Statement at the inauguration of the ILRI poultry facility

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Excellencies
Distinguished partners
Ladies and gentlemen
Members of the press
All protocol observed,

I am pleased to participate in today’s official inauguration of this distinctive new poultry research facility and thank you for the invitation.

This facility represents an important step in enhancing the fruitful collaboration between ILRI and research institutes in Ethiopia. Our work together has brought many positive benefits for the scientific community here in Ethiopia as well as globally and, importantly, for our farmers. For instance, the selective breeding of Horro chickens in Debre Zeit by scientists from ILRI and Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR) helped more than double their productivity.
This facility will take this collaboration to a new level through its proposed engagement with poultry farmers. It provides a unique space for men and women poultry farmers to contribute to the breeding of improved chickens, and for them to learn about new technologies that will help improve their poultry productivity.

We are proud that the facility will not only host Ethiopian chickens and provide a quality research facility but that it also displays the first DNA sequencing undertaken of one of Ethiopia’s indigenous birds; a wonderful illustration of collaboration between EIAR and ILRI. Being able to unpack the genetic code of indigenous chickens will significantly improve understanding and use of their genetic diversity to the benefit of our country. This knowledge will provide unique opportunities to understand, monitor and strengthen the resilience and productivity of these chickens in a sustainable manner. Smart genetics and breeding are key to unlocking the potential of the vast indigenous genetic diversity in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopia livestock master plan identified huge untapped potential in the poultry sector. With the improvements we are introducing in genetics, feed and animal health services, we project that poultry and egg production will grow by approximately 200% and 800% respectively over the next five years. This will take place, we believe, through the expansion of commercial and family poultry farming, in part through the introduction of improved chickens, like the Ethiopian African Planetary Community Chicken, which will be selected with farmers and scientists based on their knowledge and understanding of their circumstances.

Ethiopia has one of the largest livestock populations in Africa, contributing 40% to agricultural GDP. We have more than 55 million chickens and this figure is growing fast. Small-scale chicken production is an integral component of the livelihoods of most rural households in Ethiopia. Expanding poultry production is easier than for other livestock; poultry businesses requires little start-up capital and chickens grow more quickly than most other farm animals. And a more productive and dynamic poultry sector could be a source of economic growth and prosperity, particularly for women who are the principal owners of these businesses. More
nutritious and affordable poultry meat and eggs will also help our children improve their physical growth, micronutrient status and cognitive performance. We have made huge progress in reducing malnutrition in recent years and increased chicken and eggs consumption could play a crucial role in eliminating it altogether.

The poultry sector is also well positioned to contribute to Ethiopia’s commitment to meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly eliminating poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2), promoting health and well-being (SDG 3), achieving gender equity (SDG 5) and generating decent work and economic growth (SDG 8).

Crucial to achieving all these goals is the development of individual and institutional capacities in Ethiopia and the development of partnerships, particularly public-private partnerships (SDG 17).

Mindful that Ethiopia has also benefitted from the many capacity development activities provided by ILRI and its predecessor ILCA for many years, we are pleased to hear ILRI confirm its commitment to extending their training programs by using this facility to support the capacity development of the next generation of poultry scientists and farmers. With this new poultry facility and the ILRI-EIAR-Haramaya University partnership in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation-funded project, African Chicken Genetic Gains, which brings our scientists, farmers and business community together, I’m confident it is well positioned to help drive the realization of many SDGs not only in Ethiopia, but also in other countries in Africa and Asia.