Agriculture is the singular most important sector that can transform the economies of our respective countries to meet the growing demands for food, nutrition, industry and jobs. The population of Africa presently stands at 1.3 Billion and it is the fastest growing in the world. West Africa accounts for 350 Million of this population and Ghana, 25 Million. In 2050, these populations will double and Ghana’s population will be 50 Million.

Increase in agricultural productivity is the key determinant for socio-economic transformation and thus livelihood improvements in Africa. Improvement in agricultural productivity takes millions of people out of food insecurity and low-income status to food secured and improved living standards.

On the onset of the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program (CAADP) and the ECOWAS Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP) in 2005, a study commissioned by CORAF/WECARD in 2006 revealed stagnation of agricultural productivity growth between the years 1960 and 2006; within the same period, the population of the region grew more than three times. This in-balance between agricultural productivity and the population growth rates resulted in widespread food insecurity and poverty, which were evident in 2008 through numerous civil unrests experienced in the region and in Africa as a whole. Within the
framework of CAADP and ECOWAP, programs were initiated to address the food insecurity situation.

Through CORAF/WECARD, over 54 Competitive and Commissioned Grant Projects were implemented in West and Central Africa within which seven of them were implemented in Ghana between 2009 and 2016 as follows: (i) The promotion of the yam mini-set technique to improve yam productivity, (ii) Improving post-harvest quality of rice and cassava to enhance marketability, (iii) Promotion of Rice Yellow Mottle Resistant Varieties, (iv) Improving plantain productivity, (v) Integration of Crops and Small Ruminant to increase agricultural production and farmers’ incomes, (vi) Promotion of Africa indigenous leafy vegetables, (vii) Improving cocoa productivity and trade-off.

In addition to these, CORAF/WECARD, the ECOWAS Commission, the World Bank, USAID and the Governments of the fifteen ECOWAS Member States supported the design and implementation of two mutually reinforcing Flagship programs, which Ghana benefited. These were the West Africa Agricultural Productivity Program (WAAPP) implemented in 13 ECOWAS Member States and the West Africa Seed Program (WASP), focused on seven Member States but with the implementation of seed regulation in 15 ECOWAS Member States and Mauritania and Chad. These programs have facilitated regional integration, exchange of genetic materials and expansion of the regional markets for both seed and agricultural commodities. It is worth mentioning some of the modest successes chalked by WASP-Ghana and WAAPP-Ghana.

Some achievements of WASP-Ghana since 2013 to date include:
- The formation of the national chapter of Alliance for a Seed Industry in West Africa (ASIWA) has increased dialogue among the private and public seed sector stakeholders, donors, etc. on a whole range of seed issues along the seed value chain. e.g. the private sector access to information regarding seed data, seed policy, regulations and seed supply.
- The implementation of the ECOWAS seed regulation has improved and a National Quarantine Pest List (NQPL) has been developed to monitor invasive pests and diseases and to facilitate cross-border trade and seed imports.
- A National Plant Variety Catalogue with 161 crop species and varieties registered was developed whilst 35 crop varieties from Ghana were registered in the regional catalogue (1400 crop varieties) to enhance germplasm exchanges and increase regional seed trade;
- The capacities of Plant Breeders, Seed Scientists and other Crop Scientists (35 in number) were strengthened on variety release and registration approaches;
- A total of 42.9 tons of breeder seeds of maize, rice, cowpea and sorghum was produced in conformity with the ECOWAS standards, which was supplied to the private sector for further multiplication;
- WASP-Ghana supported the development of business plans for 10 Seed Enterprises/Seed Companies to improve entrepreneurial performance and expand their operations;
- WASP-Ghana facilitated the strengthening of the capacities of The National Seed Trade Association of Ghana (NASTAG) and the Seed Producers Association of Ghana (SEEDPAG). A total of 83 Small and Medium Seed Enterprises have been trained in seed business management.
- WASP supported CSIR-Crops Research Institute with seed laboratory and processing equipment’s to enhance quality breeder seed production.
Some achievements of WAAPP-Ghana since 2007 to date are as follows:

- **108 million** doses of thermo stable Newcastle Disease Vaccine (NDI-2 vaccine) have been produced; **22.6 million birds** of both local and exotic poultry were vaccinated in the period, resulting in no outbreak of Newcastle disease.

A total of **276,394 farmers** have so far benefited from the vaccine in Ghana (i.e. 228,324 farmers) and other participating countries (47,507 farmers). It is also estimated that the country has saved at least, **USD 3,240,000** it would have spent to import the 108 million doses of NDI-2 vaccine.

- **39 improved crop varieties have been released** (cassava, cocoyam, sweet potato, Pearl millet, and rice). For cassava, farmers’ yields have increased from 12 to 30-60mt/ha, and the adoption of improved cassava planting material is currently 41%.

- An ultra-modern biotechnology laboratory for research in Root and tuber crops constructed at the CSIR-Crops Research Institute, which is presently in use.

