TRAINING AND MENTORING ON R NOW EXTENDED TO STAFF OF MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES, MINNA, NIGER STATE

The Nigerian Agricultural Policy Project (NAPP) Scholars extended training and mentoring on the use of R to the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources Minna, Niger State, 24-28th of February 2020. Three Scholars trained at Michigan State University (Hephzibah Obekpa, Balaraba Sule and Dr. Charles Olumba) were entrusted with the task of training the staff on the use of R software. The software will be used for statistical analysis to support evidenced based work at the Ministry that will contribute positively to the overall policy process in Niger State and Nigeria at large.

Balaraba Sule (NAPP Scholar) providing support to participants during the training.

The training was held in the ministry's conference hall with the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries permanent secretary Dr. Wasa Jonathan K. giving the opening remarks. He encouraged participants to leverage the opportunity to build their capacity for analysis with R. Such capacity will be put in use for work in the ministry and for their personal research. For those who would further their education, the knowledge and skills gained will be put to additional use.

Comments from the pre-evaluation exercise indicated that participants expected to have the ability to use R for their analysis, at the end of the training. The permanent secretary assured all present that the training effort would not be wasted. He challenged his staff to put in their best throughout the period of the training.

None of the participants had previous exposure to R software. Some had used Excel, SPSS and STATA but the licensing cost posed a challenge to their legal acquisition. Twenty-five participants (21 males and 4 females) from six different ministries, departments and agencies in Niger State (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries, Niger State Agricultural and Mechanization Development Authority, Fadama, Women Affairs, Planning Commission and Bureau for Statistics) were trained. The participants were thrilled and indicated that they would appreciate if the training lasted more than a week.

Dr Olumba Charles (NAPP Scholar) supervising participants during an exercise.

What was entailed in the training include introduction to R, basic R structures and commands, managing R packages, data management in R, graphics in R, Regression, correlation and ANOVA amongst others. After training participants to use R, they were given assignments that covered modules taught in class like graphics and regressions to work through for 2 weeks after the training as a strategy to encourage experiential learning. A WhatsApp group account that allows users to communicate by sharing messages, documents and videos very inexpensively was created to further guide and assist participants with challenges as they continue to use R in a mentored mode. The WhatsApp group

account is a very unique platform that allows the trainers to continue mentoring participants as long as they choose to remain in the group.

By Mrs. Hephzibah Onyeje Obekpa

Hephzibah Obekpa (NAPP Scholar) helping out participants during the training.

This is further evidence that the NAPP Scholars' Program is an innovative and worthwhile USAID investment. The value of scholars' continued inputs to fill human capacity gaps of many Nigerians will lead to stronger support for the policy process across the country.