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Promoting Cassava Productivity in Benue State: Linking Data and Policy

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Introduction and background to Benue State

Benue State lies within the lower River Benue trough in the middle belt region of Nigeria. The state has an estimated population of 5,852,297 (2016 projection based on the 2006 census) (NPC, 2017). Benue State shares boundaries with six other Nigerian States: Nassarawa, Taraba, Kogi, Enugu, Ebonyi and Cross-River. It also shares an international boundary with the Republic of Cameroon in the southeast. The state lies between latitudes 6.5° and 8.5° N and longitudes 7.47° N and 10° E and has a landmass of 33,955 square kilometers (BSG, 2017a).

Figure 1: Map of Benue State Showing Major Towns



Benue State is populated by several ethnic groups: Tiv, Idoma, Igede, Etulo, and Jukun. However, the

Key Messages

- Expansion in land area under cultivation between 2011 and 2013 did not result in a corresponding increase in yield. This is attributable to the flood experienced in the state in 2012.
- The significant increase in yield from 2013 is due to ease of accessing improved inputs and good agronomic practices.
- The sharp decrease in area of cultivated land (2013- 2014), despite increasing yields, could be due to the adoption of improved inputs and farming techniques by farmers.

dominant Tiv ethnic group occupies 14 out of the 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs). The state has a tropical climate, with a wet and a dry season. However, the southeastern part of the state adjoining the Obudu-Cameroon mountain range has a cooler climate. The vegetation of Benue State consists of rainforests with tall trees and grasses that occupy the state's western and southern fringes while the Guinea savannah is found in the eastern and northern parts.

The majority of the state's inhabitants, especially in rural areas, are employed in a highly productive agricultural sector. Hence, Benue is acclaimed as the "Food Basket of the Nation." The commonly cultivated cash and food crops include yam, rice,

cassava, sweet potato, maize, sorghum, peanuts, millet, sesame, soybean, mango varieties, citrus, tomatoes and chili pepper. Inventory of livestock includes short-legged cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and Fulani cattle. A section of the population (especially those located around the River Benue) engage in fishing as their primary or important secondary occupation.

The Benue State Government Program for agriculture under the Agriculture Promotion Policy

Benue State established the Benue Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (BNARDA) in 1986 with a mandate to direct the implementation of its agricultural policies. The goal of BNARDA is to promote sustained crop and food production in order to raise the income and standard of living of farmers in the state. The overall objectives are to assist small-scale farmers in increasing food production and develop an effective agricultural extension system, focusing on agricultural potentials.

Under the current administration’s Agricultural Promotion Policy, the state government has partnered with development agencies to deliver programs aimed at enhancing agricultural production. These programs include the Fadama III additional financing project (World Bank funded), the Rice and Cassava Value Chain Development Program (in collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development), the Good Agricultural Practice Program (through the SASAKAWA program), the Anchor Borrowers Program (in collaboration with the Central Bank of Nigeria) and the Nigerian Zero Hunger Project. These programs are geared towards boosting agricultural productivity through the provision of improved farming inputs as well as linking producers to available markets. With particular reference to cassava production, IFAD and Fadama III have several cassava clusters in over five LGAs with a total population of 1,700 participants. The government has given directive for expansion of the

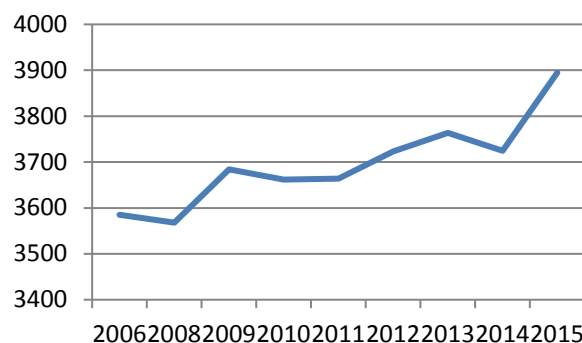
clusters to the 23 LGAs (BSG, 2017; IITA, 2017; SAA, 2015).

Descriptive statistics on a government priority crop

The current administration in Benue State has cassava as one of its priority crops. This is not surprising, owing to the potentials of the crop and its popularity among majority of the farmers. The production level of cassava as shown in Figure 2 has been on the increase in the state beginning from 2008.

The production trend is majorly increasing, as shown in Figure 2. The expansion in land area for cassava cultivation between 2011 and 2013, as shown in Figure 3, did not result in a corresponding increase in yield shown in Figure 4. This is attributable to the flood experienced in the state in 2012, which resulted in significant loss of yield.

