

**BREAKING NEW GROUNDS IN AGRO-BUSINESS
AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

BY

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**BEING TEXT OF ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION
OF THE
2nd CONVOCATION CEREMONY OF LANDMARK UNIVERSITY,**

JULY 17, 2015.

ADDRESS BY THE CHANCELLOR, LANDMARK UNIVERSITY, DR DAVID OYEDEPO, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2ND CONVOCATION CEREMONY FOR THE AWARD OF FIRST AND HIGHER DEGREES OF LANDMARK UNIVERSITY ON FRIDAY 17th JUNE 2015.

Protocols and Special Recognitions

Preamble

It is with gratitude, praise and thanks to God Almighty that I welcome you to the 2nd Convocation Ceremony of Landmark University, as we release the Class of 2015 Pathfinders, as our graduates are prophetically referred. My speech on this occasion is captioned: **Food for Thoughts, Thoughts on the Necessity of Food Security in Nigeria**

The Landmark University Vision

To be a leading world class university, by spearheading an agrarian revolution on the African continent through the exploration of hidden treasures in the mother-earth thereby restoring the dignity of the Black Race.

This Vision of the University is focused on rebirth, national transformation and rejuvenation of our education values through phenomenal contribution to the process of restoration of the dignity of our nation Nigeria and beyond. It is therefore important on an occasion such as this to situate the role of Landmark University in providing an engine room as well as serve as a catalyst for driving agro enterprise in Africa.

One may then ask the question:

How relevant is food”

Will food ever become irrelevant?

If it must continue to be relevant, it is wisdom to deal with the food security issue.

Food security is not an ideology it is a necessity.

**To view it otherwise can be an expression of insanity.
Food now, food tomorrow, food forever**

As man cannot survive without oxygen, no mortal man can survive without food.

It is time for us to think, rethink and put actions to our thoughts in dealing with this monster of food insecurity and the impending danger of hunger and starvation.

All of the above is what prompted the establishment of Landmark University with a mandate to promote agro enterprise engagement for the upcoming generation.

As an optimist, I firmly believe that problems are meant to be solved and there are no insurmountable mountains anywhere. The Nigerian economic climate, her level of technology the regretful experience or approaches of the past notwithstanding the food security problem has a solution in us Nigerians, both in the government and the people of our great nation. **As I once noted, there are no mountains anywhere, every man’s ignorance is his mountain.**

There is no time when food will not be relevant, there is nothing that challenges human dignity like food scarcity. How to make people believe that the problem has a solution, is the real issue here. We either solve the problem or we are turned into problems.

Why Agro Enterprise?

According to the Global Hunger Index report of 2014, Nigeria is among countries in the world faced with a high level of hunger threat despite its efforts at reducing hunger in the last 25 years. Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural resources that she has not been able to successfully harness to the benefit of its teeming population. Poverty remains widespread and in recent years, even increased in some areas, with an estimated 70 per cent of the population, who are mostly rural area dwellers living on less than \$1.25 a day! The level of unemployment in the country is also high, with about 50million youths jobless, and avenue for job creation opportunities are not existent. Agriculture is the mainstay of Nigeria's economy, employing approximately two-thirds of the country's total labour force and contributing 40 per cent to GDP (IFAD 2012).

A publication titled "Economic Confidential"- November 23, 2014, cited Nigeria as the world's largest producer of cassava, yam, and cowpea; but noted that Nigeria is a food-deficit nation that depends on imports of grains, livestock products, and fish. In addition, it was also stated, that with an estimated 71 million hectares of cultivable land, only half is currently used for farming, stating that a lack of infrastructure such as roads further exacerbates poverty in rural areas by isolating rural farmers from needed inputs and profitable markets.

Nigeria was ranked 40th out of 79 on the global Hunger index and 156 out of 187 on the UNDP 2011 Human development index. According to the data form the IFAD, 2012, poverty is widespread in the rural areas, where 80% of the population live below the poverty line.

In the GHI survey released recently, it was reported that, the higher the index score, the higher the hunger level.

