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90 million Nigerians are food vulnerable

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By [Everest Amaefule](#)

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About 90 million Nigerians are in a condition of food vulnerability, Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources, Dr. Sayyid Abba-Ruma, has said.

This means that about 90 million Nigerians cannot take the issue of food for granted as they could be susceptible to the danger of lack of this basic need of life.

Abba-Ruma, who spoke in Abuja on Thursday, at the inauguration of the Agricultural Empowerment Initiative for a New Generation of Nigerian Farmers and Entrepreneurs by Fidelity Bank Plc, however, said food insecurity was worse than food vulnerability.

At another event, the Open Forum on Agricultural Biotechnology in Africa, Minister of Science and Technology, Dr. Alhassan Bako, called for the use of biotechnology to address food insecurity in the country.

Abba-Ruma said Nigeria had been facing a number of challenges in its goal to achieve food security, including low application of technology, low yield of crops and poor financing of agriculture.

He said the policy of the Federal Government on agriculture was to ensure that a substantial proportion of the food items that were currently imported into the country were produced locally through backward integration.

According to the minister, the nation, in about nine years, used only 1.3 metric tonnes of fertiliser, which he described as less than the minimum requirement that would guarantee a good yield.

He also identified mitigation of the effects of climate change as another challenge that must be tackled in order to ensure that the nation could produce food that was adequate for its citizenry.

Managing Director of Fidelity Bank Plc, Mr. Reginald Ihejiahi, said the bank was promoting agriculture because of its belief in the critical role of the sector to the nation's economy and citizens' welfare.

The highlight of the event was the launch of four new products that aimed at boosting the nation's agricultural production. The products are the Trust Fund Facility, the Self Help Group Facility, the Cooperative Union Facility and the Agric Lease Facility.

He said, "These products are designed to pool strengths and resources of loan beneficiaries, promoters and banks for the purpose of funding agricultural activities or assets required for production along agric value chains."

At the agricultural biotechnology forum organised by the National Biotechnology Development Agency, Zaku said biotechnology was critical to enhancing the nation's food security.

The minister said, "Biotechnology products have achieved sales in excess of \$500bn per year and a growth rate of 24 per cent since the turn of the century. There are regions of 4,000 biotechnology firms across the globe and almost 50 per cent are in the European Union; 30 per cent in United States and the balance in Asia.

"In the past five years, China has increased investment in the development and application of biotechnology to 12 billion yen or \$1.5bn.

It is encouraging that Africa recorded substantial growth in 2008 with Burkina Faso (cotton) and Egypt (maize) planting biotech crops for the first time."

He said the forum was very important because of the vital role it would play in promoting biotechnology development in Nigeria.

Source: [The Punch](#)

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