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Your Ref:.....Our Ref:.....Date:.....

MPR AGRICULTURE SKILLS ACQUISITION ZOOM CONFERENCE HELD APRIL 7TH 2021 SUMMARY PROCEEDINGS PREPARED BY DR. CHINEMEREM DAN ONWULIRI (MODERATOR)

Theme: 21st Century Skills and Resources to Leverage Agriculture Value Chain

MEETING NOTES

OPENING:

The Zoom conference space opened for participants at 5:30pm and the meeting started 20 minutes later at about 5:50pm Nigerian time.

The conference was packed in attendance with unique participants who logged in at various times during the conference from all across the world.

An Opening Prayer was said by Reverend Sister M. Zeta Uneze

INTRODUCTION

The conference was introduced by the MPR program coordinator- Dr. Jude Iheoma who gave a background of the MPR and the conference. He introduced the Moderator- Dr. Chinemerem Onwuliri who then went on to introduce other MPR officials and the Speakers for the day, specifically- Prof Joe Eberendu Ahanaeku- Vice Chancellor (Emeritus) UNIZIK; Prince Victor Mbalewe-Agricultural Economist and fmr Imo State SSA on Agriculture , Her excellency, Prof Viola Onwuliri-Minister of Foreign Affairs/ Education (Emeritus) and the Keynote speaker- Prof. John Kennedy Opara (Chairman/CEO CSS Group).

Dr. Chinemerem Onwuliri then invited the convener of MPR- Prof Eddy Oparaoji to speak to the conference.

Prof Eddy Oparaoji

welcomed the Participants and speakers. He informed the house that due to a personal emergency, Dr. Audu Ogbeh who was billed to chair the conference was unavoidable absent but had asked Prof J.E. Ahanaeku to Chair the conference.

Prof Joe Ahanaeku stepped in as Chairman and welcomed the participants. He then thanked the organizers for their foresight in putting together the conference focused on building the needed skills for achieving food security and development through modern agriculture. He also appreciated the focus on developing agriculture in Mbaise which by extension adds value to Igbo land and Nigeria as a whole. The Chairman opined that he was confident that Agricultural practice in the 21st century was a catalyst for achieving self-reliance of individuals and communities for sustainable development of our country. He opined that sustainability and an improved quality of life are guaranteed for all with the adoption of agriculture.

Lady Akwuago Rowland-Obom Gave a background on the philosophy and expectations held by **MPR** who were the organizers of the conference. This philosophy expressing the “words matching actions” principle gave rise to the theme “**21st Century Skills and Resources to Leverage Agriculture Value Chain**”. She stated that the theme was aptly chosen to situate practical approaches to resolving challenges with youth unemployment, food security and rural development, given that the adoption of modern agriculture practice skills will provide a multipronged solution to these critical societal challenges both in Mbaise and Nigeria as a whole.

Dr. Chinemerem Onwuliri

The moderator introduced the keynote speaker, highlighting additional details on the CSS Group which he leads, stating that they have interests in Agriculture, real estate, Aviation, Construction, IT and Energy. He gave additional details of the CSS Group’s integrated Farm in Nassarawa State, Nigeria that has a myriad of agricultural practice specializations and currently provides training in agricultural production and value addition to young persons, businesses and subnational governments across the country.

PROF JOHN KENNEDY OPARA PHD, OFR, JP

The keynote speaker thanked the organizers for the opportunity to speak to the conference and appreciated their efforts with putting the conference together. He emphasized that youth must be the major priority of everyone.

He then showed a video of the CSS Integrated farms and all the various areas of focus, production processes and products that they are known for. He stressed their mantra of “Nothing is impossible” in the CSS farm. Stating that as a result, they currently grow carrots and other vegetables that were erstwhile deemed impossible to grow in Nassarawa State. He stressed that the application of technology has made many difficult tasks both possible and easier. He highlighted the use of green houses, hydroponic technologies etc.

