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DISCUSSION REPORT

(Paper presented by S.O. Olayide)

Professor Olayide was commended for a very useful paper in that it provided data for comparison between Nigeria's experience in agricultural development and that of the Caribbean. Like in the region, Nigeria had emphasized the development of large-scale producers at the same time neglecting the small-farm sector, the consequence of which was large-scale migration from the rural to the urban areas.

As a result, the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research had undertaken a study of this rural problem which has been growing in importance since 1955. Their major recommendations concentrated on a restructuring of rural and farm infrastructure with a view to providing basic amenities in the rural areas. Since 1967 the University of Ibadan had also been reviewing this problem on a global scale and had found that the situation had deteriorated so that it was not enough to have rural and farm infrastructure. They further suggested that it was necessary to generate employment opportunity in rural areas, to enhance farm income and to change the present farm size system.

The marketing board system in the big cities of Nigeria had significantly reduced farm incomes by the practice of paying farmers less than one-third of world market prices in most cases, to the extent that investment in agricultural enterprises were prevented. So far, the Government has not implemented any of the recommendations, which has been further compounded by the recent civil war.

Professor Olayide elaborated on the question of the underpricing of marketing boards by referring to the price of cocoa. In the world market the price was about US\$1,000 (£569) but farmers were being paid about US\$400. The Marketing Board's different operating costs and trading surpluses, Government producing stock and export duties have all been responsible for the farmers being underpriced. The marketing board system from 1948 to 1970 had really bled Nigeria's commodities, with the benefits going mainly to the secretaries and clerks of the Marketing Board. As a result, production of cocoa has been poor because farmers are no longer planting cocoa and though palm oil which starts yielding in four years has been introduced, because of the low prices farmers have not been prepared to plant.

Professor Olayide pointed out that the present extension service patterned after the British system was inefficient, and must be restructured and the approach for rural development re-appraised. This the University had started by working with farmers in a particular village in 1970 which had resulted in solid co-operatives being established and the yields of maize being increased from 600 to 3,000 pounds per acre over a period of three years. As a result of the success of this system farmers have increased their range of crops, and the Government is considering an expansion of the programme to other villages and also giving a further grant of N2m. According to Professor Olayide, all the students of agriculture graduating from the University must be given an additional three month's training in rural planning and be absorbed into the Ministry of Agriculture and given

an opportunity to go into the rural areas.

At this point issue was taken with the attitude of government organisations and people in implementing agricultural policies as if the farmers' role was the least significant in the society, although they were expected to produce food cheaply for the rest of the population. It was stressed that the farmers could not continue to provide for the rest of the society unless they were treated as perhaps the most important sector of the economy.

The International Institute for Tropical Agriculture, and other sophisticated research organisations were criticized as it was questionable what impact they had made on real agricultural development. The Military Government has, however, recently restructured these organisations with the formation of the National Research Council in order to make their contribution more relevant to the economy. Nevertheless, a major problem was in transmitting the useful work done in a manner understandable to the farmers, and also in finance. In support it was noted that not more than two per cent of the farmers have actually benefitted from the production of a new variety of maize by the IITA in the Northern State. It was stressed that if the Federal Government would give the amount promised, 40 per cent of the farmers would be reached in solving Nigeria's agricultural problems in the next five years.