



**Voices For Food Security**

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## **PRESS STATEMENT**

### **Commending Government's Efforts in Support of Yam Exportation**

The Voices for Food Security (VFS) Campaign heartily commends the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and particularly the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development for the giant stride of turning one of Nigeria's major staple crops (yam) into an exportable cash crop as part of the move to diversify the economy and increase the country's agricultural export base. To us, this is in line with the extant policies of the present administration of President Buhari particularly the Green Alternative – The Agricultural Promotion Policy (2016-2020). Specifically it is a step aimed at deepening the philosophy of farming as a business and further developing markets for Nigeria's agricultural commodities that have the potential to attract foreign exchange.

Indeed, VFS observes the importance of yam to food security and livelihood of Nigerians, particularly to the farming population, and also notes that Nigeria is the world largest producer of yam with an annual production of about 40 million metric tons, accounting for 70% of world yam production. VFS regrets that despite this position, the country has not been earning foreign exchange from the commodity, while countries like Ghana and Cote d'voire that produce far less quantity of yam have been dominating the international market with yam and getting significant foreign exchange from the commodity, and perhaps sourcing their yam from Nigeria.

VFS notes that in the recent time, selected Nigeria's agricultural commodities have been facing some level of rejection at the international market due to issues related to sanitary and phyto-sanitary standards. That Nigeria has been granted the license to export yam is therefore an indication that the country is overcoming some of the issues that act as impediments to becoming a major player in the international trade arena with respect to agricultural commodities.

VFS believes that this giant stride will stimulate increased production of yam among farmers in the medium to long term, encourage private sector participation in the yam value chain, initiate more research on yam and encourage special government interventions on the yam value chain; but equally observes that the smallholder farmers who constitute the bulk of yam producers in Nigeria are challenged by poor access to formal credit and lack of modern farming tools and equipment – all of which must be addressed. VFS underscores that although there are speculations of a momentary increase in the domestic price of yam, however, on the long run, it is expected that the increase in price will trigger increase in productivity.

While commending the approach, VFS however implores government to consider the concern that possible negative effect of the policy on food security may be real. This is in view of the fact that when the present promotion of yam export coincides with another policy of rice import restriction, the outcome may not be altogether palatable for the nation. In particular, given the expectation of yam acting as a substitute for rice as energy sources in the national food basket, thereby cushioning the effect of rice import restriction (at least in the short-to-medium term), both policies being implemented at the same time could trigger a cycle of price hike and demand shortfall in the market with the attendant effect on food security of the people. Therefore, given the greater importance of food security over and above foreign exchange saving or sourcing at the moment, VFS hereby urges Government to either consider a proper time phasing rather than simultaneous implementation of the two mutually reinforcing policy instruments – promotion of yam export and restriction of rice imports – at the same time OR the promotion of increased domestic production of both commodities in order to avoid shortage that could create a food security challenge.

The recent policy of cassava export promotion under the Agricultural Transformation Agenda of the immediate past administration is a case in point, whereby the tempo of outflow of cassava products could not be sustained for a reasonable length of time. This owed largely to the importance of cassava not only as a food security crop in the country but also to its high potential for value addition at home as well, leading to sufficient domestic demand pressure that soon stymied its export potential. Therefore, VFS urges the Agriculture Ministry, working together with the Ministry of Industry, to carefully weigh the option of promoting raw products for export against the option of value addition at home on a regular basis.

Furthermore, VFS appeals to government to ensure that farmers are provided with improved yam seedling, fertilizer and chemicals that will help guarantee increased production. At the moment, yam cultivation in Nigeria is dominated by small-scale farmers, who farm with crude implements and requires more support from government in order to mechanize the cultivation of yam and increase the scale of their operation. In this regard, VFS urges government to consider placing yam in the Growth Enhancement Support Scheme.

VFS further urges government to consider policies that promote value addition from yam through development of different product lines from yam such as yam flour, starch, noodles and pastas can also generate substantial foreign exchange for the country. Besides, regional markets for yam and yam products should also be explored concurrently with measures for up-scaling quality assurance and to ease the process of obtaining certification for such products.

VFS further urges government to strengthen the capacity of Regulatory Agencies and Trade Facilitating Agencies to readily track unscrupulous traders who may want to use yam as a conduit for drug/substance peddling. Such Agencies must at same time not constitute impediments to the export of the commodity. In fact, VFS advocates for a one stop shop for yam and related products certification to avoid unnecessary distortions and non-tariff barriers.

Finally, VFS urges the government to ensure that the yam export policy is sustained by avoiding the pitfalls witnessed by similar past initiatives such as the cassava export and cassava bread initiative. To keep up the momentum, market development and agro-industry development should be explored by identifying, apart from yam, other commodities for export promotion or

value addition with a view to maximizing foreign exchange consistent with food security of the people of Nigeria.

For: **The Voices for Food Security Campaign - VFS**



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