Some products and key processes included

- a. Rice Mills requiring large rice farms
- b. Bottled water plant

- c. Carrots
- d. Maize
- e. Soya Beans
- f. Cassava and Garri Processing
- g. Orchards that produce Oranges, Mangoes, Tangerines, Guava and Grapes
- h. Vegetables including Beetroot, cucumber
- i. Animal Feed produced by their state of the art Feed Mill

Key Processes like tutelage using onsite practical sessions and Agro value addition appreciation were all discussed. The farm has accommodation for up to 200 persons allowing for intensive residential trainings on various agro value chain activities.

Some processed and packaged products of the farm

1. Garri
2. Honey
3. Eggs
4. Dried Fish
5. Animal feed
6. Bottled water

He described the key aspects of the Agric Value Chain which included

1. Input- Supply
2. Production or Farming
3. Processing and Packaging
4. Marketing/Trading

Requirements for success identified include

1. Land requirements
2. Availability of finance
3. Strong partnerships
4. Time
5. Skilled professionals and dedicated workforce

Partners

1. CBN
2. Bank of Industry
3. The State of Israel
4. States in Nigeria including Bauchi, Bayelsa, Delta

Challenges: See screenshots of presentation slides below

Some challenges at each level of chair

• 1) INPUT SUPPLY

- a) Inadequate internship/apprenticeship
- b) Poor accessibility to quality seedlings and storage
- c) High cost of Agrochemicals and other agriculture inputs

• 2) PRODUCTION...farming

- a) Limited access to land
- b) Poor pest control
- c) Poor irrigation
- d) poor farm mechanization & other knowledge



* Construction * Agriculture * Aviation * Energy * ICT * Real Estates

Some challenges at each level of chair

3. PROCESSING

- a) Limited appropriate storage facilities example cold room chain
- b) Lack of technical know how in the use of technology and digitalization
- c) High cost power

4. Marketing/trade

- a) Lack of online experiences
- b) Lack of mentoring & technical support
- c) Lack of capital



* Construction * Agriculture * Aviation * Energy * ICT * Real Estates

Some Key ongoing activities at the CSS Integrated Farms

1. Construction of a Rice Mill
2. Onsite Residential Training of youth in practical agriculture skills
3. Irrigation farming for staple food products like maize etc
4. Commercial production of Starch including medical grade starch for pharmaceutical industry
5. Supply of improved variety of fruits (e.g water melon) and vegetables to major grocery stores
6. Production of bottled water
7. Growing of vegetables like cucumber in 21 days using hydroponics and green house techniques

A Question and Answer section followed with questions from the following individuals

1. Dr. Uzo Ihionu
 - a. How do we overcome the challenge of land in Mbaise given the parcelation of land by kindred?
2. Rev Sister M. Zita Uneze
 - a. How can one connect to CSS Group or its CEO to register for trainings?
3. Nnedi asked
 - a. How can we overcome the problem of inadequate access to Industrial Training slots by Mbaise undergraduates and how can CSS Group help fill up the lacuna
4. Ndidi asked
 - a. What advice does Prof JK Opara have for an individual who started a farm but is having challenges retaining talent or capacities on the farm
5. Atty Aky Mbalewe -Onuoha asked
 - a. How is preservation done in CSS?
6. Chief Collins Olorandu asked
 - a. What are required resources and potential areas of collaboration with CSSgroup for autonomous communities in Mbaise?
7. Obom Rowland asked
 - a. What will it take to quickly have a food reserve center in Mbaise?
8. Adindu asked
 - a. How can the southeast participate in the activities of CSS Group and what sort of collaboration is required especially with the government?
9. Prof Viola Onwuliri asked
 - a. How can online training for diasporans and locals be incorporated into the CSS Group programs?
 - b. How can the farm be replicated in Mbaise?
10. Asked by Dr Ndidi Oparaoji
 - a. How do you make Agriculture enticing for the youth?

