

Farmers' Perception of Agricultural Development Activities of Local Government Councils in Southeast, Nigeria

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Abstract: *Agricultural and rural development responsibilities are major activities of Local Government Councils (LGCs) in Nigeria. The study ascertained present agricultural activities of Local Government Areas in Southeast, Nigeria as observed by farmers, ascertain agricultural activities carried out by farmers under various agricultural development agencies and identified challenges that militate against performance of LGCs in agricultural development. Questionnaire/interview schedule was used to collect data from 240 farmers selected using multistage and simple random sampling technique. Data were analyzed using frequency, mean score and standard deviation. Agricultural development activities of LGCs include buying and distributing fertilizer, acquisition of land for agricultural programmes such as Growth Empowerment Support Scheme, production of livestock, tree planting programme, animal feed formulation, educating farmers on safe handling of pesticides and insecticides, among others. The major factors inhibiting achievement of LG agricultural activities include poor staff remuneration and allowances (M= 2.9), poor logistic support for field staff (M= 2.8), poor and shortage of skilled manpower/extension personnel (M= 2.7) and poor job description of staff (M= 2.6), among others. The study therefore highlights the need for the LGCs' administration to improve on constitutionally prescribed agricultural development activities in order to enable farmers to be beneficiaries thus increasing productivity as well as raising their standard of living.*

Keywords: *Local government councils, agriculture, development, farmers, challenges.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian 1976 guidelines defined Local Government as a legally established representative council empowered to initiate and direct provision of services, determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the State and Federal governments in their areas. Local government is a government at the grassroots level of administration meant for meeting peculiar grassroots need of the people (Arowolo, 2008). According to Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) (1976), the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides in part 11, section 7 (1) - (6) for the establishment of the local government system as the third tier of government in Nigeria. The section goes further to provide for powers, functions, composition and finances of the Local Government Councils (LGCs) to be established thereof.

Nwalieji, Igbokwe & Nsoanya (2012) enumerated the functions of a LGC in the area of agriculture to include establishment, maintenance and regulation of slaughter houses, slab, markets, gardens, parks; participation in the development of agriculture and natural resources, other than the exploitation of minerals. Additionally, according to the New Nigeria Agricultural Policy of 2001, the following are also agricultural roles of LGCs (i) provision of an effective extension services; (ii) provision of rural infrastructure to complement federal and state governments' efforts; (iii) management of irrigation areas of dams; (iv) mobilization of farmers for accelerated agricultural and rural development through cooperative organizations, local institutions, and communities; (v) provision of land for new entrants into farming in accordance with the provision of the Land Use Act; and (vi) coordination of data collection at primary level. It was envisaged that local government could help to provide rural

infrastructures such as feeder roads, health centres, water and electricity, build more primary and secondary schools, provide agro-services to mention but a few. Agriculture Department which is one of the six standardized departments of LGC is responsible for the overall agricultural development such as crops, livestock, fisheries and agro-forestry/forestry plantation development (Islamic Development Bank, 2007).

Local governments have critical role to play in national agricultural development to ensure self-sufficiency and sustainable food production in Nigeria. In order to promote and sustain grassroots development in Nigeria, LGs were created as the third tier of government whose objective is to ensure effective, measurable and efficient service delivery to the people. However, many assessment studies on the effectiveness of LG governance show that things have not changed for the better in the quality of governance at this stratum of government (Ejekwumadu, 2009). Series of Nigerian government agricultural and rural development interventions have failed to noticeably affect the lives of rural farmers in terms of increased agricultural production. The author reported that outside late payment of workers' salaries, which are usually paid in arrears, many of the LGCs cannot show any meaningful projects executed between 1999 to date, notwithstanding the monumental inflow of allocations from the federal government. The general observation is that the performance of agriculture in Nigeria has not been able to match the expectation ascribed to the sector in the development process. Consequently, the pertinent questions that guided this study include: do LGCs support farmers in agricultural training? What are the current agricultural activities of LGCs? What are agricultural activities carried out by farmers under various agricultural development agencies operating in LGCs? What are the challenges militating against the achievement of agricultural roles of LGCs?

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of the study was to ascertain farmers' perception of agricultural development activities of Local Government Councils in Southeast, Nigeria.

