

AS ZAMBIAN farmers grapple with high fertilizer prices dragging down productivity, here, some Congolese ferry the commodity into the DRC at Kasumbalesa border - *Picture by Abel Nambwe*

By Mwila Ntambi

A STAPLE food agricultural system that is primarily rain-fed is unlikely to provide a pathway out of poverty, says an agricultural policy research expert.

And the expert has called for investments in key agriculture drivers such as research, extension services, irrigation and roads if productivity in the sector is to improve.

During the just-ended Champions for Change Leadership Training at Protea Hotel Safari Lodge in Chisamba last week, Indaba Agriculture Policy Research Institute (IAPRI) research coordinator Dr Anthony Chapoto observed that agricultural productivity in terms of yields was stagnant in Zambia. He observed that many peo-

Expert urges agric diversification

ple owned tiny pieces of land and that it was difficult to fight poverty in the prevailing circumstances.

"Poverty rates in the country remain very high and this is a challenge that every Zambia should contain. Inequality in urban areas is very high," Dr Chapoto said.

"Nearly 50 per cent of rural farmers are net buyers of maize. They produce maize but they don't produce enough and they end up buying again."

He added that the huge inequality in terms of land ownership also contributed to low productivity.

Dr Chapoto observed that people were more likely to be attracted to economically viable lands that had basic needs and services such as schools, hospitals, roads and markets.

He said investing in the above mentioned services would help decongest areas that had too many people in one place.

And Dr Chapoto said there was need to effectively reform the Food Reserve Agency (FRA) and the Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP) in as far as improving agricultural productivity in Zambia was concerned.

He observed that the two programmes gobbled about 60 per cent of the total budget allocated to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and yet productivity had not improved significantly.

Dr Chapoto noted that while FSP was politically popular, it was less effective than investments in research, extension services, roads and other public goods aimed at stimulating agriculture growth.

He said there was urgent need to look at ways of improving agriculture productivity because high productivity lowered production costs.

Dr Chapoto also said the extensive use of fertilisers had made Zambia's soils acidic.