The Punch Newspaper of October 14, 2014, reported Nigeria's level as dire, while Ghana's is considered to be at a "moderate" hunger level. Consequences of this dire and alarming report can result in the following –

- Micronutrient deficiency (shortage in essential vitamins and minerals)
- Erosion of a person's well-being and development.
- Reduced productivity (taking a toll on countries' economies.)
- Reduction in immunity levels and increase to a people being prone to sickness and disease.

This state of affairs is disturbing and presents a dilemma noting that Nigeria according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) 2011 statistics, has a total land area of 91,077,000 Hectares with an agricultural area of 76,200,000 Hectares. In simple terms, about 83.7% of the land in Nigeria is arable, out of which less than half is currently under cultivation. This situation is in direct contrast to China with only 11% of the land is arable. In addition, China is a land dominated by monsoons compared with Nigeria with favourable weather for all year round crop cultivation

Despite China's vulnerable climatic weather conditions, Agriculture stands as a vital industry, employing over 300 million registered farmers. China ranks first in worldwide farm output, primarily producing rice, cereals, cotton just to mention a few crops farmed, producing 20% of food for the world's population. China has been described as a land of "permanent agriculture"

The Nation of Israel has more than half its land as desert land with unsuitable climatic conditions for agriculture, but today is a world leader in agricultural technologies and a major exporter of fresh produce. Only 20% of Israeli land is arable yet it produces 95% of its nutritional requirements. (<http://www.el-rufai.org/hunger-in-the-midst-of-plenty/>)

Agro-business: What makes it work

In sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture directly contributes to 34% of gross domestic product (GDP) and 64% of employment. Growth in agriculture is at least two to four times more effective in reducing poverty than other sectors.

It has also been noted that growth in agriculture also stimulates productivity in other sectors such as food processing. Agricultural products also compose about 20% of Africa's exports. Given these figures, it is no surprise that agricultural research and extension services can yield a 35% rate of return, and irrigation projects a 15–20% return in sub-Saharan Africa.

Agriculture is extremely important for the sustenance and development of a nation and it is potentially a huge employer of labour for a country like Nigeria. Agriculture can therefore boost Nigeria's GDP and export profile, as

well as increase her foreign exchange reserves and increase employment levels. This sector of Nigeria's economy must by all means rank high in the propriety listings of the Nation.

Driving agro enterprise is vital to igniting an entrepreneurial revolution as a people, we must become visionary and daring in this pursuit.

It was George W. Bush, a one-time American President, speaking to the joint session of Congress, 20th September, 2009 after the September 9, 2011 incident who said,

“I ask your continued participation and confidence in the American economy. **Terrorists attacked a symbol of American prosperity; they did not touch its source. America is successful because of the hard work and creativity and enterprise of our people. These were the true strengths of our economy before September 11, and they are our strengths today.**”

In a similar vein, we as a people must wake up to the reality of charting a path way for strengthening the reins of our economy via productive and creative engagements in entrenching agro enterprise

What can Government do to Facilitate Engagement in Agro Business?

Governments over the years had proffered policy solutions to agricultural development challenges and indeed implemented a number of them, our dilemma is that the policies have not seemed to have addressed the food security challenge. A number of the efforts of government or statutory responsibilities considered effective for attaining agricultural development have not really been effective. Such include

- Provision of long term and low interest facility for farmers
- Promulgation of agro enterprise promoting policies
- Introduction of agro-based insurance cover for farmers
- Promotion of network registration scheme for farmers
- availability and affordability of critical agricultural inputs
- infrastructural support for survival of new agro enterprise
- Introduction of national award scheme for outstanding agro enterprises.

For example the Nigeria Agriculture Development Bank is today moribund despite several years of operation and several billions of invested fund. The CBN Agricultural Credit Scheme with such loft objective in which the nation had invested billions of her resources ended up as way of getting fund to agriculture projects without significant contribution to its development

What are the challenges faced by young agro-entrepreneurs?

