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Institutional Capacity for Designing and Implementing Agricultural and Rural Development Policies and Strategies in Nigeria

Kolawole Adebayo, Suresh Babu and Valerie Rhoe

An agricultural system consists of production, processing, storage, marketing, extension, research, and training. While production is a result of land, labor, capital, and entrepreneurship, its magnitude and efficiency from the farm to the consumer depend on handling, preservation, and the processes of making the products readily available and conveniently consumable, which are directed by government policies. For this reason, good institutional capacity for designing and implementing agricultural and rural development policies is critical for a successful agricultural system, and ultimately for food security. This brief highlights key issues on the capacity for designing and implementing agricultural and rural development policies, strategies, and programs in Nigeria.

Introduction

After independence, the agricultural sector played an important role in national development. Cash crops such as cocoa, oil palm, and groundnut dominated the export sector and agricultural commodities contributed the largest share of the national gross domestic product (GDP). However, over the years, the sector has witnessed a decline in its contribution to national development. To address this, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has identified agriculture as the key development priority in its efforts to halve poverty by 2015 and to diversify the economy away from the oil sector (Soludo 2006). Understanding the capacity for designing and implementing agricultural and rural development policies and programs is important for ensuring the effectiveness of these policies and programs.

Methodology

This study derived information from individual consultations within the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources (FMAWR), Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD), and the Federal Ministry

of Environment (FME), two consultation workshops, a literature review, and surveys.

Twenty-nine relevant institutions and 183 individuals from Abuja, Oyo, Kaduna, Enugu Ogun, Benue, and Abia states were surveyed to better understand the capacity issues related to designing and implementing agricultural and rural development policies and strategies.

The respondents of the institutional questionnaire were mostly male (23 of 24) and were heads of departments (10 of 24), directors, deputy directors, and their equivalents (12 of 24). Over 70 percent of the respondents for the individual survey (experts) had at least a Master of Science (MSc.) or its equivalent. The majority (80 percent) were male, who had spent more than 10 years on the job. About half of the experts worked with universities, compared to 13 percent in the ministries and 38 percent in parastatals. Their expertise cut across a broad range of subjects relevant for designing and implementing agricultural and rural development policies, strategies, and programs, with more than one-quarter being experts in agricultural

economics, extension, communication, rural development, or rural sociology.

Both the institutional and individual questionnaires included an attitudinal scale. Using the overall perception score, the institutions were classified as:

- Having a negative perception of the general environment and processes involved in putting national policies (score of 70 points or less);
- Having an indifferent perception of the general environment and processes involved in putting national policies in place (score between 71 and 140 points); or
- Having positive perception of the general environment and processes involved in putting national policies in place (score 141 points or higher).

Individual respondents were classified as:

- Having negative perception of their job satisfaction and institutional incentives (score 42 points or less);
- Having an indifferent perception of their job satisfaction and institutional incentives (score between 43 and 84 points); or
- Having positive perception of their job satisfaction and institutional incentives (score of 85 points or higher).

Assessment of Institutional and Individual Capacity

To support proper implementation of policies, strategies, and programs proper planning is required. Of the institutions surveyed, about one-third of them used near-term strategies, a little more than one-third used long-term visions, and one-third of the selected institutions encouraged participation in their planning from a broad range of personnel.

In addition to planning, maintaining and strengthening the institution's capacity to support the design and implementation process require staff capacity needs to be identified and actions taken to fulfill these needs. Most of the selected institutions had both a human resource

management unit (71 percent) and dedicated staff training centers (54 percent), but about half of the respondents neither knew the regularity of the review of staff training needs nor when the last staff training needs were assessed. This implies that the institution's training exercises may or may not match the skill gaps of staff and the capacity requirements of the institutions. Nevertheless, reported resources for capacity strengthening efforts (for 13 of the 24 institutions surveyed) were considerable, at an average cost of US\$76.98 per person per day for the one to three-week trainings.

Collaborative arrangements assist in sharing information, providing technical assistance, and funding of activities, but poor flow of information within an institution may inhibit implementation and consultation. Between 75 and 80 percent of the selected institutions engaged in some collaborative programs and linkages with other government institutions, relevant NGOs, international development partners, training institutions, and research institutions. Over 60 percent of the respondents of the individual questionnaire stated that at least some consultation was done with stakeholders through face-to-face communication at stakeholder fora, meetings, conferences, summits, and talks.

According to the individual respondents, the major concern is the extent to which agricultural and rural development policies, programs, or strategies achieve their stated goals. Implementation based on research is useful to help guide the process, but almost one-half of respondents believed that the government did not use research to support the design and implementation of policies and programs.

To potentially increase the effectiveness of agriculture policy design and implementation, gender and environmental issues should be considered. However, only about 50 percent of institution's training strategies included gender or environmental issues. Furthermore, it is perceived by more than 50 percent of the individuals interviewed that the government is either not taken steps to amend existing policies to reflect the needs, interests, and priorities of women and men

or are not aware of these efforts. Furthermore, 38.8 percent felt that government included environmental issues as part of the national agricultural policy.

Conclusions

Two major conclusions were drawn:

First, the main capacity gaps for designing and implementing agricultural and rural development policies in Nigeria include the need: (a) to entrench democratic principles and transparent leadership into the process, such as through greater participation of a broad range of personnel in the planning process and (b) to bridge the sharing of

evidence and knowledge between the universities, research institutions, and policymaking and implementing entities.

Second, the government needs to institutionalize effective measures for tracking the role of evidence in strategic gender-sensitive and environmental sustainability planning through regular monitoring and evaluation, such as impact assessments and adequate documentation, and should use the results of these exercises. Efforts should also be targeted at improving the quality, gender-sensitivity, timeliness, and circulation of policy-relevant evidence.

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For more information:

IFPRI-Abuja
International Food Policy Research Institute
c/o International Center for Soil Fertility and Agriculture Development
No.6/ Plot 1413 Ogbagi Street
Off Oro-Ago Crescent
Cadastral Zone 11, Garki, Abuja
Nigeria
E-mail: ifpri-nigeria@cgiar.org
www.ifpri.org