Specifically, the Study was Designed to:

1. ascertain current agricultural activities of LGCs in Southeast Nigeria;
2. ascertain agricultural activities carried out by farmers under various agricultural development agencies; and
3. identify challenges militating against effective performance of LGCs in agricultural development.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Southeast, Nigeria. Southeast, Nigeria comprises five states, namely; Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. In the first stage, three (3) states namely: Abia, Anambra and Enugu were randomly selected from the five states. Secondly, five (5) LGAs that were participating in different agricultural programmes such as Fadama III project and Commercial Agricultural Development Programme (CADP), etc. were purposively selected from each of the three states. This gave a total of 15 LGAs. In the third stage, four (4) town communities were randomly selected from each LGA. In the fourth stage, four (4) farmers were randomly selected from each of the communities. This gave a total of 16 farmers from each of the 15 LGAs. Generally, a total of 240 respondents were interviewed and used for analysis. Questionnaire/interview schedule was used for data collection. Respondents were asked to indicate the agricultural activities they are presently involved in; a list of agricultural development programmes/agencies such as NSPFS, RTEP etc. was provided and the respondents were asked to list their activities under each agricultural development programmes/projects that they participated in. From a list provided, respondents were also asked to indicate on a 3-point Likert-type scale the seriousness of factors inhibiting performance of LGAs in agricultural development. Some of the factors included poor staff remuneration and allowances, low extension agent: farmer ratio, poor coverage, etc. Their response categories were, very serious = 3, serious =2; and not serious =1. A cut off point of 2.0 was obtained and the respondents' mean score was also obtained for each item. Any mean score ≥ 2.0 was regarded as very serious factor while any mean score < 2.0 was regarded as not serious. Data were analyzed using frequency, mean score and standard deviation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Current agricultural activities of LGAs in Southeast Nigeria

Table 1 shows that current agricultural development activities of LGCs in Southeast, Nigeria as observed by farmers include buying and distributing of bags of fertilizer and sale of crop seedlings,

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acquisition of land for agricultural programmes such as Growth Empowerment Support Scheme (GESS), production of livestock such as poultry, snail, fish, pig, etc.; tree planting programme; feed formulation for pig and fish production, educating farmers on safe handling of pesticides and insecticides; Prestes des petits Ruminant (PPR) vaccination for sheep and goat; control of swine fever in pigs; grass cutter production; group formation of farmers. Others include food and cash crop production, agricultural farm exhibition, provision of staff to help pilot agricultural programmes such as National Programme for Food Security (NPFS), counterpart funding of Fadama projects and citrus plantation.

Table 1 also reveals that Enugu State respondents had listed more agricultural activities performed by LGCs than other states. However, the following agricultural roles were listed by respondents in the three states as their activities: buying and distributing bags of fertilizer and sale of crop seedlings, acquisition of land for agricultural programmes such as Growth Empowerment Support Scheme (GESS) and poultry production. The study revealed that presently the major agricultural roles of LGCs centre mostly on provision of farm inputs. A study carried out by IFPRI reported in Obiechina (2012) stated that up to 46.4% of all farm households in Nigeria use modern agricultural inputs categorized as improved seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Poultry production is the private business of the LG Agriculture and Veterinary Department that do not have any impact on the farmers. Most of the agricultural roles stipulated by New Nigerian Agricultural Policy of 2001 were neglected. Examples of such activities include provision of effective extension service, provision of rural infrastructure, management of irrigation areas of dams, provision of land for new entrants into farming in accordance with the provision of Land Use Act, assisting and working hand in hand with extension agents to promote viable agro-based projects such as snail and fish farming and protecting the rights of members as producers and consumers at the grassroots. The implication is that LGCs in Southeast states Nigeria are considerably performing below the expectations of New Nigerian Agricultural Policy of 2001 hence their impact is not felt much agriculturally by farmers and other rural dwellers. Anikpo (2008) reported that the LGCs have failed in performing agricultural roles in the rural areas that can minimize rural-urban migration, encourage partnership with the private sector to undertake mechanized farming and establish agro-based industries to mention but a few. However, the findings disagree with Anikpo (2008) who did not report procurement and distribution of agricultural inputs at subsidized rate. This disagreement could be as a result of difference in the times of the studies

Table1. Current agricultural activities of Local Government Councils in Southeast, Nigeria

Agricultural activities of LGCs in the states*	Abia	Anambra	Enugu
Buying and distributing bags of fertilizer and sale of crop seedlings	×	×	×
Acquisition of land for agric. programmes such as Growth Empowerment Support Scheme (GESS)	×	×	×
Production of livestock such as poultry, snail, fish, pig, etc.	×	×	×
Plantation cropping such as oil palm, citrus, etc. (Food and cash crop production	×	×	×
Tree planting programme)			×
Feed formulation for pigs and fish production			×
Educating farmers on safe handling of pesticides and insecticides for agricultural produce			×
Educating farmers on food processing			×
Tractor hiring services			×
Prestes des petits Ruminant (PPR) vaccination for sheep and goat			×
Control of swine fever in pigs			×
Grass cutter production			×
Group formation of farmers to form co-operative societies			×
Horticulture		×	
Market gardening		×	
Counterpart funding of Fadama project.		×	
Agriculture farm exhibition	×		
Provision of staff to help pilot agricultural programmes such as National Programme of Food Security (NPFS), etc.	×		

