



COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE

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Whilst taking care of about 200,000 largely peasant farm families in Edo State who produce about 80% of the food we eat, through the activities of the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources and its four Parastatals, the State Government has its focus on commercial agriculture as the target.

Commercial agriculture, of necessity, involves large scale production of cash and food crops, including livestock, poultry, fishery, etc. It involves large scale agro-processing and agro-businesses generally. The target markets for commercial agriculture are both local and international. This is the constituency for private investors, both local and international. Experience in our country has shown that governments are not the best managers of businesses.

With 1.6m hectares of arable land and a very favourable ecological condition, Edo State is the potential haven for private investors in agribusinesses. The Northern part of Edo State shares the same savannah conditions with Northern Nigeria. The South, Central and part of the North also share the rain forest conditions with the rest of Southern Nigeria. Both the River Niger and the Atlantic Ocean water substantial areas of Edo State all the year round. A good number of small and big rivers criss-cross Edo State and many of them flow all the year round.

The implication of all of the above is that large commercial farms can profitably thrive in Edo State around maize, groundnut, guinea corn, Soybeans, cassava, yam, vegetables, fruits, livestock, fishery, oil palm, cocoa, rubber, pharmaceutical herbs and ornamental trees, etc. These are the necessary springboards for any meaningful industrial take-off. Edo is an industrial explosion begging to happen.

The Vietnamese Partnership

Against the above background, the Ministry opened dialogue with an organization called Transformation Agritech Nigeria Limited (T4M), driven by a young Nigerian but a British national, Dr. A.I. Sample, and another Briton, Mr. Stephen G.J. Liney. The organization has a very heavy dose of Vietnamese content, both in terms of funding and technical back-up.

The T4M intervention is actually a Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangement, that also involves Edo State government and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). While T4M is bringing most of the funds, equipment and technical experts, NDDC is also putting in some funds and equipment. Edo State is making ten thousand hectares of fertile land available for a start to grow rice in commercial quantity for local consumption and for export market.

Under the partnership, T4M is bringing a high bred rice with a gestation period of only ninety days. They will produce the specie of rice thrice a year on the same plantation. The location is Ekperi to Anegbette in Etsako Central Edo State, covering fourteen communities.

As part of the deal, Edo rice farmers would be adequately catered for through the outgrowers scheme. Under the scheme, the Vietnamese would provide the same specie of rice to the farmers and assist them with land preparation, fertilizers and other inputs. A guaranteed price regime would be in place to purchase the rice after harvest from the farmers. This is in addition to the mass employment the project would generate. Of course, the immediate communities would benefit from the corporate social responsibility the investors are mandated to administer.

The deal with the Vietnamese was sealed vide a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed on the 28th of December, 2009. Dr. Tunde Lakoju, Honourable Commissioner for Agriculture and Natural Resources, signed for Edo State Government. His signature was witnessed by Dr. Osagie Obayuwana, the Attorney General and Honourable Commissioner for Justice. The Group Managing Director of T4M Mr. Ngo Van Minh signed for T4M, witnessed by the Group Operations Director, Dr. A.I. Sample.

Soon after signing the MOU, on February 25, 2010, the Honourable Commissioner for Agriculture and Natural Resources joined his colleagues from Akwa-Ibom, Cross Rivers and Bayelsa, along with the Managing Director of the NDDC on a trip to



Vietnam. The objective of the trip was to relate with the Top officials of the Vietnamese Government, see the factories and inspect the machinery assembled for exportation to Nigeria and to visit the rice fields and mills.

In two weeks the delegation visited the key government Ministries in Hanoi to seal the deal. The communist party, which runs the affairs of the country, insists on knowing the labour force leaving the country. They must know where they are going, the security arrangements for them and the welfare package. In Vietnam, it is communism with full play of market economy. Like China, the combination of communist discipline and capitalist adventurism gives the economy an unprecedented growth rate.

The whole of Vietnam is a rice field. It is the largest producer of rice in the world, but the second largest exporter of rice after Thailand. Whereas Thailand exports over 60% of her rice produce, Vietnam exports less than 50%.

The University of Agriculture in Hanoi has a highly developed research centre for rice. It was agreed that at some point Edo indigenes would be sent to this University for special training in Agriculture generally and rice production in particular.

For every one Vietnamese farmer or expert coming to Edo State, it was agreed that ten Edo indigenes would be attached to understudy him or her. The arrangement is that in three to four years Edo citizens would be able to take over the operations and run the project. The life span of the project is twenty-five years (renewable), after which Edo State will take over ownership and management of the project.

At maturity the project shall employ about four thousand workers. To grow rice thrice a year irrigation farming shall be the focus. Solar power shall be built and waste-to-energy programme shall also be a major feature of the infrastructural development programme of the project. Housing estates shall be built by the company to accommodate its staff at all levels.

Today, Nigeria spends two billion U.S. dollars importing rice annually. Two billion U.S. dollars at current exchange rate is more than three hundred billion Naira. The aim is for Edo State to get a good size of the Nigerian rice market and save the nation its hard earned foreign exchange. We are also looking at the export market.

All of these key into the vision of Comrade Adams Oshiomhole for Edo State – eradicating poverty, through responsible employment generation, food security and wealth creation for citizens and for Government.



Edo Community

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