

A Welcome Address given by Prof. Eric Eboh, President, Agricultural Policy Research Network (APRNet) and Executive Director, African Institute for Applied Economics (AIAE) at the Symposium on “Making Agricultural Research Work for the Users”, holding on Tuesday, 24 May 2011, Valencia Hotel, Abuja

Protocols:

- The Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development
- The Executive Secretary, Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN)
- Representatives of the Development Partners and International Agencies
- Directors of Agricultural and Other Research Institutes in Nigeria
- Permanent Secretaries and Directors from the State Ministries of Agriculture
- Deans of Faculties of Agriculture in Nigerian Universities
- Managing Directors from the State Agricultural and Rural Development Authorities and Programme Managers and Agricultural Development Programmes
- Representatives of the various National Agricultural Intervention Programmes including the FADAMA III, Commercial Agriculture Project, National Programme for Food Security (NPFS)
- Members of the Agricultural Policy Research Network (APRNet)
- Associate Fellows of the African Institute for Applied Economics (AIAE)
- Representatives of Farmers Associations and Civil Society Organisations
- Gentlemen of the Press
- Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Agricultural Policy Research Network (APRNet), African Institute for Applied Economics (AIAE) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI-Nigeria), I am pleased to welcome you to this Symposium. It is encouraging to have such a distinguished cross section of agricultural sector stakeholders from across the country to discuss how to make agricultural research work for the users. This Symposium is particularly unique for APRNet because it is our maiden public policy dialogue event since we came into being about 16 months ago.

We – the co-organisers of this event (APRNet, AIAE & IFPRI-Nigeria) are very deliberate to host this Symposium at this auspicious time of transition to new democratic governments, at the federal and state levels, beginning from 29 May 2011. From our viewpoint, this time of transition should be devoted to deep reflections about how to correct our past mistakes and set the country’s agricultural sector on the right path. This is a critical step to pushing forward our ambition to rank as one of the topmost 20 economies by the year 2020 (just nine years from now). This reflection is needed most about the agricultural sector whose economic potentials have for a long time been held down by policy inadequacies, institutional weaknesses and structural distortions.

Within the context of pondering for the emergence of a new agricultural sector landscape for Nigeria under the new democratic government, this Symposium is designed to rally experts and practitioners on the important question of optimizing the interface of agricultural research, agricultural policy and agricultural enterprise for sustainable growth and food security. It creates an opportunity to share research information and to synthesize informed and experiential perspectives on innovative

and best practices for linking research, policymaking and private enterprise. The quality and diversity of the participants in this Symposium underscore our desire to galvanise critical thinking among the relevant experts in public and private sectors and thereby enhance the constituency for agricultural research in the economy and society.

Bridging the gap between agricultural research and policymaking on the one hand and the gap between agricultural research and private enterprise is one of the principal reasons for the formation of the Nigerian Agricultural Policy Research Network (NAPRNet) in November 2009. Within its vision to be an authoritative and independent forum for promoting research for evidence-based agricultural and rural development policies in Nigeria, NAPRNet's mandate is to facilitate the conduct of research as well as the communication and utilization of research results in the agriculture and rural development policy process in Nigeria.

For research to have desired impact, it should produce useable results, which should be communicated in such a manner that promotes its use on a sustainable basis. Research should be relevant, available, accessible and useable. On the other hand, prospective users of research results should have capacity and orientation to digest, absorb and utilize research results (information, new knowledge, products, innovation), whether for policymaking, programme planning, monitoring or enterprise production. In line with these desirable ends, the objectives of NAPRNet include to:

- Promote the exchange of existing research information
- Mobilize a pool of financial resources for independent policy research
- Encourage mentoring of upcoming policy researchers
- Provide peer review for researchers
- Create channels for linking research with policy process
- Facilitate the use of research results in the policy process

We are convinced that this Symposium will produce concrete ideas and recommendations for making our agricultural research a real catalyst for agricultural development. Our conviction is vindicated, because in the course of interacting with you ahead of this event, you had repeatedly pointed to the fact that our chosen theme is very germane in our current and future efforts towards sustainable economic development.

