

## **Rural Development - Contemporary Issues and Practices**

### **State of Agriculture in Rivers State During Governor Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amachi**

**Dr. Harry Ariamebo Tobin**

Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development  
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

#### **Chapter 9**

##### **INTRODUCTION**

Rivers State came into being on 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1967. From inception, Port Harcourt, also known as the Garden City of Nigeria has remained the capital because of its year round vegetation that gives rise to its scenic beauty.

The State occupies a territorial space of 12,240 square kilometers and is located at the southern tip of the coastal region of Nigeria.

Its topography is flat plains, with a network of rivers, rivulets and tributaries. It has an estimated population of over 4,654,624 hospitable and business friendly people with rich, unique cultural heritage. Rivers State accounts for over 48% of onshore petroleum oil, the single biggest source of Natural gas in the country.

In addition to oil and gas, the State also has the following : agricultural, forest, mineral, water and other aquatic resources including a high biodiversity of plants and animals uniquely.

The Ministry of Agriculture has the responsibility of promoting farmer friendly agricultural policies with a view to achieving food security, eradicating poverty, developing the rural economy and protecting the environment.

This it does, through the creation of conducive macro-economic climate that stimulates greater private sector investment in agricultural and rural development, rationalizing the roles of the various tiers of government, reorganizing the institutional framework, improving incentives, to agriculture and promoting increased application of modern technology to agricultural production.

##### **State of Agriculture today in Rivers State**

During the year, the ministry of Agriculture carried out the listed activities in furtherance of its drive towards achieving food security in the state (Rivers State ministry of Agriculture, 2010).

**Land Clearing:** Farmers in the 23(twenty three) local government areas of the state were sensitized on land clearing and preparation by divisional agricultural officers from the department of agriculture between February and March 2010.

**Launching of Farming Season:** The farming season was launched at the Rumuodoinaya farm complex of the ministry in the Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Port Harcourt on 18th May, 2010. The Hon. Commissioner for housing and Urban development, Marshal Stanley Uwom represented his Excellency, Rt. Hon. Chibuike Amaechi, Executive Governor of Rivers State special guest of honour. Apart from re-emphasizing the importance of early land preparation exercise to our farming population, the occasion created the opportunity for farmers; through exhibition of inputs and services by both government and non-governmental organization, to avail themselves of recent innovations in agriculture and enlighten farmers/fisherfolks on the policy thrust of government and areas of emphasis for the current year. The ministry equally used the occasion to distribute farm inputs such as cutlasses, hoes, oil palm seedlings, cassava cuttings, agro-chemicals and fishing nets to our farmers/fisherfolks after the inspection of the mini exhibition and demonstration of the land preparation exercise by the representative of the Executive Governor of the state.

## **Rural Development - Contemporary Issues and Practices**

**Cassava Plots/Budded Citrus:** The crops division of the department of agriculture established 7(seven) hectares of TMS30572 and cassava variety plots at Atali farm. Bori farm is in progress, and Rumuodomaya divisional farm during this period has started harvesting of maize. Telferia, cucumber and Okro, sales were conducted state secretariat Port Harcourt.

**Training/Monitoring:** In the month of May, 2008, a total of 23(twenty three) military personnel from the Oshodi military base of the Nigerian army received training conducted by staff of the agriculture department on crop/livestock production of the Elimbu farm of the ministry, Obio/Akpor local government area Port Harcourt. Students on industrial training are benefiting from the training programmes in agricultural practice while routine farm maintenance and extension services are going on the 23(twenty three) local government areas of the state at instance of the department of agriculture and the agricultural development programme (ADP)

**Presidential Initiative on Rubber:** The ministry has already established 3(three) hectares of land each at Tabaa and Degema including 2(two)hectares each of the land at Ahoada East and Omoku as a merseries for the presidential initiative on Rubber., The federal department of agriculture has also released subvention of N2, 1 37,500(Two million, One hundred and Thirty seven thousand, Five hundred naira) to the ministry for works on the project (Rivers state ministry of agriculture, 2010).

**Sustenance of the Fish Sale Programme:** The ministry of agric has kept a float the fish sale activity at the secretariat complex which was established as part of civil service welfare package to ensure availability of fish at affordable prices of civil servants. The fish sold, is sourced from contact artisanal fishermen who in the past benefited from input loans granted by the government (Rivers state ministry of Agr.ic2010)

### **Fishes Frame Work Survey and Extension Services:**

This entails enumerations of:

- ❖ Fisher folks domiciled at fishing ports.
- ❖ Fishing-gears.
- ❖ Fish landing sites and settlements.
- ❖ Inland fisheries and aquaculture facilities.

