

Research Application Summary

**University of Port Harcourt linkage with agricultural organizations in Nigeria:
The journey so far**

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Abstract

The Faculty of Agriculture in the University of Port Harcourt was established to provide broad based training of undergraduates in various areas of agriculture: crops, poultry, livestock, fisheries, wildlife, forestry, agricultural economics and extension. In a bid to ensure that it incorporates agri-entrepreneurial teaching and learning the faculty has established linkages with several research organizations such as Niger Delta Development Commission, Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, National Root Crops Research Institute, and many others. The linkage established has strengthened the faculty in the teaching, research and community services. Through the linkages, the faculty has acquired tractors, improved varieties of seedlings; has also carried out baseline research in food security assurance in Rivers State and also conducted training for farmers in various agro-entrepreneurial skills. It has also strengthened the students' practical skills and some of them have established farms in different localities through the community services programme as a way of giving back to the society.

Keywords: Agro-entrepreneurial skills, private sector partnership, River State, University of Port Harcourt

Résumé

La Faculté d'agriculture de l'Université de Port Harcourt a été créée pour fournir une formation à base large des étudiants du premier cycle dans divers domaines de l'agriculture: les cultures, la volaille, le bétail, la pêche, la faune, la forêt, l'économie agricole et la vulgarisation. Dans le but de veiller à ce qu'elle intègre les liens de l'enseignement de l'agro-entreprise, la faculté a mis en place avec plusieurs organismes de recherche tels que le «Niger Commission Delta Development», «Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency », « International Institute of Tropical Agriculture », «National Root Crops Research Institute » et beaucoup autres. Le lien établi a renforcé la faculté dans les services d'enseignement, de recherche et de la communauté. A travers ces liens, la faculté a acquis des tracteurs, des variétés améliorées de semis, a également effectué des recherches de base en matière d'assurance de la sécurité alimentaire dans l'Etat de Rivers et également organisé des formations pour les agriculteurs dans diverses compétences agro-

entrepreneuriales. Elle a également renforcé les compétences pratiques des élèves et certains d'entre eux ont établi des fermes dans différentes localités à travers le programme de services communautaires comme un moyen de payer la société.

Mots-clés: les compétences agro-entrepreneuriales, partenariat du secteur privé, l'Etat de River, Université de Port Harcourt

Introduction

The Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Port Harcourt in Nigeria was established on 9th August, 2005 and admitted its first set of students, entirely from the School of Basic Studies in the same year for the 2005/2006 session. The various programmes and courses of study were grouped into four departments – Agricultural Economics and Extension, Animal Science and Fisheries, Crop and Soil Science, and Forestry and Wildlife Management, and recently a fifth Department of Fisheries was carved out of Animal Science and Fisheries (Faculty of Agriculture Hand Book, 2014). The programme aim to equip graduates with a wide range of skills and the capacity to utilize scientific knowledge in developing practical solutions to the problems of agricultural production and related activities in the Niger Delta region and beyond. The orientation of graduates of the programme will focus on the development of appropriate technology that would also enhance their entrepreneurial skills and community service. This is a response to local socio-economic needs and environmental concerns for meeting global goals for food and nutrition security and sustainable biodiversity conservation. In the final analysis, the opportunities for profitability in agriculture within the region will be explored. The objectives of the faculty include to: produce the appropriate human resource equipped with necessary skills to establish and profitably operate their own farming enterprises; improve the genetic stock and introduce scientific fisheries and livestock management; improve the cropping and farming systems in the Delta Creek ecosystem; promote agricultural production and improve productivity of local small scale farmers, thereby providing solutions to the country's agricultural and rural development problems; and exploit water resources and development of suitable soil water management practices and cropping techniques to enhance agricultural production in the Delta region.

To ensure effectiveness and proper training, the faculty has established partnership with agricultural organisations in the country. This is partly to ensure stable funding for research and programmes, which will lead to increased efficiency and effectiveness of research and the University training programmes (NEPAD, 2002). This linkages according to Mgbenka *et al.* (2013), enables effective communication as it promote face-to-face interactions and also provides a platform between students, farmers, and research organisations to interact and share ideas.

Broadly the partnership serve to provide funding for various activities, but also provide opportunities for training and research collaborations, and provision of infrastructure. Over the years, the faculty has been able to sustain and maintain the relationships with several organisations. The purpose of this paper therefore is to examine the benefits derived and strengths of these linkages and also explore ways to further enhance and strengthen the linkages.

