

**ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF THE NIGERIAN ASSOCIATION OF TECHNOLOGISTS IN ENGINEERING (NATE), TGST. AHMAD MOHAMMED YABAGI (FNATE), AT THE OFFICIAL COMMISSIONING OF THE RICE DE-STONING MACHINE DESIGNED AND FABRICATED BY NATE ON TUESDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2016 AT AKINRELE AUDITORIUM, FIRO, OSHODI - LAGOS.**

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted to welcome you all to the official launch and commissioning of the rice de-stoning machine designed and fabricated by the Lagos State Branch of the Nigerian Association of Technologists in Engineering (NATE).

Rice is valued as the most important staple food for over half of the world population; about three billion people eat rice everyday with Nigerians consuming nearly six million metric tons per annum; thus making Nigeria the leading consumer of rice in Africa. This has made us one of the largest rice importers in the world, importing roughly three million metric tons per annum [FAO 2016]. Nigeria spent a whopping sum of \$2.41 billion dollars on rice importation between January 2012 and May 2015 (Business News, March 21 2016). Indeed, rice has become one of the major consumers of the country's foreign exchange.

Fortunately, Nigeria has the right soil and climatic conditions for producing rice in abundance. Currently, Nigeria is the largest rice producing country in the West African Region and the third largest in Africa, after Egypt and Madagascar; indeed, Nigeria produces approximately two million metric tons of milled rice per annum. In spite of this, our production has not caught up with our consumption which has risen tremendously. A major reason for this is that most Nigerians prefer to consume imported rice brands rather than the local rice varieties. Why? The presence of stones in Nigerian rice grain which has remained a challenge for rice processors.

The solution to this challenge faced by most Nigerian Rice processors is the provision of affordable locally made machinery that can compare favorably with their foreign counterparts and meet international standards. This was the target we set ourselves when the Nigerian Association of Technologists in Engineering (NATE) conceived the idea of producing the Nigerian made rice de-stoning machine with locally sourced materials. We are proud to say at this point that that target has been met. The cost of imported rice de-stoning machine is above two million naira (₦2,000,000.00) while the production cost of NATE made rice de-stoner is about six hundred thousand naira (₦600,000.00) only. We have also by this stayed true to the Motto of the Association which is "Design, Build, and Maintain for Progress".

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, once we can commence commercial production of this machine, the presence of stones in our local rice will soon fade away and Nigerians can then gladly embrace our local rice varieties. This will have the following advantages:

- a drastic reduction in the importation of rice and the consequent foreign exchange savings.
- A boom in the demand for local rice thus leading to increased production and processing with attendant provision of employment for our people.

This is why we need to synergize and collaborate with relevant Government Parastatals and Agencies, fabricators and rice processors. In this regard we have set the ball rolling by holding meetings with International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and reached very useful agreements. It is also worthy of mention that FIIRO and Bond FM have indicated their interest to partner with NATE towards taking this initiative by the Association to the next pedestal.

I wish to appreciate everyone who has contributed immensely to the success of this project, especially the chairperson of this occasion, Dr. (Mrs) Gloria N. Elemo (FNATE), the Director General/CEO of the FIIRO. Indeed, she is a woman with tremendous leadership qualities and outstanding achievements, an administrator par excellence under whose watch the Lagos Branch of this Association has enjoyed enormous support.

In the same vein, let me appreciate our indefatigable Guest of Honour, the COREN President, Engr. Kasim A. Ali FNSE, FNATE for his unflinching support towards this noble Association. Let me also appreciate our Special Guests, **the Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture Sen. Abdullahi Adamu, the Chairman House Committee on Agricultural Production and Services Hon. Mohammed Tahir Mongunu, and a lady of substance, Hon. Bridget Obi for gracing this event with their esteem presence despite your tight schedules. Similarly, I want to appreciate** all Past Presidents, members of National Executive Council, South West Zonal Executive members, Lagos Branch Executives and all members present.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me once again to welcome you all to the official launch and commissioning of NATE made Rice De-Stoning machine and thank you for sparing your time to be here to witness this monumental achievement.

Thank you for your attention and God bless.