New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) counterpart funding.	×	×	
Palm for palm programme			
Total	7	8	13

× indicates states that perform the agricultural activities

5. AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY FARMERS UNDER VARIOUS AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

Table2. Agricultural activities engaged by farmers under various agricultural development agencies

Agricultural activities	Agricultural Development Project (ADP)	Fadama 1, 11 and 111	National Special Programme of Food Security(NS PFS)	Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (RTEP)	Commercial Agricultural Development Programme (CADP)
Extension delivery packages on yam/cassava/maize intercrop	×				
The use of fertilizer and its rate in crops.	×				
PPR vaccination programme	×				
Vaccination of sheep and goats.	×				
Optimum plant production.					
Teaching women groups storage methods	×				
Attendance to field visits of extension agents.	×				
Record- keeping in agricultural business.	×				
Successful livestock and crop farming.	×				
Honey production.		×			
Obtaining agricultural information.		×			
Obtaining grants from the programme for crop and livestock production.		×			
Provision of grants to large scale farmers for apiculture.		×			
Provision of grants to cooperative societies.		×			
Raising of broilers, piggery and apiculture by medium and large-scale farmers.			×	×	
Local governments provide staff to help pilot the programme.			×		
Farmers obtain loans from the local government for agricultural production such as building processing centres.			×		
Under this programme, livestock can be given to farmers as loan.					×
Farmers obtain extension services through Farmers field school (FFS).			×		×
Cultivation of MTP maize under this programme			×	×	

× indicates agricultural development agencies under which corresponding activities were performed.

Farmers participated in the following agricultural programmes under the platform of the LGCs: Agricultural Development Project (ADP), Fadama I, II and III, National Special Programme for Food Security (NSPFS), Commercial Agricultural Development Programme (CADP and Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (RTEP) (Table 2). The findings show that farmers participate under ADP in

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the following activities: obtaining agricultural information, honey production, obtain extension service delivery packages on yam/cassava/maize intercrop, use of fertilizer and its rate in crops, PPR vaccination programme was organized for farmers, vaccination of sheep and goats, optimum plant production, teaching women groups storage methods of some farm produce, attendance to field visits of extension agents, record- keeping in agricultural business and successful livestock and crop farming. The farmers participated in the following activities under Fadama III, obtaining grants from the programme for apiculture; crop and livestock production, provision of grants to cooperative societies, production of broilers, piggery and apiculture by medium and large-scale farmers.

Under the NSPFS programme, farmers obtain loans from the local government for agricultural production such as building processing centres, obtain livestock in form of loan, while local governments provide staff to help pilot the programme. Farmers also received grants, cultivated MTP maize, form cooperative groups for better utilization of grant under CADP programme. They also obtained loans and cassava varieties (NR 8082, NR 8083, RMS 419) for multiplication from RTEP programme. The findings show that farmers participated under these agricultural development agencies. Ugwu (2006) reported increase in farm household income, provision of farm input, extension contact, additional family/farm assets, food security, capacity building/skill training and improved storage/preservation methods through RTEP in Enugu State, Nigeria. However, among all the agricultural development agencies, ADP had the highest activities with farmers.

6. CHALLENGES MILITATING AGAINST EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE OF LGCs IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Table3. Mean distribution of challenges militating against effective performance of LGCs in agricultural development

Factors	Mean	Standard deviation (SD)
Poor staff remuneration and allowances	2.9	0.9
Poor extension services coverage	2.6	1.0
Marginalization of Agriculture Department	2.6	0.8
Lack of drive amongst Head of Department of Agriculture	2.5	1.0
Corruption and corrupt practices among management and staff	2.7	0.9
Poor and shortage of skilled manpower/extension personnel	2.7	0.9
Lack of rural farmer participation in programme development	2.6	0.9
Lack of understanding of the philosophy of the LG system	2.5	0.9
Existence of role duplication and overlapping of functions among the tiers of government	2.3	0.8
Poor funding of agricultural development activities both in quantum and release pattern	2.7	0.8
Inadequate budget allocation to Department of Agriculture	2.8	0.8
Inadequate extension training	2.6	0.9
Inadequate provision of farm inputs	2.9	0.9
Inadequate planning and evaluation of extension programmes	2.8	0.8
Lack of local government autonomy	2.5	0.9
Instability of political climate	2.3	0.8
Insecurity of investment	2.5	0.8
Poor logistic support for field staff	2.8	0.8
Politicizing of project objective	2.7	0.9
High cost of production	2.8	0.9
Lack of quick or immediate cash return from most agricultural project	2.6	0.9
Poor job description of staff	2.6	0.9
Ineffectiveness of agricultural policies and regulations	2.5	0.9
Poor attitude to work of workers	2.8	1.0