Complete enumeration forms are immediately collected by the Federal Department of Fisheries (FDF) field staff are taken to federal department of fisheries and Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)office at Abtja (the sole sponsor of the project). Report and finding will later be forwarded to the ministry after collation, and data analysis.

### **Tripartite Management Arrangement for the coastal Fishery Terminal, florokirt-Port Harcourt:**

Between the months of April to June 2008, the ministry facilitated the process for the engagement of a core—investor for the terminal, which was established to provide services such as fish processing, storage marketing/berthing facilities for medium and small size vessel, slippage and repair as well as ice-blocks and water provision. In this matter the present government, the executive governor of Rivers State appointed the office of the special adviser to the executive governor on aquaculture and deep sea

fishing lion. Briggs Kurotamunoye (JP) who is in charge of the 5(five) trawlers (that was acquired) during the tenure of the former Governor of Rivers State, Hon. Celestine Omehia

**Forest Nursery:** Over 5,000 seedlings were raised by the forestry department in Port Harcourt and Bun forest nurseries from Jan-June, 2009 which shows an improvement from the figures for 1999-2008 of the previous years. The cuttings and seedlings, which were locally sourced,

## **Rural Development - Contemporary Issues and Practices**

covers ornamental/flower plants Irvingia, native pear, Guava, Avocado Pear, Cola acuminata, Cola nitida, coconut seedlings, mango etc. The hectcrage of nurseries are as follows:

|               |                |
|---------------|----------------|
| Ahoada        | - 3 hectares   |
| Port Harcourt | - 0.2 hectares |
| Bori          | - 0.5 heetares |
| Bonny         | - 02 hectares  |
| Emelego       | - 2 hectares   |

(Rivers State Ministry of Agric, 2010)

**Tractor Services/Delivery:** The Engineering Department of the ministry carried out fault diagnosis and costing of repair needs of our tractors and/implements. It has also effected delivery of 22 new tractors with implements from the federal department of agriculture premises at Owerri to the ministry in the state in the month of 2008. Currently the state government had built a standard workshop at Rumuodumaya farm Obio/Akpor local government area of the state where all the tractors are kept and also repairsin 2010.

**Accelerated Development of Oil Palm Initiative (ADOPI)** This project was contracted to RENTEC NV at Belgium and is sited in 16 locations across the oil palni belt of the state. Civil works have reached 90% completion in ten (10) sites with 60% completion has been achieved in the remaining six(6) sites. All machinery and equipments for the processing mills have been delivered while six(6) are about to be cleared from Onne PorL(Rivers State ministry of Agric,20 10).

### **Mini-Modern Rice Mill**

Four unit of the mini modern rice mill was installed in 2010 and test run for demonstration purposes at the engineering workshop at the ministry's Rumuodamaya farm complex. It is anticipated that these machines will be installed in all the 23 (twenty three) local government areas of the state in line with federal government drive towards increasing local rice production. But currently the rice milling machines are located in the four local government areas of the state

- (a) Isu Etche L.G.A
- (b) Kpoghor - Tail LG.A
- (c) Okwala - Khana L.GA
- (d) Ibaa -- Emohu L.GA

### **Prevention and Treatment of Animal Diseases**

The veterinary/lives stock department of the ministry provided ambulatory services in the state between Januai - August 2009 with a view to ensuring non-occurrence of the outbreak of animal diseases, this is in addition of free consultation services on daily basis to prospective farmers who wish to invest in livestock, piggery and poultry farming and counseling/prescriptions on animal disease prevention and treatment.

Some of the farms where these ambulatory services were rendered are:

- (a) Osa farmer-mgbuitanwo in Emolga
- (b) Midam farm (in Woji, Obio/Akpor) and
- (c) Chizarch farm (in Rumueme Obio/Akpor) all in Rivers State. Over 1, 804 animals were treated and vaccinated was in excess of 62,000 within the period (River State ministry of Agric, 2010).

