ENHANCING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF COCOA GROWING IN NIGERIA

A PAPER PRESENTED BY EVANGELIST JOSHUA O. OYEDELE, PRESIDENT ONDO STATE FARMERS’ CONGRESS AT THE ICCO ROUNDTABLE ON A SUSTAINABLE WORLD COCOA ECONOMY, ACCRA, GHANA, 3-6 OCTOBER, 2007

INTRODUCTION

We are aware that cocoa was introduced into Nigeria around 1874. Cocoa production and export in large quantity started at about 1910.

There was high figure quantity production between 1970 and 1975, when annual production rose as high as 307,000 metric tonnes per annum. After this period the World Bank pumped money into the South-Western Region of Nigeria for more cocoa production.

Millions of seedlings were raised by the Cocoa Development Unit for the farmers to increase acreage and improve yield. The impact was minimal because of unfavourable weather and inadequate care occasioned by ignorance.

The older generations of the plantations are ageing simultaneously as the farmers. The governments of Nigeria, both Federal and States, are continuing in the programme of seed multiplication and supply. This is backed up with a comprehensive education and enlightenment programme for the farmers.

ONGOING POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

The Ondo State Farmers’ Congress and other state farmers’ congresses provide regular training to our members on good agricultural practices to produce quality cocoa beans. We also subsidize inputs (when the funds are available); monitor/supervise farm practices and undertake periodic orientation programmes.
The Farmers’ Field School program introduced by the National Cocoa Development and International Institute of Tropical Agriculture is yielding good result for the farmers. We pray that it is sustained and extended to cover all the farmers producing cocoa in Nigeria.

Cocoa Association of Nigeria is also helping to train and sensitize farmers directly on the control of pests and diseases, maintenance of the crops, harvesting and processing.

The National Cocoa Development Committee has also spent millions of naira to see that farmers are trained. The NCDC is a presidential initiative, which led to a festival of “Cocoa Rebirth” in 2005 and had been held annually in rotation and hosted by the 14 cocoa producing states in Nigeria. The impact and the awareness is unquantifiable. Cocoa Association of Nigeria is the arrowhead of the implementation of the initiative.

PRESENT CHALLENGES

Input Supply Must Be Addressed
These include new and good varieties of seedlings which give early and higher yields.

Chemicals
Correct and adequate chemicals must be available for use at the right time in cocoa farms against termites, mirids (capsids) and leaf eating caterpillars and diseases such as black pods etc. There should be good chemical applicators and dedicated workers. There is difficulty in knowing good chemicals from adulterated brands by rural farmers. Nigeria cocoa farmers have adhered to approved chemicals for treatment of cocoa.

Infrastructure
The infrastructure must be well maintained. These include irrigation for nurseries and maintenance of mature farms. Roads to the farms are necessary for easy and inexpensive evacuation of produce from farm settlements. Basic rural health care, primary educations schools, borehole for clear water supply and a mini-market to enable farmers reside in the farms – should be provided.

**Training**
The farmers, their leaders and their workers must be given regular training in the art of planting, maintenance, harvesting, processing and storage before sale of beans to buyers.

**Extension Agents**
This is an organ of government that gives support services to the farmers. These must exist between the farmers and the researchers, bringing research findings and new innovations to the farmers and reporting the problems of the farmers to the researchers. They must also be provided with materials and funds to effectively carry out their activities to the two sides. There should be easy communication in the language of the farmers for them to understand what are needed for effective production.

**Effective Cocoa Supply Chain**
This is being looked into by all practitioners in the cocoa industry in Nigeria. The producing farmers, who are at the base, need to understand their position in the supply chain for the production of good quality cocoa. The quality of cocoa is essentially determined by the farmers’ adherence to basic guidelines of mature pods, pod breaking, adequate fermentation, good drying and storage in approved bags.

**Good Price**
The farmer deserves good remuneration for his labour. The farmer, who is the basic producer of cocoa beans, needs an encouraging price for his cocoa to enable
him remain on the farm and meet other basic needs of life. Premium price for quality cocoa! When the price is not right, quality adherence will be in problem and final consumers’ health will be in jeopardy!

Thank you for your time and attention.