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Supporting Nigeria's agricultural change agenda in a meaningful way

By Daniel Anazia
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one of the 11 three tonne harvester tractors

Olam Nigeria, in a bid to showcase its contributions to the rice revolution in Nigeria, took some journalists to its multimillion-dollar rice farm and milling facility at Ondorie, Rukubi in Nasarawa State. DANIEL ANAZIA was there and reports

Agriculture, no doubt, accounts for two-thirds of livelihood, just as food accounts for two-third of the household budgets in Nigeria. It, therefore, makes up a very important part of the lives of people.

In spite of its enormous potentialities, it receives little attention from the governments.

With Nigeria's huge market for rice, there is no gain saying that Nigerians consumes about 5.5million metric tonnes of rice yearly. Of this, 3.6million metric tonnes are locally produced, mostly by farmers for personal consumption.



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Currently, over \$5billion is spent on food import and an estimated ₦365billion is spent yearly to import the deficit 1.9million tonnes rice

needed, because local production is unable to satisfy the huge gap.

Recently, The Guardian, alongside other media platforms, visited the Olam Nigeria rice farm at Ondorie, Rukubi in Nasarawa State, to observe the firm's ongoing rice project and contribution to rice revolution in Nigeria.

Olam Nigeria, is a fully owned subsidiary of Olam International Limited, a leading agro-business operating from seed to shelf in 70 countries, supplying food and industrial raw materials to over 16,200 customers worldwide.

Located on a green field site measuring 12,920 hectares on the banks of River Benue, 265 kilometres off the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, and approximately 150 kilometres off Lafia, the state capital, the expansive farm is fully irrigated and mechanised.

At the heart of the rice farm is a mechanised rice milling facility, with state-of-the-art machineries that incorporates Satake milling and Italian par boiling technologies, with a current operating capacity of 67,500 metric tonnes yearly.

Conducting journalists round the farm, the General Manager, Pieter Nel, and the Farm Manager, Mark Mclean, said the farm is expected to yield 10 metric tonnes per hectare (over two annual crop cycles, dry and wet season), based on four varieties of high-yield rice tested with the West African Rice Development Association.

Mclean explained that of the 12,920 hectares, being the total area of the farm, 10,000 hectares is mapped out for the full paddy rice irrigation, adding that 4,400 hectares (3,000 hectares from the dry season, with additional 1,400 hectares for the forthcoming wet season) are already under cultivation.

He disclosed plans for additional 3,000 hectares for the 2018/19 season to enable the farm meet its average yield of 4.2 to 4.5 metric tonnes per hectare, which is far above the national average of 1.5 metric tonnes per hectare.

He listed four varieties of rice being cultivated as Faro 44, Nerica L34, C90 and C20 (the last two being Chinese varieties), all of which are giving the expected high yields, adding that the farm is currently studying over 100 other varieties with a view to adopt some.

With a net value put at \$150million, despite its number of hi-tech machines, including 11 three-tonne combined harvesters, one splitter harvester and two aircrafts (basically for spraying of the paddy and fertilizer as application of chemicals- herbicides and pesticides), deployed for planting and harvesting, the farm has on its payroll 1,000 workers, made up of 400 regular workers and 600 seasonal workers, who are mainly engaged during peak season from the host community, Ondorie, depending on season.

Determined to ensure self-sufficiency in rice production in Nigeria, Olam Nigeria, through its paddy rice activities, is linking large-scale agriculture with smallholder farmers to boost production in the country.

Through its activities, it has supported and still supports the rice growing communities in Nasarawa, Benue and Kaduna states with group formation, training and all agro inputs on credit to improve their paddy yields and revenues with assured buy back system.

To this extent, the nucleus model combines the quality control of a large-scale commercial farm with the cost and scalability benefits of smallholder 'out grower' networks.

To augment its production capacity, Olam has engaged over 4003 farmers, including women in an area that span about 5,563 hectareage, with a



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target of 16,000 next year, ultimately supplying 30 to 40 per cent of the mill's capacity.

It buys paddy from all producing states, while also controlling the quality.

Its Director of Quality Assurance, Madan Singh, said the firm is out to produce quality rice that can compete with any other in the domestic market, by creating high-end rice from Nigeria, for Nigeria.

"We conduct relevant analysis to ensure that our rice is safe and meet the nutritional values.

"We do physical and chemical analysis. Our modern technology facilities have stand us out and make the difference between us and others," he said.

This earned it the honour of being the only ISO 22000 FSMS and FSSC certified rice processing company in Nigeria, just as it has received global best quality rice product of the year award, FY-2015 for the Mama's Pride brand.

The mill, Singh explained, is capable of milling 105,000 metric tonnes yearly.

On irrigation activities, Mclean explained that water is channeled from River Benue using five submersible pumps, each capable of pumping 5,000 cubic metres per second, to the farm for its dry season farming.

"As a result, we have the capacity to farm two times in a year, producing 4.2 tons per hectares and we have 3,000 hectares for the dry season and planning 4,400 hectares for this coming wet season," he said.

Speaking on the essence of the tour, Vice President, Corporate and Government Relations, Olam Nigeria, Ade Adefeko, said: "Often time, people talk about what they want to do mechanised farming for agriculture, but these things remain statements.

"Hence, for us at Olam, rice farm mechanisation is visible and growth has been consistent for about six years.

"Meeting Nigeria's food security needs and reducing the food import bill has been our core value, and this has driven Olam Nigeria in its over \$1billion investments in Nigeria, across different businesses," he added.



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On corporate social responsibility to the host communities, the Farm's Community Relations Manager, Abubakar Ogashuwa, said it has created access roads to link up the six host communities around it, providing them with solar power, boreholes for portable water, constructed a block of six classrooms for the school in the community and hired teachers as introduced scholarship for indigent children.

He further stated that the farm was also in constant meeting with herders to avoid crisis that could come up through invasion of the farm by their animals.

One good thing about the symbiotic relations between the farm and the locals, he disclosed, is that house construction activities have spurred

young people in the area into the business of block-making, as several of young men now earn a living from the ventures, while also being responsible members of their communities.

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