

Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project Highlights

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Scholar Program 62

NIGERIA AGRICULTURAL POLICY PROJECT SCHOLARS' PROGRAM: OPPORTUNITY FOR EMPOWERMENT, PROFESSIONAL LINKAGES AND REPLICATION OF BEST PRACTICES

The Feed the Future Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project (NAPP) is a five-year initiative funded by the Nigeria Mission of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and implemented jointly by Michigan State University (MSU) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). Embedded in the initiative, is a Visiting Scholars' Program. Following a selection process, involving prequalification and interviews, my Ph. D. Student (at the Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State, Nigeria), SULE, Balaraba Abubakar was one of the three Scholars selected to participate in the 2019 Scholar Program.

The Visiting Scholars' Program is a capacity strengthening component of NAPP. It is intended to strengthen national capacity for greater evidence-based policy processes in agriculture by enhancing the capacity of Nigerian researchers to undertake and make widely available relevant evidence-based policy analysis. Scholars are exposed to current international best practices in micro-econometric research methods. This provides them a firm grounding in the key elements of research and questionnaire design, data collection and analysis of multi-topic household surveys for international development issues. The scholars also had multiple engagements with program's stakeholders to identify their needs and priorities. These stakeholders include Ministries, Departments, Agencies (MDAs), Academia and targeted Value Chain Actors in the six USAID Feed-the-Future focus states, including Niger State. The intervention also provides support to scholars in finalizing their PhD theses.

The initial engagement in Niger State was with relevant Ministries (Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Education, Health, Women Affairs) and Academia. This was followed by two semesters of study for the scholar and a month stay at MSU for me as the supervising Nigerian faculty. From the scholar's end, the multiple interactions with the Ministries enhanced her capacity to identify stakeholders' needs and priorities in addition to articulating thoughts for policy brief development. This aspect of the program

culminated in the preparation and dissemination of four policy briefs in English and Hausa languages with the view to create awareness and provide relevant information for the targeted project beneficiaries to address identified challenges.



To deepen the theoretical base of the scholar, four courses (3 units each) were taken at MSU; two each during the spring and fall semesters. Critical among these courses were the Agricultural Benefit-Cost Analysis (AFRE 865) and Empirical Methods in Field Research in Developing Countries (AFRE 874). According to the scholar, the courses deepened her capacity with identification strategies for empirical research and the fundamentals of economic analysis. During the course work, the cordial teacher-student relationship was a key take home.

In the area of PhD thesis support, the scholar had the opportunity to work with Professor Eric Crawford of MSU as mentor. This interaction clarified grey areas in the preparation of her thesis, particularly with regards to adjustments and derivation of economic costs, interpretations of specific aspects of the Policy Analysis Matrix (the key analytical tool for the thesis). The arrangement provided me a better understanding of the

workings of academic support and consultancy at MSU, while the scholar affirmed that she acquired the requisite skills for her financial and economic analysis.

Another area of empowerment was the exposure to Agricultural Food and Resource Economics departmental seminar series. This comprised of the “Brown Bag”¹ Seminar and the final seminar presentation. My take, and that of the scholar, is that these fora provided inputs and enriched the quality of her PhD thesis. The Program also exposed the scholar and myself to professionals and students of varied nationalities across the globe, working in several related research fields.

Specifically for me, the MSU engagement widened my research scope, provided exposure to best practice teaching methodologies and the current focus of an ideal Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness. The visit also enhanced linkages and provided opportunities for collaboration with international researchers and institutions. Specifically, I was exposed to agricultural innovations and technologies, including robotic milking, livestock and pasture management and sustainable environmental practices at MSU’s Kellogg Biological Station, in addition to observing various urban agriculture interventions and strategies employed in Detroit MI.

From the industry engagement and consultancy angles, my close interactions with thematic professionals at MSU unearthed my skill gaps, broadened my skills and enhanced professional networking.

Looking beyond the Program, we have used the opportunity of the MSU visit to harvest inputs for adoption at our home University. In addition, we are in the process of developing an Economic and Policy Analysis Manual, intended for use in support of capacity building efforts for targeted stakeholders in the MDAs and Academia, after the closure of the Project in 2020.

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¹ Brownbag refers to people attending the seminar and eating their lunches that are carried in brown bags. This emphasizes the informal and collegial atmosphere of the meetings.