

# Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project Highlights

September 2018

Scholar Program 31

## THE FUTURE OF AFRICA: MAKING “AFRICANISTS”, DRIVER OF OUR OWN DEVELOPMENT

It is often said that “*The future of Africa is in their own hands.*” I remember listening to the current President of Ghana, Mr. Nana Akufo-Addo, when the President of France, Emanuel Macron, visited Ghana. He argued vehemently that the catalyst that will drive African development is within Africa. And to me, part of that catalyst would be highly-skilled young graduates. In spite of the enormous natural resources at her disposal, Africa’s development, is still not a great sight to behold. However, I believe that when a new generation of youth in Africa (that I tag “Africanists”) are given the needed impetus and tools, they can drive that much awaited change that Africa so desperately needs now.

I grew up in a rural village in the Southern part of Nigeria. My parents were not very educated but wanted better education for their children. I did not have the luxury of a very good educational background. Over the years however, I have been privileged to receive the needed boost when it matters most in my academic journey. One boost is the privilege afforded to me by the Feed the Future (FtF) Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project (NAPP) to acquire some needed skills and tools, not only to make myself better but to support the development of other aspiring graduates and scholars in agricultural disciplines in Nigeria. One of the objectives of FtF NAPP is to train young Nigerian graduates and scholars in empirical methods and tools for a maximum of two semesters (PhD students) and one semester (Master students) at Michigan State University (MSU). The students then go back to Nigeria to be the catalyst and agents of change, first in their department and faculties of agriculture and then within the agricultural sector in Nigeria.

It is no gainsaying the fact that, currently, several universities in Africa (Nigeria inclusive) have a dire need to revamp academic curricula and empirical tools for providing evidence-based analytical work that adequately informs public policy including agricultural policies.

When I visited MSU, I saw for the first time the gap between Universities abroad and those in Nigeria in terms of resources, tools and methods that students are exposed to. This difference was clear. But, I also knew that there were talented and brilliant folks who lack these basic resources to thrive in their academic work and profession back in

Nigeria. When exposed to these modern tools and methods, these folks will surely thrive excellently. So, I was enthused when I was selected as one of the Visiting Scholars for my cohort to study at MSU.

Just within two weeks of my arrival at MSU in Spring 2018, I knew that my life had been positively changed forever. For example, apart from learning about new tools and methodologies in my field (Agricultural Economics), I was exposed to hands-on knowledge of relevant statistical software (R and STATA) for my work and trained for about three months. I went back to Nigeria to co-facilitate R training for about 20 graduate students and faculty members from different Nigerian Universities. I was trained as one person (at MSU through NAPP) and in less than two months, I was able to transfer some of these skills to about 20 other graduate students. My work through the FtF NAPP project also supports agricultural policy development in Kebbi State – a major food-producing State in Nigeria.



R Training session for graduate students in Nigeria. (Author is 3rd from right)

My last semester at MSU is speeding by and I plan to go back to Nigeria to transfer new knowledge and skills to several other graduate students and scholars in Universities in Nigeria. Hopefully, this will be part of the “kick-start” to the birth of a new set of highly skilled pool of graduate students in agriculture who are able to conduct rigorous, evidence-based researches that will inform agricultural policies in Nigeria.

Arguably, attainment of food security in Africa and many developing countries is a function of the depth of the capacity of Africanists working in Africa. The current President of the African Development Bank (AfDB), Dr Akinwunmi Adesina has proved this and, FtF NAPP is helping to make progress in this regard in Nigeria.

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This work is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Feed the Future initiative through the Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project, Associate Cooperative Agreement Number AJD-620-LA-15-00001. The contents are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

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