

WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT, ANIMAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA AT THE 5TH ASAN-NIAS JAM, 21ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION HELD ON SEPTEMBER 20, 2016 AT EBITIMI BANIGO AUDITORIUM, UNIVERSITY PARK, UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT, RIVERS STATE

His Excellency, the Executive Governor of Rivers State
The Chief Judge of Rivers State
The Honourable Commissioner of Agriculture, Ministry of Agric. Rivers State
The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Rivers State
The Vice Chancellor, University of Port Harcourt
The Vice Chancellor, River State University
The President NIAS
The Council Members NIAS
Fellow, NIAS
Board of Trustees, ASAN
National Executive Council, ASAN
The Captains of Industries
Our distinguished Sponsors
Gentlemen of the Press
Student, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed my great pleasure to welcome you all to the 5th ASAN-NIAS Joint Annual Meeting. This meeting marks the twenty first statutory Annual General Meeting of the Association that Animal Scientists and other Stakeholders are converging to discuss issues of great relevance to the Association, the Livestock sub-sectors and our dear nation. We are delighted you could find time to be with us at this occasion.

The Association and the Nigerian Institute of Animal Science (NIAS) consider as topical and apt the theme of this joint meeting, which is, **‘Repositioning Animal Agriculture in a dwindling Oil Economy’**

The history of agriculture in Nigeria is the history of the people, as Nigeria is an agrarian nation. It is no wonder that agriculture served as the main stay of the economy during the first decade after independence, and accounting for about 71% of foreign exchange earnings for Nigeria. In the 1960’s, the Agricultural sector was the most important one in terms of its contribution to Gross Domestic Products (GDP), employment and foreign exchange earnings.

During the oil boom decade of the 1970's, the sector remained largely stagnated and this accounts largely for the declining share of its contribution these days. Various stakeholders have bemoaned the neglect of the agricultural sector, blaming it mostly on the discovery of crude oil. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the trend in the share of the agricultural sector in Gross Domestic Product shows a substantial variations and long-term decline forms; 60 percent in the early 1960's through 48.8 percent in the 1970's and 22.2 percent in the 1980's. The discovery of crude oil lured many youths away from the farms into the cities in search of white-collar jobs

As global oil prices continue to fall sharply over the past 18 months, nigerians, for an economy that is largely dependent on oil needs not be told that tough times beckon and in deed we are already in recession.

Thus we must recognize the urgency and severity of the matter. As a matter of fact, all efforts must be geared and directed towards the 'rejected stone,' which must now become the chief corner stone as a means to set the nation's economy on a path of rebirth and recovery.

The decline in agriculture notwithstanding, successive administrations at the federal level, had over the years, initiated various programmes aimed at redressing the drastic decline in the sector. Agricultural analysts easily point to the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) programme introduced by the erstwhile military regime of Olusegun Obasanjo in 1976, the Green Revolution programme under Alh. Shehu Shagari and DFFRI under Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, Agricultural Transformation Agenda and currently the GREEN ALTERNATIVE. All is aimed at increasing the number of the nation's farmers and raising the people's awareness of the key role agriculture play in an economy.

Setting the nation's economy on the path of rebirth and recovery requires a complete shift of attention back to the Agricultural sector as one of the best options out of this conundrum. This current administration must understand the precarious situation and the need to fix things in an accelerated manner.

To save the situation, Nigeria must earn foreign exchange to replace oil through exportation of right quantity and quality of agricultural products, not just producing them but adding values to our agricultural products.

It was reported by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development on leather value chain that the third highest forex earner to oil is leather. We can imagine the foreign earnings this can give to our economy if we harness the opportunities and develop the industry, the possibilities to the economy are indeed enormous.

The regulation and deregulation of policies by different administrations of government is not helping the stability of government policies that should have enhanced productivity.