11. Asked by Fidelis Mary Nwachukwu
 - a. What opportunities are available to the youth from CSS Group?
12. Dr. Vitalis Ojiegbe asked
 - a. What are the considerations for security given that the farm is located in an area that may have herdsmen attacks and crisis?
13. Prof Uzoma Igboekwe asked
 - a. Is the scope of the conference only for Mbaise indigenes?
14. Dr. Collins Ugochukwu asked
 - a. If any available internships and accommodation for undergraduates and graduates studying agriculture who are of Mbaise origin?
15. Engr. Kennamdi Onwuliri asked
 - a. What is the role or adoptability of Vertical Agriculture in places where large parcels of land are not available and how can CSS Group adopt such models to expand their activities to Mbaise, given the challenges of land availability?
16. Austine Uchechukwu asked
 - a. What support can be given to CSS Group trained youth who have ventured in carrot farming but have had poor results due to a lack of improved varieties and seeds?

RESPONSES BY THE KEYNOTE SPEAKER

1. The contact of CSS Group was shared with the conference and participants were encouraged to engage with, send in emails and other enquiries
 - Email: info@cssgroup.com.ng
 - CSSgroup Telephone: 07026033333
 - Website: www.cssgroup.com.ng
2. The keynote speaker suggested that MPR can take up the responsibility of training youth of Mbaise in collaboration with other partners and groups
3. He announced that the CSS Group will be offering 20 training slots for Mbaise youths to MPR
4. He suggested that the fight of insecurity is inexplicably linked to unemployment and as such employment generation activities like mechanized agriculture will curb insecurity
5. He said the MPR can liaise with CSSGroup on the issue of internships
6. He informed the house that the green houses are an example of vertical farming that can be implemented in Mbaise where land may not be available. CSS Group has used these green houses alongside hydroponics to grow seedless cucumbers and other vegetables.
7. He also encouraged previously CSS Group trained youth to link up with their alumni group and the CSSgroup when they face challenges as help will be provided to them.

8. He also suggested that local communities must start to utilize water sources and rivers in Mbaise for irrigation farming by connecting lands to the water bodies.
9. On the issue of preservation, the best approach he suggested was to process and package farm produce as this not only adds value to the products but it extends their shelf lifespan.
10. The use of cold rooms as well cannot be overemphasized as the CSSgroup has invested in a number of cold rooms and are using these facilities to preserve produce on the farm.
11. A second video on the CSS Group which was the output for a meeting in the United Kingdom where Professor John Kennedy Opara was honoured by the Oxford Academic Union, was shown.

Professor Joe Ahanaeku, FAS (GUEST SPEAKER 1)

The first guest speaker called in from Mbaise. These were the key summaries from his presentation

1. Skills: There must be a renewed focus on building skills for young people. The era of depending on a certificate that has no complimentary job value may have passed. Agricultural practice skills are also important as they prepare
2. Mentoring of young people must be given attention
3. Constituency projects of legislative representatives must echo this ethos of focusing on young people, their skills and need for mentoring especially in Agro production, processing and allied areas.
4. Agriculture requires a lot of discipline, persistence, patience and commitment
5. Success in agriculture requires collaborative efforts from our traditional, religious and sociocultural institutions.
6. He cited a specific example with the "ji-oba" specie of yam that is slowly becoming unavailable yet it has lower carbohydrate levels and is highly nutritious. He said the knowledge of the science behind food options will also be necessary to advise farmers on what best species to grow.
7. Prof explained that he has refocused his time after leading the UniZik on farming and currently has over 4000 yam plants on his farm out of which over 60% are the local "Ji-oba" specie
8. He thanked the organizers for their contributions and steadfastness
9. Also, enjoined participants to congratulate John Kennedy Opara on his achievements with the CSS Group and integrated farms. Calling for broader collaboration between him and the Mbaise nation.

PRINCE VICTOR MBALEWE (GUEST SPEAKER 2)

Having served as senior special advisor to the governor emeritus of Imo State- Emeka Ihedioha on Commercial Agriculture. Prince Victor trained as an Agric Economist and has an MBA. He has worked with governments to revamp agro investment projects and farms across the southeast.

His discussion focused on identifying and espousing the skills and resources needed for success in agriculture. He also discussed context specific agricultural practice that focuses on the local competitive advantage of the local population, job creation, income generation and practical implementable steps.