### **State of Nigeria Farmers**

Rural farmers use technologies that have been developed throughout the countries and are the result of both their own research and outside innovations. Farmers have always made their selections being fully aware of the interactions between varieties and the ecological environment,

## **Rural Development - Contemporary Issues and Practices**

they have identified fodder species and medicinal plants and have rudimentary knowledge of animal pathology, and understand production systems, which generally preserve soil fertility (Ani, 2007). Presently in Nigeria, the agricultural sector is faced with several serious challenges such as heavy demand for food, declining cultivated areas due to population increase, declining agricultural productivity due to natural resources, degradation, climate change, and increased competition in international markets. The fundamental element in meeting these challenges is increasing production per unit area by adopting of improved agricultural production technologies and marketing techniques by farmers and other concerned entrepreneurs. This transition from resource based to technology based system of agriculture, however, places greater responsibility on the Agric extension sector, since it is a vital channel of new agricultural information and technologies to farmers as well as vital channel back to researchers and policy makers concerned with farmers problems and needs (Umali and Schwartz, 2008) The farmers have become more competitive those who farm for their own livelihood are prepared to invest in seminars and technology transfer programmes but demanding an investment add value to their enterprises. We are aware that general advisory services for the whole farm enterprises are less common that many farmers with similar firming enterprises or similar problem groups together form an association to solve their common problems (fruits, Animals, vegetable growers association dc) public and private extension support either directly or indirectly helps the association in planning and executing the various activities of the association. The farmers experience must be taken into consideration when proposing innovations. He almost always makes changes before adopting a technology, based on his level of technical knowledge and socio-economic constraints. How many technology proposed by research stations has the farmer rejected purely and simply because they did not correspond to his concerns? For the farmers, the process of innovation is ongoing, although it is sometimes scattered. Thus, frequent meetings in the field between researchers extension agents and farmers encourage. Communication and interaction which contribute to progress. Any extension system that does not promote these meeting lacks relevance and efficiency. The farmers ongoing training raises his level of technical knowledge. improves his capacities to analyze and synthesize, and stimulates his critical thinking and facilitates dialogue. Functional literacy could serve as an essential support tool in this regard (Ani, 2007).

Experience shows that the farmers' potential for progress is linked to his general level of education (Emma and Isife, 2004). It should be emphasized that a top-down approach should no longer be used for training rural farmers.

"Horizontal" information exchanges between the three categories of players, researchers, extension agents and farmers, are part of the overall picture. More over, horizontal exchanges between groups of farmers are highly beneficially and more efficient due to their comparable levels of perception of the situation.

They are less frustrating and more interactive, thus more enriching. Extension should promote visits between farmer groups, and should take care of the necessary logistics. This type of farmer participation in the training of their counterparts deserves special attention. Finally motivating the farmers to adopt compatible and eco friendly enterprises leads to effective recycling of available internal resources ensuring effective bio-resources flow within the farm which is bound to conserve soil, moisture and environment. And numerous problem of linkages include communication problems caused by different functions being performed by agencies under different ministries, inadequate ties with universities, lack of mechanisms to bridge gaps, and specifically, the difficulties of reaching a very large number of very small farmers, especially in the proper, rainfall areas where traditional technologies are predominant.

### **Situation in the Niger Delta**

## **Rural Development - Contemporary Issues and Practices**

The potentials of the Niger Delta region in the area of primary agricultural production are immense. It is important to re-iterate the fact that just before the oil boom of the 1970s, over 50% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings came from primary agricultural production. In the years preceding the gluts Nigerians were also not under the threat of starvation due to a gaping food production deficit as they are today. Suffice it to say that a good percentage of the food production that earned good income for the nation and secured her people from starvation was done mostly by rural farmers in the Niger Delta Region, with about 70% of the population involved (NDDC, 2005). The Niger Delta Region produces a variety of cash crops and food crops. The cash crops are palm fruits, from which palm oil and palm kernels are derived, rubber and Cocoa as well as groundnuts and pineapples.

Nigeria was once the world's largest producer of palm oil. This largely centred in the Niger Delta Region, hence, the area was named the oil Rive (SPDC, 2005) the oil palm remains one of the most important cash crops in Region, and could serve again as a major income earner the economic development of the region.

