

**WELCOME ADDRESS DELIVERED BY PROF. W. O. ELLIS – VICE
CHANCELLOR OF KNUST AT THE MEDIA LAUNCH OF THE “*IMPROVED
YAM STORAGE FOR FOOD SECURITY AND INCOME*” PROJECT AT THE
FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE KNUST ON 4TH JULY, 2013**

Chairman

Your Excellency – Australian High Commissioner to Ghana

Provosts

Deans

Faculty Members

Our Partners and Friends

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning. It is a greatest pleasure and honour for me to welcome you especially the Australian High Commissioner to Ghana to our serene and green campus which is now unusually quite in view of the fact that students are now on vacation.

We are all aware of the critical role that agriculture plays in the economy of Ghana. In the year 2010, agriculture contributed about 34% to Ghana’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and root and tubers alone contributed about 50% to agricultural GDP (MoFA, 2010). The role of agriculture as a major contributor to GDP in Ghana is under threat; it is now the third contributor, recording about 29% of GDP in 2011. One of the reasons for the declining contribution of the sector is attributable to the huge postharvest losses estimated to be between 30 and 60% of harvested produce.

As a Food Scientist myself, I am aware that yam is a major staple crop which plays a central role in the daily diet and the agricultural systems of majority of Ghanaians. It is a major source of income for farmers, processors and traders. It, therefore, plays a key role in ensuring household food security. But unfortunately, the yam sector in Ghana is plagued with several challenges; the most critical being high levels of postharvest losses. These postharvest losses constitute a major threat to economic viability of yam production and food security of the population that depends on the crop.

Your Excellency, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, yam farmers like many other crop farmers in Ghana over the years have not benefited fully from the production and marketing of their produce due to their inability to hold stock during glut periods and supply in times of shortage. The resulting effect is that supply of produce exceeds demand during the harvest period, forcing farmers to sell their produce at cheaper prices. This then leads to shortage of both food and cash for farm families during the lean season. The root cause of this problem has been inadequate storage facilities and inefficiencies associated with traditional storage systems.

Over the years, various government policies and programmes have focused on addressing this issue. These initiatives have, however, not achieved the desired results since the farmer's indigenous knowledge is most often underplayed. The current project, I am told, aims at increasing food security and income in the long term by promoting improved storage systems for yam through a participatory approach. This project will focus on evaluating existing technologies and finding innovative solutions to the weaknesses and constraints associated with them. Improved technologies from research which are effective and cost-efficient will

then be introduced alongside farmers' existing storage systems with the intention of gradually making farmers adopt new technologies from research.

Ghanaian farmers, through this project, will be better off in terms of enhanced incomes and consumers would also benefit from constant supply of good quality yams at stable prices throughout the year. The quantity of yams available for export would also increase when postharvest losses are reduced through this project, thereby increasing the foreign exchange earning potential of the yam sector for sustainable socio-economic development of Ghana.

As a science and technology university, we are happy to be part of this project and it is my hope that this programme will offer us the opportunity to strengthen the bond between our University and the Crops Research Institute (CRI) which is a partner in this project as well as the Australian Government through its High Commission. I hope that beyond this project, we will dream about other pressing agricultural problems in Ghana and design studies to address them for the benefit of our poor farmers.

Let me on this note express our profound appreciation to the Government of Australia who has through its High Commission in Accra, provided immense support to this project. It is my expectation that the bond so established would be nurtured for our mutual interest. I once again warmly welcome you all to our University and thank you all for coming.