Status of the Faculty linkages with agriculture industries

The Faculty has established several linkages with both private and public agriculture organizations in its 11 years of existence. The public organizations include Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency (RSSDA), National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI) and Africa Regional Aquaculture Centre (ARAC). The five (5) Private organisations include International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Food for All International (FFAI), Domitta Farms, Green River Project of The Nigerian Agip Oil Company and CEW and TONTEX gardens. These organizations have agriculture focus as part of their mandates. The areas of partnership are further elaborated below:

Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). The organization was established by the Federal Government of Nigeria with the mandate to facilitate the rapid, even and sustainable development of the Niger Delta Region into a region that is economically viable and prosperous. The organisation partnered with the faculty in the area of infrastructural development. Through the partnership, the faculty has received two tractors for mechanised farming in the school farm and for training of students in operations of the tractor during their industrial training.

Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency (RSSDA). RSSDA is a government establishment involved in sustainable development in Rivers state. The faculty partnered with the organisation in the areas of research and training. This linkage with RSSDA provided a platform for a baseline survey on food security assurance in Rivers State, Nigeria. Findings from the survey revealed that the food security situation in Rivers State is moderate as households grew enough food and worried less about not having enough to eat since there is always something to fall back on in the farm. RSSDA has also been involved in training of the fourth year students of the faculty in their Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES). Through the scheme students undertake practical lessons in various agricultural enterprises for one year in an identified agricultural industry under supervision of both the University and Industrial supervisors.

International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA). IITA is one of the CGIAR institutions with its headquarters in Ibadan, Nigeria. In terms of relation with University of Port Harcourt, IITA has provided support in terms of provision of hybrid varieties of crops and research attachment for staff and students. The organization has supported the faculty in plantain and banana research: The Faculty of Agriculture got 13 PITA plantain hybrid varieties for multiplication through this partnership. This involved research on cytogenetic characterization and assessment for male fertility and pest/disease resistance in Musa germplasm. As part of partnership with IITA, modalities are been put in place for exchange and linkage programme with Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium for research on tropical crop improvement.

National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI). This is a Federal government research organization in Nigeria. The organization has partnered with the faculty through

research collaborations, such as the NEXTGEN Research on effect of gender and cassava breeding which covered Eastern and Western Nigeria. The linkage with NRCRI has provided the University of Port Harcourt with 24 varieties of sweet potatoes for multi-locational screening.

Food for All International (FFAI). This is a private Non-Governmental Organization. There is an ongoing partnership with the FFAI under the farmer-first outreach programme. This partnership has specifically resulted in the multiplication of 2 beta-carotene-rich cassava varieties.

Domitta Farms. This is a private integrated farm located in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (about 100 km from Port Harcourt) with over 10 hectares of land. It has helped to build the capacity of our students during the Students Industrial Work experience Scheme (SIWES) training for over 5 years in the areas of horticulture, landscaping, livestock management, fishery and crop husbandry.

Africa Regional Aquaculture Centre (ARAC). This is a government research organization in Nigeria that was established in a bid to increase fish production through brackish fish farming. The centre's activities include research, training and development of sustainable agriculture practices and they achieve this through building linkages across local, regional and international boundaries. Over ten (10) years now, the centre has provided training for non-academic staff of the faculty and students in aquaculture.

Green River Project of The Nigerian Agip Oil Company. Green River Project is the Agricultural programme of The Nigerian Agip Oil Company. The partnership with the faculty has resulted in the faculty's involvement in the organization's annual exhibition in the last four (4) years. The partnership has also resulted in consultancy activities in cluster management (evaluation of extension services). The faculty takes students periodically on excursions to the firm and this has helped to build exposure and improved practical skills of the students.

CEW and TONTEX gardens. Students in the Department of Crop Science visit the CEW garden on excursion to appreciate horticultural and floricultural practices through the course: Horticultural Crop Production and Landscaping.

Conclusion

With the dwindling oil revenue, the Federal Government of Nigeria is repositioning Agriculture to be the pillar of the economy. In this regard, widespread awareness on agribusiness opportunities is being created across the country. The Faculty of Agriculture in the University of Port Harcourt has partnered with several private and government agriculture organizations in the form of training, research, infrastructural provision and community outreaches. It is suggested that this public-private sector partnership be strengthened. Also there is need to strengthen staff capacity for consultancy activities and encourage staff to partake regional

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collaboration activities. Further, it is recommended that a strong mentorship mechanism be established at the University.

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