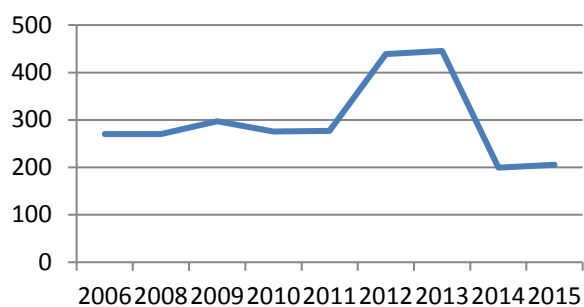
Figure 2: Cassava Production Trend in Benue State (000 MT)



Source: National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS)

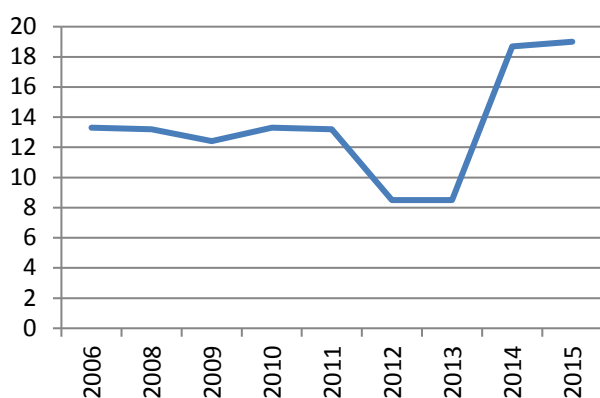
The story was different between 2013 and 2014. Despite a steady decline in land under cultivation, cassava yield increased steadily. This phenomenon is a function of the outputs of the intervention programs. Farmers had better input access and increased supply of improved varieties as new farming techniques were adopted.

Figure 3: Cassava Land Area in Benue State (000 ha)



Source: National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS)

Figure 4: Cassava Yield in Benue State (MT/ha)



Source: National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS)

Explaining the recent productivity gains in cassava in Benue State

The recent gains in cassava yield in Benue State are attributable to a number of successful collaborations between the government (at the state and national levels) and development partners such as IFAD, World Bank, Sasakawa Africa Association, IITA, FAO, AFDB and the Central Bank of Nigeria. Specifically, the BNARDA has improved the capacity of 1,500 cassava farmers in good agricultural practice through the Sasakawa value chain development program. In addition, with the assistance of Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, a total of 12,519 high variety cassava stems and 850 bundles of Vitamin A

cassava were distributed to farmers through the Harvest Plus program.

Similarly, the IFAD rice and cassava value chain development programs have supported cassava production in Benue State on over 2,000 hectares (ha) of land. The significant improvement observed in cassava yield in Benue State from 2013 is majorly due to increased access of farmers to quality inputs and good agronomic practices supported by the various intervention programs.

Input use in cassava production in Benue State

With the support of development partners, the BNARDA has intensified the multiplication and distribution of high quality cassava stems and Vitamin A cuttings to farmers. In addition, through the Ministry of Agriculture, the state government subsidizes both organic and inorganic fertilizers for farmers.

Challenges to cassava productivity growth

Some key challenges to cassava productivity in Benue State include:

- Both the improved stems and Vitamin A cassava cuttings are in short supply. Supply is always overwhelmed by demand.
- Low rate of delivery of agricultural extension services. The ratio of extension agent to farmer is significant.
- Inadequate farm machinery to boost production to the capacity that is envisaged.
- Inefficient marketing facilities and pricing systems for cassava output.

Sustaining and improving cassava productivity in Benue State

To sustain cassava productivity, priority should be given to the development of the cassava value chain. Pointedly, specific inputs, policies and support systems relevant to proper functioning at each level of

the value chain should be properly addressed. In addition, an efficient marketing system and good pricing policy will further motivate farmers to take advantage of the opportunities in cassava production.

Conclusion and key recommendations

This note is prepared to link data on production of cassava in Benue State to policy. Largely, it has shown that the right policies and interventions can enhance productivity of farmers. Benue State has the potentials to be a major hub for cassava production to meet both local and export demands. To achieve this, the following recommendations need to be considered:

- The BNARDA should be further supported to timely deliver improved quality inputs to farmers.
- The extension system should be enhanced through more recruitment and re-training of extension agents. This will enable better technology transfer to farmers.
- Ready access to land should be provided to attract private investments in cassava production.

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