- **103 Staff** (31 PhDs and 72 Masters) were trained in various disciplines, resulting in improved capacity to conduct quality research and the National Centre of Specialization upgraded to a Regional Centre of Excellence.

- **155 ha of cassava breeder planting materials** were supplied to establish more than 3,500 ha at primary and secondary multiplication fields;

- An estimated 40,000 farmers, companies/organizations such as Ayensu starch factory, commercial farms and small-scale farmers established cassava farms to feed cassava related industries.

- **6,698 ha** aroma fields of aromatic rice were established covering **16,745 farmers** in 121 districts in the 10 regions in the country.

- WAAPP-Ghana intervention supported 80 Guinea fowl (GF) farmers with hatchery incubators and generators/solar panels and is currently benefiting approximately 8,500 farmers.

Despite the significant successes chalked in the region, a recent meeting held in Abidjan which took place in May, 2016 to review the CAADP/ECOWAP over the past 10 years, revealed that the recent increases in food production in the region was due mostly to land area expansion rather than agricultural productivity improvement.

The Malabo Declarations therefore provide the framework for making adjustment to the implementation of interventions to achieve accelerated growth in agriculture within the next 10 years (2015-2025) with focus on the use of quality improved agricultural inputs, nutrition and health; resilience; markets; finance, with high gender and the youth engagements. This will allow the continent achieve Sustainable Development Goals 1 – No Poverty; 2 – Zero Hunger; 5 – Gender Equality; 12 Responsible Consumption, and Production and 13 Climate Action.
The efficient application of the Integrated Soil Fertility and Water Management approaches alongside the use of quality and certified agri-inputs and the best practices in post-harvest technology will be essential to achieve the desired growth, bearing in mind that quality fertilizer and certified seeds contribute 70% to agricultural productivity improvement. Thus the increase use of these inputs within the next 10 years will be vital in achieving the objectives of the Malabo Declarations, the ECOWAP+10 and the National Agricultural Policy.

In taking cognizance of the opportunities provided by the regional agricultural frameworks and achievements chalked, the Government of Ghana is pursuing an agricultural policy objective of modernized agriculture, improved production efficiency to achieve food security and profitability in farming. The Government is currently embarking on a flagship program, “Planting for Food and Job” Campaign, which seeks to increase production of the targeted crops viz. maize, rice, soybean, sorghum and vegetables.

The campaign is in line with the overarching goal of Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy (FASDEP II, 2008) and the Medium Term Agriculture Sector Investment Plan (METASIP II, 2014-2017).

Mr. Chairman, the primary objective of the “Planting for Food and Job” Campaign is to ensure adequate quantities of food in the country through improved productivity and increased Government support to private sector service providers.

It is worth noting that the secondary objective is to provide job opportunities for the teeming unemployed youth in Agriculture and allied sectors. During the first year (2017), about 750,000 jobs would be created for the youth (both direct and indirect jobs) through this policy interventions and strategic directions. The tertiary objective is to create general awareness of all formal/informal workers and institutions to either have farms or establish backyard gardens when enough land is not available and accessible.

The “Planting for Food and Jobs” Campaign is focusing initially on four key commodity value chains: maize, rice, soybean and sorghum. In addition, the campaign will promote peri-urban vegetable production. These crops were chosen because they have shorter gestation period and also grow in every agro-ecology of the country: coastal, forest and savannah areas. Additionally, these selected crops also have high propensity for income generation and export revenue.

The program is anchored on five pillars: (1) Promoting the use of improved seeds, (2) Promoting the use of fertilizers, (3) Provision of dedicated extension services, (4) Value addition/marketing strategy (5) Electronic platform for farmer registration and data management. The Government is supporting farmers under the flagship program with seeds and fertilizers at subsidized rates. Additionally, Ghana is embarking on a fertilizer subsidy program for 2017, where the commercial price has been reduced by 50%.

I have no doubt that the deliberations on seed at this “Learning Event” will go a long way to make certified seeds of major crops accessible, available and affordable in the ECOWAS-UEMOA-CILSS Region and to support the President’s flagship program of “Planting for Food and Job” in Ghana.

The regional approach in agricultural research and development has provided enormous opportunities for regional integration and market expansion, acquisition of new genetic
material in the light of Climate Change and the learning of new models and ideas for accelerated agricultural-led socio-economic growth.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the ECOWAS and the UEMOA Commissions, CORAF/WECARD and Partners for the vision of regional integration and the use of regional approaches to ensure efficiency and synergy to achieve an impact. It has been an eye-opener for me personally and for my Ministry and I promise to take advantage of the enormous opportunities in the region to grow the agricultural sector in Ghana for food production, industrial development and job creation. The theme for the Event “Catalytic Innovation for Agricultural Transformation” is therefore appropriate within the context of the present circumstances in Africa.

On behalf of the President and the People of the Republic of Ghana, I wish to thank all and sundry for making this learning event possible.

I thereby declare the Event opened.