Agriculture is crucial

By Ambassador Leonard Lipimbo

Agriculture is predominately livestock. 85% of the suitable land for agriculture in Namibia is under livestock production. Beef production in both communal and commercial areas is the mainstay of agriculture, accounting for 87% of the gross agricultural income. Namibia’s red meat is naturally produced from vast natural pastures rearing top quality animals well-known for producing tender, tasty and wholesome goodness of meat products.

The population of cattle in Namibia is today estimated to be around 2.5 million with 71% being in communal areas. Namibia is one of the fortunate SADC countries trading beef internationally, having three EU approved beef export abattoirs and two EU approved small stock abattoirs, as well as RSA approved beef and small stock abattoirs. In 2010 cattle worth N$630 million were marketed of which 70% was exported to South Africa. During the same year 900,000 head of small stock, were exported on the hoof to South Africa and only 20% were slaughtered through export abattoirs supplying 5% of the South Africa’s lamb consumption. I am quite pleased to state here that of the 150,000 weaners exported annually to South Africa, 60% of them originate from communal areas south of the veterinary cordon fence.

In 2004, Cabinet introduced a value addition policy aimed at re-directing small stock slaughter to local abattoirs for processing. Although this policy is still unpopular even today, its implementation has increased slaughter capacity at local abattoirs on average by 64% utilization. In 2010 slaughter capacity at local abattoirs for small stock doubled from 528,000 units to 1,258,950 units per year, thus creating sustainable long-term employment. During the same year, according to Meat Board of Namibia, the Witvlei abattoir slaughtered 8,199 head of cattle while Meaco abattoirs slaughtered 119,022 head of cattle. The utilization of slaughter capacity at Meaco abattoirs increased from 69.9% in 2009 to 76.8% in 2010. The export of livestock on the hoof is robbing Namibia of value addition even though it is the most preferable by farmers as a result of the premium price offered. It is now the time for the sector to attract investment for value addition and enter into joint ventures with other business men and women from South Africa and elsewhere to establish leather factories here in Namibia to produce leather goods and create jobs in the long-run. There are great opportunities to expand the sector. Livestock infrastructure development, especially in the communal areas north of the cordon fence is required in the sector that will enable value addition here at home. Agribank stand ready to finance such ventures to boost the economy. I would like to therefore call upon fellow farmers to be innovative and redirect efforts to value addition to strengthen this sector of the economy.

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