Successful examples of what can be achieved can be found in the oil palm plantations owned by the respective governments of Bayelsa Imo and Rivers State (Bayelsa palm, Adapalm and Risonpalm), and a few others owned by private investors. These investments have proved to be not just profitable to the investor but also valuable to the local economy through substantial job creation and linkages soap and pomade. indeed there are by products for every part of the palm tree. Although there has been some modernization of the industry, as in Risonpalm and Adapalm, the potential of oil palm has not been fully exploited. The two other main products in the region are rubber, which is mainly produced in Delta and Edo states and cocoa, which is produced mainly in Cross Rivers and Ondo States. The vast domestic and international markets for oil palm products, rubber and cocoa are yet to be fully explored by the region (NDDC, 2005). The major food crops that could be developed more efficiently are cassava, yam, plantain and cocoyam. There is also enormous potential for rice production, which is fast becoming a food crop in the region. The critical need is for modernization of production activities and the creation of the appropriate conditions to attract youth to agriculture, especially in the face of aging farming population. A number of important fruits are also produced in the region. These include pineapples oranges, grapes, lime, lemon, guava, pawpaw and bananas.

The extent to which the potential of the agricultural sector can be harnessed will hinge on the success of agricultural modernization in the face of serious deficiencies in socio-economic and physical infrastructure. Ecological degradation occasioned largely by oil activities, declining productivity and inefficient land tenure systems are also several problems hindering development. Even so, recent satellite images of the Niger Delta region indicate that in general less than 50% of the land available for growing crops has been put to use. This significant underutilization of such large area of land indicates a huge potential for agriculture.

### **Agricultural Processing and Rural Enterprises**

Poor presentation is one of the major problems of the agricultural sector. With abundant food production development in the region could receive a further boost from the industrial processing of such food stuffs. Cassava, yam, maize, plantain, etc can all be processed. Similarly, the various fruits can be processed into fruit juice. Cocoa can be processed into different kinds of beverage. As described previously, the processing of palm fruits is a major industry, palm oil and kernels have many industrial uses. The major partners here could be the private sector, the government sector, the NDDC, communities and the aid agencies.

### **Aquaculture**

## **Rural Development - Contemporary Issues and Practices**

Despite various major efforts to develop aquaculture the potential of the sector remains unrealized (SPDC. 2005) the fact that Nigeria is the largest importer of fish in West Africa is partly indicative of the failure of past attempts to harness fish resources and their management to meet market demand. The importance of the shrimp industry and the considerable scope for the development of fish farms in the Niger Delta points to a significant development opportunity that should not be passed by the region.

Demand driven private sector-led intensive fish farming (starting with catfish *Gariopinus Lazera*) can be embarked upon to close the wide gap between the fish produced via capture and culture technique and the quantity demanded. Additionally, public private sector synergy could be the key to unlock the potentials for fresh and salt-water shrimp/prawn culture.

### **Livestock: Production and Processing**

There is considerable scope for investment in modern methods of animal husbandry particularly of sheep, goats, chicken and ducks, which are presently reared through traditional livestock ownership and management. There is also scope for the rearing of other animals including Pigs and rabbits. Snail Production is another line of emerging productive activity. The recent ban on importation of poultry products by the federal government has increased supply deficits, raised prices and enhanced great potentials (and imperatives) for profitable local poultry farming.

### **Forestry**

The timber resources of the Niger Delta are diminishing rapidly along with other forest products such as ropes, snails and bush-meat, This creates the need to support the domesticated production of snails, grasscutters, mushrooms etc. there are a number of forest reserves in the Niger Delta but enforcement has been very ineffective so that the local people easily move into the forest reserve to harvest timber and other forest products. There is a need for the enforcement of law protecting the forest reserves. A need also exists for massive replanting of trees in the region. Education of the local people in terms of the importance of these reserves for their sustainable development is also important. The key role here belongs to the various states and local governments, and communities based organizations. The major constraints here are poverty in the rural areas, poor attitude to work corruption and Lawlessness.

## **REFERENCE**

- Ani, Anthony O. (2007) Agricultural Extension A Pathway for Sustainable Agricultural Development 79-92
- Emmah, G.N & Isife, B.I (2004): Constraints to Extension Activities of Private Agricultural Farm in South-Eastern Nigeria. Nigerian Journal of Agric-business &/ Rural Development 1(2) 30-33.
- NDDC (2005) Niger Delta Development Commission in Rivers State, June 2001 Sept. 3005, Federal Government Nigeria 1-4
- Rivers State Ministry of Agriculture (2010) Agricultural Development in Rivers State.
- SPDC (2005). Community Development, Handbook.
- Umah, D.I. & Schwartz, L. (2008) Public & Private Agricultural Extension: Beyond Traditional Frontiers, World Bank Discussion Paper No. 236. The World Bank, Washington, DC. USA