

Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project Highlights

April 2019

Scholar Program 44

MY PRESENTATION AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY'S BROWN BAG SERIES

"Take a seminar during lunch hours, and combine it with two pleasant things -food and economic research- you get the brown bag seminar".

Tuesday, March 12th, 2019. I will never forget. It was the fateful day that I, a visiting scholar, was expected to deliver my first mandatory "brown bag seminar". The brown bag seminar is a weekly seminar at the Department of Agriculture and Food Resource Economics (AFRE), usually coordinated by the Graduate Students' Organization (GSO). The motive is for students to learn about others' research and to receive comments to improve one's work.

On the morning of the appointed day, I lost my appetite. I was nervous but told myself that's a good thing. *"If you're not nervous about something that you're about to do, you probably don't care very much"*. Fueling the anxiety was the fact that I was the sole presenter of the brown bag. It came with heavy responsibility. How would I survive 50 minutes in a hall filled with diverse and exceptional graduate students and faculty?!

A friend of mine, trying to encourage me, only made matters worse saying; "Michigan State University's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources is one the best in the world So consider yourself lucky to share your research work with best brains". At that point, numerous thoughts started flying through my head.

- *Guy who send you come MSU. ***
- *Guy don't forget that you're flying the flag of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki (EBSU).*
- *Your Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Chigozie Ogbu is a Spartan.*
- *You receive tremendous support from your mentors at EBSU including Prof. Alimba, Dr. Okereke, Prof. Nwibo (Head of Department, Department of Agricultural Economics, Management & Extension, EBSU), and Prof. Happiness Oselebe, (Dean Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources Management, EBSU)".*

I relaxed slightly knowing that my MSU mentor, Dr. Oyinkan Tasie, the Feed the Future Nigerian Agricultural

Policy Project Team and the other two Nigerian visiting scholars would be present to encourage me.



I practiced the presentation once again for 30 minutes to an hour. The much anticipated time finally arrived and I left for the venue. Arriving at the venue, I received warm greetings. I said to myself, *"They are really complying to Samantha's mail. They came to show me Midwest Hospitality"*.

At 11:50 a.m., Samantha introduced the speaker, which happens to me. I began my presentation thanking everyone for his or her attendance. The first 10 minutes went really well. I was happy and pleased seeing smiling faces on most of the audience. During the course of my presentation, I was interrupted at intervals by the audience with questions or comments. I was surprised at this approach. In my home country, Nigeria, you are given time to finish your presentation before comments, questions or contributions are made. I remember vividly, one particular question threw me off balance; I didn't see it coming. Immediately, I knew that the *"hospitality period had expired"*. I lost grip of my presentation for some minutes. Fortunately, I had correct answers for subsequent questions.

At 1 p.m., the ordeal was over. I was so happy. Not just to be off the hot seat but for the wonderful comments and contributions that improved my research skills. For instance, I was made to understand that the intended method of measuring food security status of the urban farming households was *"sample dependent"*, which would have yielded biased results.

However, attending brown bag seminars will improve your research knowledge. You won't know what you are missing until you attend one. I assure you, your research skills and knowledge won't be the same!

By: Chukwudi Charles Olumba

** It means you were not forced to study at MSU.

This work is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Feed the Future initiative through the Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project, Associate Cooperative Agreement Number AJD-620-LA-15-00001. The contents are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Copyright © 2019, Michigan State University, and the International Food Policy Research Institute. All rights reserved. This material may be reproduced for personal and not-for-profit use without permission from but with acknowledgment to MSU, and IFPRI.

Published by the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics, Michigan State University, Justin S. Morrill Hall of Agriculture, 446 West Circle Dr., Room 202, East Lansing, Michigan 48824.