



MASSIVE REDUCTION IN MALNUTRITION IN NIGERIA: We Must Get It Right This Time.

Saving the vulnerable from health crises is an emerging challenge we face. Now is the time to take stock and realign. We must hit hard at the key pressure points for change; at points that promises multiple remedial effects. **Agriculture is it.** It is the source of livelihood of greater percentage of the people. Working to reduce the poverty level and increase well being, agriculture offers an option, not for trial but for straight and immediate adoption for major social changes particularly health, reduction of maternal and child mortality. Its first impact is to lay a good foundation and ensure wellbeing.

Sadly, past performance of agriculture in Nigeria has not been encouraging, like the barber's chair rocking without gaining distance. Agreeably, **United Nations Food Council in the work of its fifteenth session believes that "Hunger is a man-made phenomenon; human error or negligence creates it; human complacency perpetuates it and human resolve can eradicate it"**

Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA Nigeria), a collective and renewed approach towards the search for sustainable agriculture and food security constitutes this resolve. It is timely. An agricultural program in Nigeria like never before. Its emphasis on value addition sets it apart. Products which hitherto moved from farm to the market with a lot of wastages now to go through processing, preservation, storage and then marketing increasing rural income and creating multiple jobs in its trail.

For the Apex Bank Governor, Dr. Sanusi, Agricultural sector holds the key to economic development as it remains the focus of any attempt to achieve price index stabilization, inflation regulation, poverty reduction and food security. The CBN with a self imposed mandate under the Sanusi administration decided for the first time to veer off the normal function of financing to economic development where agriculture was picked as key. Faced with the challenge of financing the sector, working together with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture Rural Development fashioned a way out – NIRSAL, a novelty in agricultural financing.

Internally, the resources lined up, particularly human are the best ever paraded - a fine combination of policy and field specialists. We have great expectation of increases in all facets of the value chain –production, preservation, processing. The challenge of reduction in post harvest losses has been built in as the process is positioned to absorb the excesses. A sector that was moving in a stationery position, agriculture is gearing to leap and bounce. However, a lot still needs to be done. UNFC 15th session says "emphasis on the diet of the people, especially the vulnerable group, who are mostly women and children, completes this resolution".

It is evident that increase production has not resulted to better nutrition intake. FAO has estimated that 80% of malnourished children living in the developing world live in countries that produce food surpluses. Yes, Nigeria's northern region has food. That is why it is logical to say in the face of several commitments to increase support to agriculture and anticipated abundance, further precise and urgent measures are needed if issues of malnutrition must be tackled. ATA Nigeria presents a good platform for this.

Nutrition affects every aspect of life of the individual; forms a significant and crucial part of the Agricultural system; is the fundamental aspect of a sustainable food security programme, as it impacts directly on the people and so lends credence and meaning to all efforts in the various components of the food system and national development. Again, the health of the populace, measured chiefly by the nutritional status of the majority, is the true indication of the commitment of the government, her development partners and people of Nigeria to the social and economic development of the nation. Therefore, absence of strong issues on nutrition in any program is reminiscence to a house built on a poor foundation, which occasional patching and artificial paintings cannot sustain. **This is why although the nutritional aspect is integral to the concept of food security, the FAO finds need to bring out the import of nutrition by renaming it food and nutrition security.**

Agriculture sector must be assisted to release its full potential. The produced food must be made to work for the individual. The transformation must be total for it to create the desired impact – transforming the health of the people. This is imperative. **Nutrition**

is a crucial issue. It is the final point in the consideration of all that is happening in agriculture and the proof that meaningful things have happened along the value chain.

Rising in Rome in 1992, the International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) raised global awareness of the causes of malnutrition and encouraged action aimed at promoting and protecting the well-being of the vulnerable group, who are mostly women and children. According to them, **assured access to nutritionally adequate and safe food is essential for individual welfare and for national, social and economic development and plays a critical role in achieving food security.**

So its own strategy must be spelt out. A lot still needs to be done. Yes, the deepening effect of its negative impact calls for precision and urgency.

First, there must be a paradigm shift, one that recognizes that:

- **Development is all about the individual.** First in developing him, in assisting him develop himself and in letting him develop his environment. Programs must start with the wellbeing of the individual, which is first his food. Remember, you are what you eat – not the injection or the drugs you take.
- **Agriculture has the primary mandate for health. The sector must reclaim the mandate of health of the people, which has slipped off, even in the most rural economy. The sector has the primary mandate for health via nutritious and safe food-** The take off point for good health. We must therefore as the FAO has done stress nutrition in practical sense. **The Health sector has been burdened enough.** They have done well struggling with a burden that is not squarely theirs.
- **Good nutrition is an investment which can help raise the productivity of both present and future generations. (FAO/WHO, 1992). Once we get nutrition and safe food right, we are on the verge of getting all other things right. An individual's well being assures health and a healthy individual does much to further develop self and contribute to economic development. We must recognize individual in the rural areas-** constituting about 2/3 of the population are generally characterized by poverty, dearth of medical personnel and other resources, mostly faced with traditional, cultural and or religious ways that set barrier on their acceptance of medication. And this is where the greatest number of deaths comes from.

What then do we do with this population so much at risk? And with the rest of the population not yet down? Experts say unless an extraordinary effort is made by us all issues would be worse by 2020. President Museveni said this is why a new vision is so urgent. What extra ordinary effort do we offer/ adopt? What new vision?



NNENNA NWOKE KALU
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
VULNERABLE EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE NETWORK