



**Remarks as prepared for DCM Parnell, Launch of Geographic Information System (GIS) Lab
Wednesday, February 11, 2015 University of Nairobi, College of Agriculture and Veterinary Services**

I am happy to be here today, on behalf of the American people to launch the upgraded GIS lab.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate the university, on the appointment of Professor Peter Mbithi, as new Vice Chancellor. I'm certain your leadership will continue to create exemplary education experiences for your students.

The Center for Sustainable Dryland Ecosystems and Societies represents a partnership in higher education between our two countries. Education is one of our most powerful tools for shaping our future. It begins in the classroom, continues in the lecture halls of universities like this one, and endures through the papers written by researchers, many of whom are right here in this room.

This partnership has produced well-trained teachers who are sharing their knowledge of drylands management with a new generation of Kenyan scientists and researchers, many of whom come from the pastoralist communities most affected by climate change. It has enhanced the quality and depth of education for students, and helped to ensure that they graduate with 21st century skills that contribute to Kenya's growth and development.

Real-world skills, like those that are being developed in this GIS lab, give us greater knowledge to meet our biggest challenges. One of the most pressing problems we have environmentally – is climate change.

Kenya's pastoralist communities have a rich history. They are enormously resilient and resourceful, and have survived and thrived for centuries. But, in recent years they've had to deal with longer, more extreme droughts - that have taken a devastating toll on their families and communities.

The U.S. Government is investing about 6.5 billion Kenya shillings, that's 75 million dollars, to help these communities adapt to and bounce back from future droughts more quickly and effectively than before. The research and learning that is going on in this program is a big part of these efforts. We hope that you will use what you've learned here to advocate for these communities, so they have access to the tools they need to weather crisis.

But the true value of this partnership isn't about what we've done – it's about what the Kenyans living in these communities have achieved. Kenyans, like Fatuma Amin, whom I've had the pleasure of meeting today. Fatuma just received a master's degree in disaster management. As the 5th born in a family of 12, Fatuma's hard work and determination led her to complete her bachelor's degree in development studies, and with help from the Center was able to continue to earn a graduate degree.

Fatuma, please stand.

Congratulations, Fatima. Your success is proof that women have a leading role to play in driving their communities forward. Thank-you for being here today. (applause)

I would also like to thank all of the communities represented in this room, for being involved in the center's studies and research – your input has been invaluable. You are truly the authors of your own development, and success is not possible without you.

We have achieved a lot together. The USAID-supported partnership between Colorado State and the University of Nairobi has been an excellent opportunity to export and import knowledge across continents, and to undertake mutually beneficial research and learning. Our partnership endures through this lab, and the courses we have developed together.

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This lab will serve more than 2,000 students in this university, as well as others in the larger natural resources community with the necessary skills to incorporate science into their research and propose practical solutions to complex problems.

The various courses will better prepare students and faculty to work with communities, civil society, the private sector, and government counterparts to address both the environmental and social impacts of climate change in Kenya's arid lands.

To all of the students in this room.

We hope that our joint investment in your research and education will give you a solid base of knowledge that will benefit you in your future careers. The learning that is available at this university can help you create tangible solutions that will improve the lives of your families, your communities and Kenyans across the country – make good use of it.

There are ideas yet to be realized and discoveries yet to be made – good luck in all your endeavors.

On behalf of the American people, we are proud to have invested in your future.

To learn more about this event, contact Robin Johnson, Communications Specialist, USAID/Kenya

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