



**ADDRESS BY PRINCE AJIBOLA AFONJA, CHAIRMAN, FIRST BANK OF NIGERIA PLC,
AT THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON AFRICA'S INDIGENOUS
STIMULANTS, ECOWAS COMMISSION AUDITORIUM, ABUJA, JULY 12, 2011**

PROTOCOL:

Alhaji (Dr.) Bamanga Tukur, President, African Business Roundtable and Chairman, NEPAD Business Group;

Professor Wande Abimbola, Awise Agbaye, Former Vice-Chancellor, Obafemi Awolowo University; Recipient, UNESCO Award of Intangible Cultural Heritage for Nigeria and Executive Chairman of this Conference;

His Royal Majesty, Eze (Dr.) Sir Maxwell Kanu, Eze of Ejezia Autonomous Community, Ideato, Imo State;

The Sponsors of this International Conference;

Members of Government and Diplomatic Corps;

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen:

I am pleased to join you at this First International Conference on Africa's Indigenous Stimulants, organized to encourage the exportation of specialty crops in Nigeria and Africa at large. As we might be aware, these crops can compete favourably with oil if properly exploited and managed. The crops include bitter kola and kola nut, which are medicinal and can be harnessed to promote healthcare, globally. I have been requested to speak on "FirstBank and the Business of Agriculture in Nigeria".

FirstBank is a major stakeholder in the Business of Agriculture in Nigeria. We recognize that agriculture provides a sure pedestal for sustainable economic diversification and growth. FirstBank's suite of agricultural solutions are custom-made and designed to meet the needs, expectations and peculiarities of various clientele in agricultural business in Nigeria. Some of these products enable our valued farming customers to key into government incentive schemes such as the Commercial Agric Credit Scheme, the Agric Credit Guarantee Scheme, amongst others.

As part of our Bank's effort in extending its services and expertise to the agricultural sector, FirstBank maintains a dedicated team of professionals in various agricultural disciplines. They assist farmers in drawing up viable farm plans, developing acceptable financing propositions and providing advisory services for project monitoring and implementation. FirstBank also operates an organizational architecture that empowers over six hundred branches of the Bank

to respond to the needs of various segments of the agricultural sector ranging from micro, small and medium to large enterprises. Our product offerings find relevance in the production, processing, marketing and input distribution components of the agricultural value chain.

FirstBank supports the agricultural sector through various advocacy initiatives in partnership with the Central Bank of Nigeria, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, Nigerian Economic Summit Group, Africa Rural and Agricultural Credit Association and several multilateral agencies. Our retail products under the “FarmersFirst” suite continue to generate a lot of enthusiasm and to stir competition in the Banking sector. We are also collaborating with the Nigeria NLNG Limited, Shell Petroleum Development Corporation and various State Governments in financing small scale agricultural projects to complement government’s effort in addressing the restiveness in the Niger Delta, through constructive engagement of youths.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, in view of the gamut of activities arranged for this event, I would not bother you with our bouquet of agricultural finance products. Please rest assured that you can walk into any of our branches and expect prompt attention to your agricultural needs. It might also interest you to know that in recognition of the active role of the Bank in the agricultural sector, FirstBank qualified as one of the two Banks originally selected to administer the Commercial Agricultural Credit Scheme (CACS) of the Federal Government of Nigeria.

With respect to Africa’s Indigenous stimulants, we realize that the indigenous stimulants are the catalysts for wealth creation in Africa, and we cannot afford to neglect them. As we forge ahead towards socio-economic development as a continent, we must be careful to ensure that these God-given stimulants are not destroyed. It behooves us as stakeholders in our continent to take the collective and personal responsibility for the protection, management and security of Africa’s indigenous stimulants. This would fortify our future economically and culturally.

I thank Dr. Alhaji Bamanga Tukur and Professor Wande Abimbola, Awise Agbaye, for their immense support for this endeavour. I also thank the organisers of the conference for conceptualizing the development of Africa’s Indigenous Stimulants Industry. I thank you all for your time and your kind attention.

May God bless you and may God bless Nigeria.

Prince Ajibola Afonja

Chairman, First Bank of Nigeria Plc

July 12, 2011