability to crisis.

It is in these regard that the center for sustainable Dryland ecosystems and societies; a partnership between the University of Nairobi and Colorado State University has been established as the hub of a web of collaborative institutions engaged in education, research and action supporting Dryland communities so that they can adopt to the many changes affecting their sustainability.

The main purpose of this partnership is to enhance the capacity of the universities to produce high performing graduates and quality demand driven research that contributes to more sustainable and productive Dryland ecosystems and societies.

This workshop thus presents a very vital avenue to address some of the fundamental issues that are critical to the success of the centers initiatives. Some of the goals of the workshop include:

- To discuss the role of Higher Education for Development especially with respect to capacity building in the drylands;
- To hear a critique from dryland communities about current development projects and government policy with a view to improving on past efforts so as to enhance sustainability of these dryland ecosystems and societies;
- Highlight the importance of devolution and governance issues with reference to optimizing opportunities for sustainable pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihoods in dryland areas; and
- Building consensus on a set of first actions that different groups participating in this workshop might collaborate to implement the identified development priorities.

**Ladies and Gentlemen;** I am glad to note that the efforts to build sustainable dryland ecosystems and societies is in line with the Kenya Vision 2030 that recognizes the need to provide socio-economic inputs and protect environment to achieve economic growth by investing on community actions. It is in view of this recognition that the workshop aims at discussing the role of higher education in building human capacity for sustaining and improving the dryland ecosystems and human livelihoods in Kenya.

As I conclude, allow me take this opportunity again to thank all the Community representatives who have travelled from different parts of Kenya to attend this workshop. It is my sincere wish that your voices will be heard as we set the agenda for the new center for dryland Ecosystems and societies. You are the members of the dryland societies that the center is targeting. I also wish to thank the Colorado team for the tremendous work done so far. Thank you all invited stakeholders for accepting to participate in the workshop. The responsibility to tackle the environmental challenges in dryland areas cannot be left to any one institution and therefore all of us have an important role to play in enhancing sustainable livelihoods. In these regard I wish to urge the development partners to increase their support for this noble course especially in providing scholarships from undergraduate to post graduate levels in order to increase the capacity of the dryland communities to manage their natural resources

With these remarks, it is with great pleasure that I declare the Dryland Community Voices workshop open. I wish all of you a lively and interactive workshop.

**Thank you and God bless you.**