In particular, the responsibility for agriculture-driven economic transformation has been highlighted by the Nigerian Vision 20:2020 and the First Vision 20:2020 Medium-Term Implementation Plan 2010-2013. The responsibility is being currently pursued within the context of the National Agricultural Sector Strategy and the National Agricultural Investment Plan. At the heart of these interlinked policy and strategy frameworks is the need to harness the power of agricultural research to drive agricultural productivity, competitiveness and sustainability.

Today in Nigeria and indeed for a long time into the future, the success of agricultural sector policies and plans will be benchmarked against the extent to which we push down farm-level and agribusiness costs, upgrade farm productivity and at the same time improve the quality of and value addition to agricultural products. None of these can be achieved without getting right our research links with

enterprise and without ensuring that public agricultural policies and agricultural spending decisions are informed and guided by good science.

Given the lingering gaps between agricultural research and policymaking, and agricultural research and private agro-enterprise, APRNet is advocating for some kind of more proactive research results vendor or broker system? The proposed 'national agricultural research results vendor' will connect systematically with the producers and users of research. It will perform the critical complementary marketing, communication and promotional functions that are outside the traditional domains of research institutions. If well planned and implemented in terms of ownership, financing and responsibility assignment, such a mechanism could positively transform the landscape for the utilisation of research results in the country.

This is the reason why we are consciously connecting with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria, Directors of National Agricultural Research Institutes, Permanent Secretaries or Directors in State Ministries of Agriculture and Programme Managers/Managing Directors of State Agricultural Development Programmes as well as agricultural practitioners (farmers and agribusiness people). Given the setting of agricultural research in Nigeria, these actors play crucial respective roles (directly or indirectly) in the production, communication and utilisation of agricultural research. The rare assembling of these key agricultural research stakeholders provides an excellent opportunity for stock-taking, experience sharing and mutual learning. It is therefore important for us to candidly address the questions about what is working and what is not working regarding our present models of research influence on policy and enterprise.

We also need to explore lessons and insights from other countries and identify key elements that can be suitable and useful for our institutional environment. We should not lose this golden platform to intensify the agenda and reinvigorate the processes for enhancing agricultural research and its impact on agricultural development in Nigeria.

In this regard, we note with great interest the efforts of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, with support from some development partners, to strengthen the Ministry's Library and Databank facilities. The Library and Databank are crucial in the Ministry's attempts to foster links and information exchanges with the research community. Over time, the Databank can also take on the milestone function of building "agricultural database and research results repository", such that the facility will become a valuable information portal for policy officials, development practitioners and researchers.

On its part, the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN) has commendably launched its Strategic Agenda 2011-2020. It has also embarked upon critical programming aimed to strengthen agricultural research capabilities among the National Agricultural Research Institutes (NARIs), support good-quality research, facilitate research networking and promote research dissemination and utilisation in agro-industry. In the light of these ongoing initiatives, the objectives of this Symposium are consistent with the principles given in the ARCN Research Strategy and they align very much with the capacity building goals of the Federal Ministry.

Hence, we shall continue to explore collaborative opportunities towards enhancing the influence of agricultural research in the country.

Let me assure you that the ideas and recommendations given at this Symposium shall not just fizzle out as we return to our respective institutions. Beyond mere publicity for this event, APRNet and the co-organisers of this event are committed to developing the observations and recommendations into sensitisation and advocacy materials for wider and long-lasting dissemination.

Also, APRNet is considering working with other stakeholders to set in place some kind of mechanism to monitor and report periodically on the status of links between agricultural research and policymaking in Nigeria. The mechanism may take the form of an 'Agricultural Research and Policy Observatory' whereby there will be an ongoing system to track research developments, highlight success stories, identify challenges and disseminate best practices for making research work for the users. In the coming months, we shall be approaching your various institutions to consult you about ways and means of developing this idea in a collaborative and sustainable manner.

The Honourable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me thank you all for coming to this Symposium. I hope and pray that our deliberations will be fruitful and effective in producing concrete ideas for further exploration. I particularly thank the Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria for participation for accepting to give the keynote address.

I also thank the African Institute for Applied Economics and International Food Policy Research Institute for collaborating with us in organising this Symposium.

Let me use this opportunity to invite other national organisations and institutions and development partners to join hands with the Nigerian Agricultural Policy Research Network (APRNet) for enhancing the relevance, use and impact of agricultural research in Nigeria.

Protocols

Thank you very much for your attention and once again, you are welcome. Thank you.