DEVELOPED BY HON. PROF. SAM ONGERI M.P. MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE GLOBAL CHILD NUTRITION FORUM CONFERENCE HELD AT HILTON HOTEL, NAIROBI ON 3RD MAY, 2011 AT 10.00AM

The President of Global Child Nutrition Foundation, Ms Gene White,
Executive Director of Partnership for Child Development, Dr. Lesley Drake,
Minister for Local Government of Ghana, Hon. Samuel Ampofo
Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Sally Kosgey,
Minister for Public Health and Sanitation, Hon. Beth Mugo,
Permanent Secretaries from Participating Countries present,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am delighted to be with you this morning to preside over the official opening of the 2011 Global Child Nutrition Forum jointly with my colleagues. This forum presents an exciting opportunity that bring together a diverse array of expertise in the area of agricultural development and school feeding to explore further the barriers and actions required to achieve the long-term food and nutrition security for our countries.
I am informed that the Forum is an initiative conducted annually to assist leaders from developing countries in planning and implementing sustainable School Feeding Programmes (SFP). It provides leaders with a platform for sharing their insights, experiences and related challenges. School Feeding Programmes (SFP) have globally been recognized as a social safety net aimed at countering hunger and thus contributes to the achievement of Universal Primary Education. When School Feeding Programmes are linked to local agricultural production, they benefit local farmers and producers by generating a stable, structured, and predictable demand for their products, thereby building the market and the enabling systems around it. In Kenya, this is in line with the global commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the Kenyan Constitution which recognizes the right of the child to basic nutrition and health care, adequate food of acceptable quality and free and compulsory basic education.

Education is a human right and is central to the establishment of a productive human resource base which is critical to the realization of the various governments. To this end, the Government has since independence recognized the importance of education as a major factor in our National Development and poverty eradication efforts. Consequently, the Government has continued to invest heavily in Education Sector in order to increase access, retention, equity and transition rates from Primary to Secondary Levels. The Government of Kenya is committed to the achievement of the Education For All (EFA) goal by the year 2015 in conformity with International Declarations and conventions.

The Government is committed to promotion and enhancement of access to quality education. The ministry has disbursed a total of Ksh 779 million directly
to schools for the purchase food for 538,000 children in the new initiative of Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) in the last 2 years. The beneficiary children in the new initiative were previously under the Regular School Feeding Programme supported by GOK/WFP.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the main advantage of the Home Grown School Feeding Programme is that food sourced locally can provide a strong incentive to our local farmers to produce and sell food to schools. Local schools can offer farmers guaranteed market and price for their produce, giving them an incentive to make improvements to their production levels and also obtain credit for further development. This guaranteed market can also induce our farmers to adopt modern technologies and thus have a spillover effect into the overall production in an area.

School Feeding Programme provides an opportunity to benefit small-holder farmers by generating a stable and predictable demand for their products, thereby building the market and the enabling systems around it. This is the concept behind Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF), an intervention identified by the Millennium Hunger Task Force as a quick win in the fight against poverty and hunger. Home Grown School Feeding has been identified by the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) as a key food security intervention within the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Plan (CAADP).
I believe the delegates will share more on how School Feeding initiatives have positively impacted on enrolments, attendance and retention, as well as girls’ access to education in participating countries.

Ladies and gentlemen, over the years, the Government of Kenya has demonstrated its commitment to the development of education and training through sustained allocation of resources to this sector. However, despite the substantial allocation of resources and notable achievements attained, the sector is still faced with major challenges. Some of these challenges relate to access, equity, quality, cost and financing of education and regional disparities among others.

There are major regional disparities in terms of the achievement of set goals. The Schools in Arid and Semi Arid Lands (ASAL) areas face unique challenges due to negative cultural practices coupled with harsh climatic conditions. These include migration in search of water and pasture, early marriages and long distance to school. These conditions have had negative impact on enrolment leading to absenteeism and high dropout rates.

Kenya’s Home Grown School Feeding Program (HGSFP) positively impacted on school participation of children in ASAL areas. At the inception of the programme in Kenya, about 50% of the schools that received funds, had procured food locally within three weeks. This boosted the school attendance in the benefiting schools. We are now focusing on ensuring efficiency within the supply chain, from the capacity of local farmers to the provision of food to the children. The HGSFP is cost saving since the aspect of transport is greatly reduced.
It is hoped that through the knowledge exchange and learning opportunities provided at this forum among stakeholders from various governments, private sector, NGOs and the research community, we will all walk away with an abundance of resources and a wider network of support to strengthen the coordination of school feeding, school health and local agriculture development in our various regions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, my Ministry together with the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation launched the School Health Policy that provides a legal framework for implementation of Comprehensive School Health Programmes and recognizes the role the school plays and can play in enhancing the health of our children. As a Government, we see these policy guidelines as necessary in promoting partnerships, cooperation, collaboration and commitment among Government Ministries and stakeholders thus creating value for health and education in line with the Millennium Development Goals. This Policy Framework recognizes what we have known all along, that “healthy kids perform better in school”.

Finally, Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to thank the Partnership for Child Development (PCD) and Global Child Nutrition Foundation (GCNF), for their invaluable support. I also wish to thank all stakeholders including WFP, who are gathered here today for finding time out of your busy schedules to participate. We value your participation at this very important Forum.

It is now my pleasure to declare the Forum officially open
Thank you and May God Bless you all.