

Keynote Address presented by Mrs. Oluwatoyin Adetunji, the Technical Adviser to the Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, at the Opening of the 2014 LiveWell Initiative LWI Grand Health Bazaar Programme, 14th May 2014

It is my pleasure and honor to be part of this very important event of the LiveWell Initiative Grand Health Bazaar 2014, with the theme: **'Sustaining Wealth Creation through health enhanced Africapitalism'**. The theme of this year event is very strategic and timely especially when the African continent is facing challenges of food insecurity and hunger. It is a known fact that a sound and healthy citizenry is foundation to a wealthy society where economic activities are driven by all and sundry. We therefore share in the vision of LWI of reducing health- illiteracy by half and raising the life expectancy of the people of Africa to 70 years by 2030. I so commend the Initiator of this project for the sound vision of building a healthy people as bedrock of sustainable socio-economic growth. This annual event of health education initiative has come a long way and it is on record that LWI contributed to health awareness and improvement in the wellbeing of the citizens in general and the key beneficiaries in specific terms.

This is in line with the vision of Agricultural Transformation Agenda of the Federal Government of Nigeria, which is being implemented through the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The objective is to transform the agricultural sector of Nigeria to a state of food security in terms of availability, affordability and accessibility. The ministry has put measures in place to improve both the productivity and production of key agricultural produce where Nigeria as comparative advantage; these are Cassava, Rice, Sorghum, Cocoa, Oil Palm, Fruit and Leafy vegetables, e.t.c. Under these platforms, the main goals of the umbrella transformation agenda are: to add 20 million MT to domestic food supply by 2015; to ensure overall food security; to create 3.5 million jobs in all the sub sectors by 2015; to generate additional N300 billion as income for farmers; to achieve self sufficiency in Rice production by 2015; to cut down the import bill of wheat by substituting 20% of wheat flour with High Quality Cassava Flour (HQCF) in bread and other confectioneries. A current food import bill of **\$11billion (N1.8 trillion)** is not only dangerous to the foreign reserve of the country; it increases unemployment and exports job to other farmers around the world. Other indirect effect is the fact that poverty is entrenched within and access to health care diminishes.

In Africa, it is more challenging, as issues of food security, conflicts and wars become the order of the day. We therefore must provide the platform upon which we will collectively build a continent where generations unborn will cherish. The Maputo resolution of 2003 emphasize that food security should be the main agenda of every government in Africa where over 800 million of the people still go to bed hungry. Nigeria as the most populous country in the continent is therefore taking the bull by the horn, hence the efforts at transforming the agricultural landscape of Nigeria through the Programme of ATA, including building partnerships and collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

In this regard, the efforts of LWI are worthy of note, having reached 1.5 million Nigerians on health support and empowerment, including the physically challenged and the underprivileged. The works of LWI have been very impactful on all levels of health care, from primary health care to the tertiary level. We are aware of the community health outreach activities and the effective free health screening and free medicines programmes, which LWI undertakes. This also includes capacity building and health empowerment on specific health complications and personal awareness of health status of the people.

Similarly, the ATA agenda contains deliberate interventions targeted at improving the nutritional contents of certain crops as well as boosting food nutrition through value addition. For example, the FMARD in collaboration with the National Root Crop Research Institute, Umudike, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the IITA developed the Vitamin A cassava variety. The Vit. A variety of cassava has been officially released and currently being multiplied and grown across the country. The vitamin A variety has the capability of providing additional vitamin A to the malnourished and for better eyesight for all. The Ministry also seeks to promote improved, high yielding Vitamin A maize, High iron-enriched Millet, orange-fleshed Potatoes e.t.c.

As a member of the G8 Nutrition Alliance and the Nutrition Champion of Africa, The Hon. minister of Agriculture Dr. Akinwumi Ayodeji Adesina is committed to improving nutrition of the people especially for mother and child, hence the inclusion of nutrition component in the whole transformation agenda. In scaling up nutrition in the northern part of the country where malnutrition is more prevalent, the Ministry is not only promoting nutrition Programme but also wooing investment in the production of high-energy nutritious food. There are also programmes that provide technical backstopping to

women and youths in the north on the use of Sorghum as food based fortification and support for **'1000 days window nutrition'** for mother and child i.e from conception till the child is two years; this is to enhance brain development of the child. It is worthy of note to state here that Dangote Group is investing in the high energy nutritious food production in Kano using Sorghum which is widely grown in the area while the World Food Programme is also positioning as off takers.

The policy of 20% inclusion of HQCF in bread will not only save Nigeria the sum of N127billion but will also improve the health of the people. This is because the Glycemic Index (GI) of Cassava Flour is lower than that of wheat flour. The Glycemic Index is a measure of the rate at which food consumed is converted into sugar in the blood within few hours after consumption. Therefore, the inclusion of HQCF in bread will reduce the total Glycemic Index. The success of this policy is shown in the number of cassava bakers across the country and the influx of investment in the value chain. Park n Shop, ShopRite and Butterfield are among the major cassava bread producers who have commercialized the product. There are also over 40 master bakers in all the geo-political zones and the number is growing by the day. The Ministry has since 2012 embarked on training of master bakers on the production of cassava bread where a total of 1,125 master bakers have been trained and it is continuing.

The FMARD will therefore be delighted to collaborate with LWI to improve the health of Nigerians across demographic settings. A healthy people will build a wealthy nation, where there is peace and sustainable economic growth. I shall end this address with this quote from Dr. Jacques Diouf, (past Director General, FAO), at the Africa Food Security Summit in Abuja, December 2006.

"No civilization, no continent, no self-respecting country can allow the food security of its people, to be ensured or decided by others. From the depths of history, great empires and affluent kingdoms have come and gone. But, if we look closely at what contributed to their demise, we would often see that the main cause was the failure to meet the basic needs of the people in particular food."

Thank you all for your attention

Yours Sincerely,

Mrs. Oluwatoyin Adetunji

Technical Adviser to the Honourable Federal Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development