The major factors inhibiting the role performance of local government councils in agricultural development include poor staff remuneration and allowances (M= 2.9), poor logistic support for field staff (M= 2.8), poor and shortage of skilled manpower/extension personnel (M= 2.7) and poor job description of staff (M= 2.6) (Table 3). These factors could negatively affect workers' morale and cause lack of interest in their job and consequently result in reduced productivity. Nwalieji et al (2012) observe that lack of motivation of employees in any organization is *sine qua non* to the failures

in the achievement of the desired or designed goals or objectives. Other factors are inadequate budget allocation to Agriculture/Veterinary Department (M= 2.8), inadequate planning and evaluation of extension programmes (M= 2.8), high cost of production (M= 2.8), poor attitude to work of workers (M=2.8), corruption and corrupt practices among management and staff (M= 2.7), politicizing of project objective (M= 2.7), poor funding of agricultural development activities both in quantum and release pattern (M= 2.7), poor extension services coverage (M=2.6), inadequate extension training (M= 2.6), lack of drive amongst Heads of Department of Agriculture/Veterinary (M= 2.5) and lack of understanding of the philosophy of the LG system (M= 2.5). All these factors incapacitate LGCs and render them unproductive. The finding is in line with Ejekwumadu (2009) who stated that local government system's corruption has become all pervading, unabashed, uncontrolled and persistent. This perhaps explains the efficiency and ineffectiveness in local government administration in Nigeria.

Others included marginalization of Agriculture/Veterinary Department (M=2.6), lack of rural farmer participation in programme development (M= 2.6), inadequate provision of farm inputs (M= 2.9), lack of quick or immediate cash return from most agricultural projects (M= 2.6), lack of local government autonomy (M= 2.5), insecurity of investment (M= 2.5), among others. There were no variations on the responses of the respondents as all the values of standard deviation were either 1 or below 1. The findings agree with Nwalieji et al (2012) who reported that the responsibilities of LGCs in agricultural development are hindered by impediments which range from political to undue interference of the higher levels of government i.e. federal and state governments, bribery and corruption to embezzlement and gross inadequacy of well-trained and qualified personnel. Ejekwumadu (2009) also noted that participation by both men and women is central to good governance and it is the function of local government administration to ensure that concerns of the most vulnerable in society are taken into consideration in decision making. It implies therefore that LGCs cannot function effectively until these factors are addressed by the three (3) tiers of government in Nigeria.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The major current agricultural activities of LGCs in Southeast, Nigeria were buying and distributing of fertilizer, sale of crop seedlings, acquisition of land for agricultural programmes, tree planting programme, providing vaccination for ruminants (Prestes des petits Ruminant (PPR), practicing horticulture, market gardening; agricultural farm exhibition, provision of staff to help pilot agricultural programmes, counterpart funding of some agricultural programmes and establishing citrus plantations.

The level of participation of farmers under ADP is more than other agricultural programmes. The farmers obtained record-keeping in agricultural business, agricultural information, honey production, grants, learnt improved methods of crop and livestock production, obtained livestock in form of loan, cultivated MTP maize varieties, formed cooperative groups for better utilization of grants, obtained cassava varieties (NR 8082, NR 8083, RMS 419) for multiplication, etc from Agricultural Development Programmes/Projects.

Many factors that hindered LGCs from actively performing their agricultural roles are poor staff remuneration and allowances, poor logistic support for field staff, poor and shortage of skilled manpower/extension personnel, poor job description of staff, inadequate budget allocation to Agriculture/Veterinary Department, inadequate planning and evaluation of extension programmes, poor attitude to work of workers, corruption and corrupt practices among management and staff, among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made:

1. In order to achieve more efficient extension services delivery, the cost of extension at LG levels should be shared among the three tiers of government and this could be instituted by law makers.
2. Efforts of Federal Government and LGCs are needed in ensuring that adequate remunerations of LG staff are put in place to enhance performance.
3. Staff of local government councils should be motivated through proper remuneration in order to participate actively in agricultural development activities.

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