

THE ROLE OF DEMONSTRATION FARMS IN ACHIEVING FOOD SECURITY IN THE IMO STATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Food availability and affordability cannot be fully guaranteed if any avenue for increasing food production is not maximally exploited. This paper therefore strongly suggests that the enormous amount of available factors of production at the local government system should be galvanized for the direct production of food through the establishment and proper management of demonstration farms at that tier of government. This land laboratory facility will additionally publicize the potentials and skills of the staff of the Agriculture Department of the LGAs.

Key words: *Food availability, food affordability, land laboratory*

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of agriculture in the socio-economic development necessitates greater emphasis to be placed in its growth and development (FMARD, 2001). In Nigeria, the policy that drives agricultural development aims at:

- ▶ Attaining self-sufficiency in production of basic food commodities;
- ▶ Producing raw materials for agro-industry;
- ▶ Producing and processing agricultural commodities for export;
- ▶ Using improved production and processing technologies;
- ▶ Generating gainful employment opportunities for the economy; and
- ▶ Rational utilization of resources and preservation of environment for sustainable agricultural production.

In a fundamental sense, the provision of food represents the most important reason for the existence of the agricultural sector of any nation (Oji, 2002). Food is the only contribution to the economy that is peculiar to the agricultural sector. This tends to explain why countries the world over carefully articulate principles that should guide activities in the agricultural sector with a view to achieving food security.

Food security refers to the availability and affordability of food. It encompasses national food sufficiency which is attained when a nation possesses the capacity to produce, store, import or otherwise acquire sufficient food to meet the needs of all its citizens at all times. Food

importation is a measure of last resort when domestic production and stored reserves are temporarily insufficient to meet a country's food needs.

By way of policy direction, focus is on demand-driven, needs-oriented, forward-looking activities that will lift Nigerian agriculture to meet the nation's immediate needs and also for export. To bring to fruition this policy direction, roles have been assigned to the three tiers of government and also to the private sector. The three tiers of government are namely Federal, State and Local Governments.

Local Government is the administration at the grassroots level meant for meeting peculiar grassroots needs of the people (Agagu, 1997). It is that tier of government closest to the people and is vested with certain powers to exercise control over the affairs of people in its jurisdiction (Lawal, 2000).

As a third tier of government the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development (FMARD) (2001), stated that the Local Government authorities are expected to take over progressively the responsibilities of the state government with respect to:

- ▶ Provision of effective agricultural extension service;
- ▶ Provision of rural infrastructure to complement federal and state governments efforts;
- ▶ Management of irrigation areas of large dams;
- ▶ Mobilization of farmers for accelerated agricultural and rural development through cooperative societies, local institutions and community-based organizations;
- ▶ Provision of land for new entrants into farming in accordance with the provision of the Land Use Act; and
- ▶ Coordination of data collection at the ward levels.

In relation to the service delivery activities, the FMARD (2001) stated that agricultural extension is an activity that should be carried out by the lower tiers of government. In carrying out agricultural extension services, the use of demonstration or model farms is widely practiced.

From the forgoing, it is obvious that food security issues of the nation are articulated in the agricultural policy document and mediated by such service delivery activity as agricultural extension through the agency of such facility as demonstration or model farms. This paper therefore focuses on the role of demonstration farms in boosting food security and argues that the Agriculture Departments of the LGAs should establish their own demonstration farms. The rest of the paper is divided into the following sections:

- a. Agricultural extension in the local government administration;
- b. The role of demonstration farms in enhancing food production; and
- c. Summary and conclusion.

A. Agricultural extension in the local government administration

According to Awolola (1991) the functions devolved to the local government by the 1976 Local Government Reform included:

- (a) Items which are the responsibilities of local government save under exceptional or temporary circumstances; and
- (b) Items which should be regarded as local responsibilities although state governments and other organizations may also perform part or whole of the functions if local government are not equipped to perform them initially.

The agricultural related functions under (a) are grazing grounds; in (b) they include agricultural extension.

Agricultural extension work helps farmers to utilize available resources in solving their current farm and home problems. It is carried out through offering educational and material services to the farmers using effective extension methods. Agricultural extension service stimulates farmers to effect positive changes in their farm operations aimed at more efficient production of basic food commodities.

In the re-definition of the areas of Federal Government intervention in, and promotion to agriculture for food security, FMARD (2001) noted that emphasis was placed on, among other things, streamlining extension delivery through integration of the Agricultural Development Programme, ADP, and state extension services. The FMARD (2001) also reported the putting in place through a joint Federal and State government collaborative effort, a nationwide, unified and all inclusive extension delivery system under the Agricultural Development Programme. Granted that the ADP is the agricultural extension arm of the State Government, the LG system, through the Agriculture Departments, shares some responsibility in agricultural extension services for increased food production. In discharging this responsibility ultimately aimed at attaining food security, the role of demonstration farms cannot be ignored.

