

## **NIGERIAN AGRICULTURE AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21st CENTURY: THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF FOOD PROCESSING**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*After 40 years of costly and of wasteful experimentation with different fashions in development strategy, Nigeria and other African countries have come back full-circle to the realization that as agricultural countries, agriculture-led development strategies are the appropriate response, as Lewis (1955) pointed out 45 years ago, to the deepening continent-wide crises of persisting poverty, hunger and malnutrition.*

*The Food Industries have tactical and catalytic roles to play within Agriculture-led development strategies in Nigeria and the other countries especially within sub-Saharan Africa. Food industries' capacity to fulfil this role depends entirely on whether the appropriate policy environment and complementary training can be created to foster a new breed of entrepreneurial players in Nigerian food processing. Vision 2010 has identified the development of Small and Medium-scale Enterprises (SMEs) as the engine for kick-starting the much-desired process of industrialization. What needs to be stressed is that Food Processing is the most fertile soil in which SMEs root and blossom into thousands of flowering industrial establishments and millions of jobs as a famous Chinese proverb puts it.*

*The strategic concept behind National Land Development Authority (NALDA) was to encourage the pulling together of unused and under-utilized tracts of land into viable cooperative farm enterprises that can be farmed scientifically using viable technologies. The idea of a Chain of Farm Service Centres to provide inputs and technology to NALDA and other Farmers within project environments remains one framework in which networks of food processing and storage infrastructure can become widespread throughout Nigeria's multifarious Local Government Areas.*

*Experience from Malaysia underscores the necessity to inject entrepreneurial blood through franchising and similar schemes into the promotion of the many sub-component parts of the Farm Service Centres in order to empower them to function as sustainable economic entities.*

*The mention of NALDA is not to say that this particular concept has been a success. Quite the contrary. NALDA has become an unmitigated failure, as we all know. But its failure derives from Nigeria's inability to implement excellent project ideas as we have seen with RBDAs, ADPs and many others. The point to be underscored is that innovative and bold ideas such as NALDA and its precursor schemes are a must. But they have to be pursued with honesty and competence to make the desired impact. Within the context of finding more efficient frameworks for input and service delivery for Nigerian Agriculture, it is absolutely necessary to identify and address the problem of Farm Mechanization. Anazodo (1980) tells us that engine power available on the Nigerian farm is only 18 watts/hectare, compared to FAO-recommended minimum of 373 watts/hectare. Consequently, raw human power accounts for 90 per cent of all power used on Nigerian farms; animal power accounts for 8 per cent and engine power for 2 per cent. Should there be any wonder why our farms are deserted by both young and old? Who wants to toil tirelessly on primitive farms for nothing?*

*Needless to say, farm mechanization through tractorization is an essential pre-requisite for Nigerian agriculture in the 21st century. Nigeria must aim to achieve the FAO target of 373 watts/hectare within the first ten to twenty years of the new century. To do this, Odigboh (1996) tells us that local manufacture of agricultural machinery is an imperative from multiple perspectives of making such equipment affordable, creating jobs and enhancing our technological capacity as a nation. The*

*networking of Farm Service Centre Franchizes remains one of the most attractive means of injecting entrepreneurial blood into this aspect of input delivery.*