

Nigerian tapped as leader by Forbes Magazine

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Dec. 3 (GIN) – For adapting new technologies to address the financial needs of farmers, Nigerian Minister of Agriculture Akinwumi Adesina was tapped as the Forbes Man of the Year 2013.

By introducing the e-wallet and using cell phones, Adesina said he was cutting out the middlemen and the losses due to corruption.

"When I came on board in July of 2011, I found a corrupt and totally inefficient fertilizer sector," recalled the minister. "The government was spending huge amounts of money on direct procurement, but less than 11% of farmers got the fertilizers.

"Some of the fertilizers paid for by government were never delivered to the warehouses. Some contained more sand than fertilizer while a large portion of the subsidized fertilizer found its way to neighboring countries where it was sold at prevailing market prices."

The same applied to the seed sector, he said. "Middle men and briefcase contractors masquerading as seed companies were doing brisk business supplying seed to government." But much of seeds sold to the government were bought corruptly on the open market. Grain was sold as certified seed.

In the 1960s, Nigeria was one of the most promising agricultural producers in the world. Export crops were the country's main foreign exchange earner.

Today, "Nigeria is known for nothing else than oil, and it's so sad, because we never used to have oil – all we used to have was agriculture," Adesina says.

The oil-rich country has increased food production through his Growth Enhancement Support Scheme by an estimated nine million tons in the plan's first year.

An innovative Electronic Wallet System - Africa's first - further allowed the farmers to receive electronic vouchers through their mobile phones for buying subsidized farm inputs, in the process eliminating inefficiencies and the middle man.

"To date we have registered 4.2 million farmers and about 900 agro dealers. For the first time ever, we can now base policy decisions on data, not guess work. I am truly honored and humbled by this prestigious award, which I dedicate to Africa's farmers," Adesina said.

UN secretary-general Ban ki-moon has named Dr Adesina as one of 17 global persons to help

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the world achieve the Millennium Development Goals in a team that also includes Bill Gates.