Livestock production is currently not positioned to play the crucial role to revamp the economy as there is appropriate policies for breeding stock for production of the different species. Animal scientists have never been given the opportunity to reach the apex of their career as FMARD still employs non animal scientist as livestock development officer.

Some of the factors that have caused agricultural policy failure in Nigeria range from:

- Complexity of the policy making process,
- Problems emanating from organizational staffing (as the case in the FMARD);
- Problem of institutional manning deficiencies that inhibit policy implementation
- Lack of the use of technical tools of analysis,
- Impacts of domestic socio-political factors,
- Incompatibility of the policies with the political system;
- Technological gaps,
- Negative effects of variations of policy transfer,
- Effects of international factors such as the processes of globalization; and
- Lack of feedback and policy learning.

A significant reason for agriculture policy failure in Nigeria was the complex and unpredictable nature of the policy making process which lacked policy design that should have mapped programme expectations.

The inability of the various regimes in power to have a meritocratic system of recruiting the best hands for a government job also furthered the failure of agriculture policies. **At various times, some government officials acted as if they were above the law and regulations.**

The case of the wrong posting of a Professional Director in the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is a very good example. Recall, the removal of the Director, Federal Department of Animal Production and Husbandry Services, Dr A.M. Raji, who is a Registered Animal Scientist as stipulated by the NIAS ACTS no 26 of 2007 as amended in 2015, and replaced with a Veterinary Doctor, who is not only professionally unqualified to head the department, but also does not have the locus standi to advice government on any issue pertaining to animal science practice.

Further insult is added to the injury of this scenario by the seeming silence and non-challatant attitude of our government at different levels which encourage nepotism and mediocrity at the expense of merit and professionalism, thus putting square pegs in round holes to the detriment of the our nation as a whole.

However, In order to make policies work and sustainable in Nigeria, it is imperative to consider domestic sociopolitical conditions while integrating lessons drawn from successful policy systems with home grown solutions. In maintaining the inflow of ideas into the policy stream, there must be a developmental plan as to how policy makers will be recruited based on merit, and how the policy making sub-system of the government will be insulated from politicians who may want to manipulate the policy cycle for their own ambitions.

Possible solutions include:

1. To truly return to the agricultural days, the government must as a matter of necessity put in place incentives to engage and capture the interest of the teeming unemployed youths to seeing farming as a lucrative and highly rewarding business.
2. There is a need for the development of Agricultural Business Entrepreneurship and farm-skills acquisition centres and the transformation of the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria to a National Agricultural Transformation Agency, just like EMPRAPA did in Brazil.
3. Government must also look at the issue of Agricultural Subsidy and tax holidays for investors in the agricultural sector seriously.

4. People who can assess the advantages and disadvantages of alternative courses while making a decision should be recruited to pilot the policy cycle.
5. The appropriate technologies needed to achieve policy goals must be transferred to mitigate policy failure during implementation as Nigeria and most developing countries still suffer from inadequate technologies needed for actualizing policy goals.
6. More important is the need to entrench good governance and democracy as they constitute the bedrock for creating the required socio-political environment needed for successful policy making and establishing institutions that will consolidate the policy making cycle so as to avert policy failure.

In conclusion,

Shifting attention from our monocultural economy and over-reliance on oil especially in the face of plummeting global crude oil prices to a diversified economy, which the development of animal agriculture could provide, will cater for unemployment of our teeming population. This will also in no small measure go a long way in discouraging heavy importations but also boost the economy. This is only achievable if mass re-orientation and education on the benefits derivable from embracing of animal agriculture are made known. In this way, president Buhari will be able to fulfil his promises of tackling poverty and hunger, strengthen the naira against the dollar through investments it will attract from investors.

Again, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you all for coming to this ceremony and hereby formally welcome you to ASAN-NIAS Port Harcourt JAM, 2016.

TAIWO ADEOYE RAS, FASAN, FNIAS, FCASN

President

Animal Science Association of Nigeria

20th Sept, 2016.