Expert bemoans inadequate funds for agro sector growth

By Kabunda Chulu

Agricultural Consultative Forum (ACF) researcher Anthony Chapoto yesterday expressed concern at the lack of adequate resources in the 2009 budget for factors that drive the agricultural sector’s growth.

And Zambia National Farmers Union (ZNFU) president Jarvis Zimba has said the increased budgetary allocation to agriculture would be meaningless if the government does not embrace stakeholder participation in the implementation of priority areas.

During an ACF post-budget discussion for stakeholders in agriculture in Lusaka, Dr Chapoto said poverty reduction programmes under the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives had continued to receive huge funding allocations at the expense of factors of growth in agriculture.

"Under composition of the poverty reduction programmes within the ministry, huge allocations have been given to the fertiliser support programme at 76 per cent and the food reserve agency at 17 per cent, while the remaining seven per cent which is very low, will go towards the drivers of growth in agriculture," said Dr Chapoto. "We are concerned because more money is needed into these factors than can improve the sector these are research, technology and extension and also there is need for more funding into soil fertility management and enhancements, irrigation, reliable and competitive markets and strategic infrastructure."

Another researcher at ACF, Dr Michael Weber said Zambia had recorded a seven per cent decline in crop production in 2008 that has resulted in four per cent overall decline of the agricultural sector.

"This is due to high costs of inputs, limited access to credit and extension services, weaknesses in the subsidised fertiliser programme and failure to attract private investment in the sector," said Dr Weber.

And Zimba said there was need to actualise the budget pronouncements.

"Our view is that government needs to re-energise itself by embracing stakeholder participation in the implementation of the priority actions identified in the budget, for example, the value added tax zero rating of agricultural equipment and spares will only translate into reduced prices if suppliers pass on benefits to farmers," said Zimba.

And agriculture minister Brian Chituwo said the ministry would soon launch an operational plan to execute its duties effectively.

"This plan once formulated will have inputs from all stakeholders and the FSP will be reviewed to attain desirable results," said Dr Chituwo.