He discussed the following skills needed for success in agricultural practice

1. Business and planning skills including building of a good organizational structure with dedicated staff
2. Real Agricultural and farming skills
3. Financial Management skills including the ability to raise capital
4. Leadership Skills
5. Sales and Marketing skills
6. IT skills
7. Negotiation skills
8. Skills in Storage and Processing of Agric produce
9. Analytical thinking skills including risk vs opportunity identification and management skills
10. Networking skills

He discussed the following key resources needed for success

1. Land is a key resource and can be a major limiting factor
2. Capital including Funds, MPR grants, CBN programs- Anchor Borrowers Program
3. Subsidized Inputs
4. Agricultural resource centers close to the farm areas to provide
 - a. Practical training
 - b. Entrepreneurship training
 - c. Research insights
 - d. Extension services
 - e. Multiplication of improved varieties services
 - f. Government resources that are available
5. Government resources
 - a. Agricultural policies and roadmap
 - b. Accountability of government to the people with regards to the Agro budget implementation
 - c. Agro development programs
6. Commodity uptaker opportunities
 - a. Where businesses in need of agro products make inputs available to farmers for a certain amount of produce that will be used to make the agro products for the supplying business

7. Crops of comparative competitive advantage: Understanding and focusing on these crops is a key leveraging resource for farmers. These crops also have short value chain and are easily available and improvable in the local environment. In Mbaise and parts of the southeast, these crops include
 - a. Cassava
 - b. Vegetable/ Spices
 - c. Oil Palm
 - d. Plantain and Banana
 - e. Beans
8. An expanding market for food and raw materials including expanding market linkages that allow farmers get a better deal for their produce.
9. Risk Management Knowhow and services – Risk should be avoided, reduced, Transferred or Insured against
10. Water resources are key for irrigation farming
11. Family farms: Pursuing the family farm models is important as it is a means of transferring knowledge across generations.

Concrete Steps that can be taken by Mbaise Community

1. REPLACE OLD WILD PALMS WITH NEW IMPROVED VARIETIES
 - a. High Quality Improved varieties of Palm Oil trees can be obtained from NIFOR (Nigerian Institute For Oil Palm Research) and used to replace the existing Wild Palm trees that are replete in Mbaise and across the Southeast.
 - b. Planting 1000 improved variety Palm Trees per Community for about 40 communities can exponentially increase the amount of Palm fruits available to run up to 10 Palm Oil Mills throughout the year. The jobs and revenue from such endeavor will create huge economic benefits
 - c. On a hectare, 145-150 Oil Palm seedlings can be planted with a space of 8-9 meters
 - d. The use of improved varieties creates high yield with low saturated fats in the palm oil.
2. INVEST IN SMALL LEVEL ACTIVITIES
 - a. Farms
 - b. Agricultural technology
 - c. Skills for Young Persons
 - d. Ensure there is an ongoing generational shift of agricultural practices in the villages and communities
3. ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO COME TOGETHER AND WORK TOGETHER
 - a. Farm sizes can be increased if this is done
 - b. Risk management is better as risk is shared
 - c. Scale is better to allow the group attract funds from banks and CBN or BOI programs

- d. They are able to harness opportunities to get involved in good government schemes.

4. MPR SHOULD HARNESS OPPORTUNITIES TO GET INVOLVED IN GOVERNMENT AGRO SCHEMES

5. FOCUS ON PROCESSING ALREADY EXISTING AGRIC PRODUCTS

- a. The bulk of earnings in agriculture comes from processing, packaging and selling of final products to markets
- b. Value addition to agro products is an important area of focus for all agro stakeholders
- c. The more advanced or diversified the value addition, the higher the profit margins

A Questions, Comments and Answer section followed with questions from the following individuals

1. Dr. Uzo Ihionu:

- a. A need to encourage people to build living houses vertically
- b. This will allow the available land to be used for agriculture
- c. A need to address the issue of urbanization without urban planning in the rural areas

HER EXCELLENCY, PROF VIOLA ADAKU ONWULIRI (GUEST SPEAKER 3)

The former minister of foreign affairs and education was the final guest speaker. She discussed the following details that are summarized under the themes below;

Value Addition

She stressed the need for value addition for Agro products and shared a vivid example of a farm she visited in an Asian country. A huge farm that offered tours to visitors. They farm's final stop was the farm shop, where tourists were made to buy processed and packaged, value added products made from the farm produce. Value addition she stressed ensure that the farm stays profitable and that the produce are not given out cheaply to bulk buyers who underprice and undervalue farm produce.