The inefficacy of government policy support and involvement and the resolution of the issues listed above speaks directly to the challenges of our young agro-entrepreneurs. If the above issues are addressed, young agro entrepreneurs can look forward to sustaining their vision for globally competitive agro enterprise with sustainable returns on investment. It is important to note the cases of China, India, and Malaysia which all recorded salutary economic transformation as a result of successful agricultural revolution. They all first conquered hunger before they moved to high tech industrial revolution

The Landmark Approach: Welcome to Agro world-the world of unlimited opportunities!

Our quest as a University is to raise an army of agricultural entrepreneurs, and ensure sustainable commitment to agricultural endeavours by our graduates who will actualize the University's motto of "Breaking New Grounds" At no other time in the history of the African is the issue of the restoration of the dignity of the Africa Man more urgent than now, particularly as it relates to the restoration of Africa's Agricultural destiny. What better time can we be urgent on recovery except at a time when recovery seems irrecoverable?

As a private provision in Higher education, Landmark University is poised to bring in new innovations to driving an agrarian revolution backed up by entrepreneurial savvy and dexterous involvement of these graduates. A number of agri-businesses in Africa are forging ahead today, creating innovative business models to serve growing domestic and export markets. In the process, they are solving problems at all levels of the value chain (Juma, 2012).

We are determined to serve as a catalyst for driving revolutionary practices in agro business and entrepreneurship. Our aim therefore is to stir up interest in agribusiness and make Landmark contribution to make solving the nation's food security a reality.

This is well encapsulated in the mission of the University as here sated below

- Raising a generation of solution providers through a qualitative and life-applicable training system that focuses on value and creative knowledge

- Raising a new generation of leaders through a broad-based qualitative education built on sound biblical principles culminating in the birth of breadwinners, job creators and world changers
- Raising an army of reformers who shall redeem the battered image of the black race and restore her lost glory as these well-equipped graduates begin to build the old waste, repair the wasted cities and raise the desolation of many generations as pathfinders.

This is where Landmark University comes in; the application of new findings from research by engaging communal efforts as well as nationally driven entrepreneurial initiatives that go beyond theorizing and lip-service strategies, to real and applicable mandates for instituting new paradigms in Agriculture and enterprise

APPRECIATIONS

Let me begin by first appreciating God for His faithfulness in bringing us to this point in time in the history of our University, as we celebrate the 2nd Convocation Ceremony of Landmark University.

Let me also congratulate the Parents of the graduands of today, I say, hearty congratulations to you and commend your partnership with Landmark University in investing in the posterity of our Nation, Continent and world, as the Class of 2015 go out to make great and novel contributions to their world. You will indeed continue to reap great dividends from this investment. Distinguished Guest

Lecturer for the Convocation Lecture **Dr. Olatunde Agbato** the Keynote Speaker of today Prof Gbolagade A. Ayoola other distinguished stakeholders who have made today a reality, I like to express our deep appreciation to you and pray that you be rewarded.

A WORD TO THE GRADUANDS OF TODAY (THE DYNAMIC SET)

To our dear graduands; we are releasing you today to a world awaiting your arrival. The Land is waiting for you to be released to it, the revolutionary skills for instituting a new order to our nation and people as food security is driven with fresh passions and zeal. You are being charged today to go forth and give expression to the quality of Education you received while here at Landmark University. Go forth indeed as the **Dynamic Set** and show forth all that God has endowed in you to make a difference to your world.

Being dynamic means you will make a difference to your world, adjusting to different environments and challenges and come up with innovative, creative, brilliant solutions for seemingly impossible issues that may come up from time to time.

So set out, Dynamic Pathfinders, mark out new grounds and carve out new pathways, as you leave indelible marks on our earth, collectively championing a green and agrarian revolution in restoring our dignity and pride as a nation. Set out therefore, go forth and blaze new trails as you break new grounds!

**God bless the Class of 2015, the Dynamic Set,
God Bless Landmark University,
God bless Nigeria, and
God bless Africa!!!**

Thank you all for listening.

David Oyedepo, FNAE