

A report on the peer review exercise of the agriculture sector of Ondo State

INTRODUCTION

Ondo state is characteristically an agricultural state with over 60% of its labour force deriving their income from agriculture. Thus, as an agrarian state, Ondo state has always been known for its immense contribution to the development of agriculture in Nigeria. The state is richly endowed with varied and favourable ecological and climatological conditions with vegetation ranging from mangrove swamps of the southern coastal riverine areas through the rainforest of the midlands to the derived savannah in the northern part of the state. The state equally has the longest coastline in the country which favors fishing activities in the riverine areas.

Agriculture in the state is characterized by zonal crop production pattern that is based on the comparative advantage of each zone. Going by this, the northern zone is noted for the production of food crops such as maize, yam, cassava, etc; the central zone favours the production of both arable crops as well as timber, while the southern zone support fishing activities and the production of tree crops such as cocoa, rubber, oil palm, cashew and forest trees like teak, gmelina and indigenous tree species. Ondo state is the leading producer of cocoa in Nigeria and this generates revenue of approximately 200m Naira annually. Also, the state is notable as the largest producer of timber and cassava

In spite of the favourable conditions for agricultural production, the state has not attained its full potentials in agricultural productivity. Therefore, to develop the state's agricultural sector, the state government in 2005 evolved an agricultural policy with a broad objective aimed at achieving an overall agricultural growth and forestry development on a sustainable basis. The policy seeks to attain self-sustaining growth in all the sub-sectors of agriculture and the structural transformation of rural areas, which are necessary for the overall socio-economic development of the state, as well as the improvement in the quality of life of the people in rural and urban areas.

The specific objectives include;

- i. self-sufficiency in basic food commodities in which the state has comparative advantage in their production;
- ii. production beyond immediate home demand so that surplus can be exported or supplied as agricultural raw materials to meet the needs of the agro industrial sub sector;
- iii. modernisation of agricultural production, processing, storage, and distribution through the infusion of improved technologies and management techniques to make it more responsive to the demands of other sectors of the state's economy, and,
- iv. creation of rural employment opportunities to stem the rural-urban migration of unemployed youths and protection and preservation of the environment for sustainable development.

In a bid to attain these objectives, the government embarked on the under –mentioned programs which were visited during the peer review exercise that spanned 6 days (14th-19th September,2010).

OBSERVATIONS

Ondo State Government /Leventis foundation Nigeria (ODSG/LFN) Agric Training School, Idoni.

The school went into partnership with Ondo state government in 2008 with the sole aim of impacting modern skills of agriculture to the youths (new generation of farmers) as a way of encouraging them into farming. The training is for 12 calendar months with 80 % practical and 20 % theory . Training cuts across animal production, crop production, rural enterprise and agricultural engineering. At the completion of the training, a certificate of participation is awarded.

The first set of students (85) that finished April, 2010 are awaiting their graduation ceremony but another set (86) are currently undergoing training. During the field visit, students and staff of the school appreciated the efforts of the state government towards ensuring that the youths go into farming but however expressed some faced challenges as itemized below:

- (a) More buildings to be erected in the school as there is overcrowding of students in the hostels at the moment (11 people to a room).
- (b) Construction of bore hole
- (c) Providing the school with tractors to facilitate their training.
- (d) Ensuring that graduation ceremony is organised for students who have completed their training
- (e) Ensuring that their training is put to use by providing them with incentives.

Seed Processing Unit, Akure

The seed processing unit of the Agric development project, Akure, was set up to produce high quality seeds of grains such as rice, maize and soya beans. Seeds from harvesting machines or hand collections will include a mix of stems, leaves, chaff, appendages and seeds of various sizes and quality. These extraneous materials must be removed to ensure a quality product.

The unit has a capacity of processing 5 tonnes of grains per hour. However, due to inadequate supply of seeds from farmers, the unit is highly under utilised as only 30 tonnes of seeds are processed annually.

Waste to Wealth Creation

This is an initiative of the present administration which focusses on conversion of wastes such as pure water sachet, empty tins etc to reusable products. One of the products of this project is the sunshine organic and organo-mineral fertilizer which is made from selected solid wastes generated in Ondo State. The wastes are collected from markets, communities, livestock, selected small scale industries, crop residues and are processed under carefully controlled environmental conditions. This is a laudable project especially coming at a time where heavy dependence on synthetic pesticides is discouraged. Benefits accruable from the use of organic fertilizers include:

- (1) Production of non-toxic food
- (2) Maintenance of the soil structure and increasing its nutrient holding capacity
- (3) Enhancement of soil fertility
- (4) Ensuring safe environment
- (5) Guaranteeing employment opportunity especially in the rural area.

One of the challenges observed at the project site, is that of marketability. Government should put in place systems that will encourage production and ensure its sustainability.

Raising of seedlings for urban/environmental forestry

Urban/environmental forestry is another commendable project by the current administration which is aimed at combating wind erosion, air pollution, climate change and beautification of towns/cities. There is a policy by the state to raise two million seedlings for urban/environmental forestry and regeneration of depleted forestry reserves of the state each year for the next 4 years. The Ministry of Natural Resources is saddled with the raising of seedlings for the urban/environmental forestry while the Ministry of Environment is responsible for planting and monitoring of the seedling.

In the last one year of the administration, 540,000 seedlings of various species of palms, trees, fruit trees and ornamentals had been raised in different locations within the state. These seedlings are distributed to the general public, institutions, at no cost to them.

Planting trees is highly beneficial in the face of accelerating climate change. As trees grow, they absorb carbon dioxide (CO₂), the main greenhouse gas responsible for global warming, thereby reducing the concentration of this gas in the atmosphere.

RECOMMENDATION

For purposes of sustainability of the above mentioned projects and actualization of set goals, government should aggressively seek private sector partnership to set up agro businesses such as plantations, poultry, cattle rearing, fish farming, bee keeping etc. in form of farm settlements or agricultural villages. These will not only generate more employment, expand and promote commercialization of agriculture but will also lead to self sufficiency and sources of raw materials for the industries including the waste to wealth creation project, seed processing unit etc. Commercialization of agriculture will also boost the 3 '1's initiative of the state government with special emphasis on the industry.

There is need to evolve a policy to gainfully employ the trained students from the ODSG/LFN Agric Training School for a period of time. This will further enhance their skills and prepare them better to go into farming. At the expiration of this, incentives such as easy loan with little or no interest with appropriate monitoring will be given to them to start their own agribusiness.

It was good to note that the state government is already thinking along this line as was made public during his interactive session with the Nigeria Governors' Forum in the banquet hall of the state government. The Governor said that an agricultural village of about 1000 ha is being set up at Ore and this will be replicated in several other places. The village will offer employment to at least 1000 youth farmers.

It will be worthwhile to introduce sex education to the curriculum of the Agric Training school to create awareness on the effects of HIV/AIDS especially on the agricultural workers. FAO (2000) estimated that out of the 27 most affected countries in Africa, 7 million agricultural workers have died from AIDS and more deaths are likely in the next decades. The immediate and long run effect is unprecedented food crisis. This is because HIV/AIDS is now a determining factor on food insecurity and livelihood incapacitation due to the growing evidence that the epidemic intensifies labour bottlenecks in agriculture, increases widespread malnutrition while

causing significant increase in rural poverty. Therefore HIV/AIDS is a development problem that demands urgent attention especially in this project of raising new generation of farmers.