Skills and Training

She highlighted the need for training, building knowledge and harnessing agro and allied skills that are key for success in Agriculture. She specifically mentioned business and sales skills as the end product of all agricultural activity was to earn some economic benefit and therefore an understanding of the market and business climate was key to success.

A minimum of 10 slots per LGA should be sort out from the CSS Group to ensure that each LGA in Mbase gets at least 10 youths trained.

Land in Mbaise

She identified it as a challenge and cited previous failed attempts to acquire land from parts of Mbaise for big projects that failed. She called for a change in mindset so that Mbaise indigenes and other investors can be encouraged to set up factories and farms that can help employ citizens of the community.

Partnerships

She called for MPR to partner with CSS Group and help resolve some of the local challenges so that the planned CSSgroup's Agriculture University can be brought to Mbaise.

A Questions, Comments and Answer section followed with questions from the following individuals

1. Dr. Jude Iheoma
 - a. Stressed the need for partnerships
 - b. Getting communities to adopt some of the basic ideas shared by the MPR conference
2. Chief Joachim Nwogu
 - a. Unemployment leads to insecurity
 - b. Agricultural investments can help address employment and thus fix the insecurity gaps
 - c. Focus on youth must be priority for all stakeholders to reduce vices- drugs, gambling, crime etc

POST MEETING PLAN/Framework (BY DIM CHIJIKE NDUKWU of MPR)

1. A framework for the Youth (Agriculture) Small Business Incubation Program is being put together to support young entrepreneurs who may also venture into agriculture and provide support for them
2. The goal of the Incubator program is to generate businesses locally that can control up to 70% of the market share in Mbaise
3. A Clearing house will be put together to implement the outcomes of this conference and specifically outline modalities for the collaboration with the CSS Group in order to link Mbaise communities up to training opportunities in the agro sector
4. Negotiations around the promised 20 slots for training of Mbaise indigenes will be pursued by MPR
5. More slots will be negotiated for to increase the 20 to at least 100.
6. Reverend Father Charles Ufomadu pledged to train 3 persons once the modalities for the CSS Group's training are made public

CLOSING REMARKS AND NEXT STEPS

Prof Eddy Oparaoji thanked all the participants, the keynote speaker, guest speaker, chairman and organizing team of MPR officials for the excellent job with contributing, mobilizing and putting the conference together.

He thanked all for their participation and patience and reemphasized that the framework will be finalized to itemize the key next steps.

VOTE OF THANKS

Was given by Dim Chijiike Ndukwu

He specifically thanked all key actors – Keynote speaker, guest speaker, MPR officials, technical support and the Moderator.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Reverend Father Charles Ufomadu said the closing prayer

CONCLUSION

The conference lasted for 5 hours and 15 minutes and ended at around 11:08pm Nigerian time.

About MPR: MPR is the premier pre-eminent Mbaize Public Policy and Business Advisory Council in the World, focused entirely on the development of Nigerian communities, through partnerships with private and or public sectors to produce and advance policies that will fast track the development of Mbaize, Imo State and indeed Nigeria, to a first world status.

For more about MPR visit: <https://mbaizepolicyroundtable.com/about/>

CSS Group of Companies, is one of the largest mechanized Agribusiness in Africa, with interests in Agriculture, real estate, Aviation, Construction, IT and Energy. CSS Group's integrated Farm in Nassarawa State, Nigeria has a myriad of agricultural practice specializations and currently provides training in agricultural production and value addition to young persons, businesses and subnational governments across the country.

For more about CSS Farms visit <https://cssfarms.cssgroup.com.ng/>