B. The Role of Demonstration Farms in Enhancing Food Production

Demonstration farms are plots of land, facilities and structures that are used for evaluating, demonstrating and showcasing agricultural technologies for such purposes as increased and improved food production. In the context of the staff of Agriculture Departments in the LGAs, demonstration farms can be viewed as plots of land and or facilities utilized by designated staff to cultivate arable crops and vegetables in the vicinity of the LGA headquarters in and out of season. Depending on the competitive advantage of the LGAs, farm animals such as goats, poultry and fish ponds can also be kept in demonstration farms in the headquarters precincts.

Strictly, agriculture is not a sedentary enterprise. Its study and practice is essentially accompanied by an appreciable degree of practical demonstrations so that skills,

competences, and principles may not appear to be farfetched. The place where all the theorizing in the classroom in respect of new and improved as well as existing practices, knowledge and scientific skills in agricultural production is tried out and brought to real life is the demonstration farm. In the primary, secondary and tertiary schools, it is called the school farm.

The framework for the proposed establishment of demonstration farms is quite simple and is modeled after the Imo State Youths Farm Programme (ISYFP) of 1986 whose mission was to inculcate in the young people the idea that they could make a decent living from farming and that farming is a noble, attractive and rewarding occupation.

This paper proposes that the Agriculture Department of the Imo State LGAs be sensitized, galvanized, mobilized and re-orientated towards harnessing the enormous resources available to them towards the establishment of demonstration farms in their different headquarters. This is an idea whose time has come. The policy issues, precautionary measures and practices that make for successful operation of the demonstration farms for the attainment of food security can be articulated by the relevant stakeholders of the LG system.

Here are some of the roles of demonstration farms in enhancing food production and ultimately food security. As a facility, demonstration farms:

- a. Ensures the success of the food security campaign. Food availability and affordability will continue to elude us to the extent that the potentials of demonstration farms in the local government system are not tapped.
- b. Brings in extra revenues from the sale of the proceeds from the farms. The proceeds add to improved Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) of the LGAs.
- c. Inculcates the spirit of self-reliance through agriculture and thus reduces unemployment. This spirit of self-reliance can be imbibed by those who are directly engaged in the day-to-day activities in the demonstration farms. These officials are likely to be pleasantly surprised at what their extra efforts can bring in terms of food production. The same can also be said of excited and interested passers-by who may be sufficiently motivated to start an own backyard farm for subsistence production and food security at large.
- d. Serves as skill acquisition centre for young adults who may desire to make a career in agriculture. This is supported by the principle of learning and training environment being identical with that in the world of work to the extent that the demonstration farms are well run and established to attract apprentice farmers by way of skill acquisition.
- e. Serves as excursion destination for primary, secondary and even university students engaged in agricultural pursuits. A properly established demonstration farm is naturally a reference point, a data base for both staff and students engaged in the study of agriculture.

- f. Serves as centres for evaluation, demonstration and showcasing of agricultural technologies for improved food production. This is in addition to the pedagogic purposes of the demonstration farms as a land laboratory.
- g. Enhances rational utilization of available but idle factors of food production in the local government system. Resources which are mobilized for the effective running of demonstration farms would have otherwise been idle or at worst mismanaged. It is therefore economical to channel available resources to the effective management of demonstration farms.
- h. Promotes desirable attitudes habits and understanding regarding agriculture such as dignity of productive labour.
- i. Publicizes the potentials and skills of the staff of the Agriculture Department of the LGAs. This has the possibility of making them more visible to and more marketable by members of the public who may require their services on professional basis.
- j. Improving background knowledge in agriculture in general and food production in particular. This is true for both the staff of the Agriculture Department and any members of the public who may turn up for instruction and consultations at the demonstration farms.
- k. It is an avenue for carrying out agricultural extension services for increased food production.

The role of demonstration farms in the attainment of food security tends to be inexhaustible. For one thing, the professionals in the Agriculture Department of the LGAs need it because other professionals also have their own laboratories, theaters, workshops and so on where they practice their various trades.

SUMMARY

The agricultural policy thrust primarily aims at attaining self sufficiency in production of basic food commodities. Clearly defined roles have been assigned to the Local Government system to aid the actualization of this initiative. The Local Governments are expected to, by degrees, take over the responsibilities of the State Government with respect to provision of effective agricultural extension service. In carrying out the agricultural extension service, demonstration farms are a necessary facility. It enhances food production and ultimately food security. In line with this realization, the paper has called for the establishment of demonstration farms in the LGA headquarters of the state to aid the achievement of food security.

CONCLUSION

The role of demonstration farms in achieving food security in Imo State Local Government system cannot be overemphasized. Establishment of demonstration farms will enhance the utilization of available but idle factors of food production in the local government. Furthermore, demonstration farms will publicize the potentials and skills of the staff of the Agriculture Department of the LGAs.

Foxes have holes, birds of air have nests; carpenters have workshops, doctors have clinics, sportsmen and women have playgrounds, therefore the LGA staff of Agriculture Department should establish their demonstration farms. Let us collectively resolve and refuse to see any factor as an obstacle towards the realization of this noble objective, but rather as a stepping stone towards the animation of our inner conviction that agriculture is anything but a sedentary enterprise.

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