

# Nigeria Agriculture Policy Activity

July 2021

NAPA Highlights #3

## A Journey of a Lifetime! Privileged to be Part of the Benue State SPI Rating Project-A Student Report

My name is Oplekwu Benson Onah, a 400 level student from the department of soil science, College of Agronomy, Joshua Sarwuan Tarka University (JOSTUM), Makurdi, Nigeria.

I was opportuned to be a member of the soil productivity index (SPI) rating team, by sheer grace. Before I joined the team, the project supervisor, Dr. Mrs. Blessing Iveren Agada, briefed me about the planned activities and what was expected of me. Our group was later assembled to meet with the Dean for



**DR. AGADA AND SOME MEMBERS OF THE TEAM SHORTLY AFTER LEAVING THE DEPUTY DEANS OFFICE**

introductions and to seek institutional support and blessings.

Our journey began with prayers on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July, 2021, as we all converged at a central point and made sure all the needed materials were on hand for the soil sampling exercise (boots, hand trowel, core sampler, probe, hammer, tapes, packaging nylons, tapes and markers). Our team went to seven (7) local government areas (LGAs) of Benue State namely; Ushongo, Konshisha, Kwande, Apa, Okpokwu and Obi. We made sure we took multiple samples at points where

there were slopes, since a slope is very much likely to have huge variations in soil nutrients' distribution as well soil development. Sampling was done to a depth of 90 cm at three (3) council wards in each LGA in one week. It was hectic and despite delays due to heavy downpours of rain on some days we pursued our goals undeterred.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of July, 2021, After the sampling from the LGAs and armed with the knowledge and skills gained, I assisted Dr. Mrs. Agada to facilitate a one day training of JOSTUM students on soil testing and soil sample collection at their University Research and Teaching Farm. The training comprised of over 800 Students with technical staff in attendance. The training session began with opening remarks by the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) coordinator, Dr. J. Okoh. The large number of attendees were grouped by departments. The process of proper field soil sampling was taught from scratch with one major goal that participants would become well grounded agronomists to continue in the tradition of the Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project (NAPP) motto of "Training One To Train Others". At the end of the training session the many questions and remarks of students were all attended to and light refreshments were served. Group pictures and interviews of a handful of students brought the day's activities to a close.

On Sunday, August 1, 2021, we arrived at the University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) where we were warmly welcomed by our hosts. The next day, the head of department of soil science at UNN, Dr. Chika, introduced our team to their technical staff and laboratory assistants. Since our samples were wet

because of constant rains, we had to get them air dried. We crushed the soil samples, sieved and repackaged them before moving them to the laboratory for labelling according to UNN guidelines. The next day, we sieved about 50 samples, weighed them and prepared reagents to test for organic carbon content, using Walkley-Black method and also for the percentage nitrogen determination using the Kjeldahl distillation method. There were many processes involved and they were all thoroughly explained to us by the laboratory assistants while we took notes at first. Afterwards, when we had mastered the sequencing the laboratory assistants allowed us to perform some analysis on the soil samples all by ourselves.

The evenings saw me and some team members exercising at the gym, and enjoying some good meals. I have never been a part of any project like this before. This experience should not end with me and my colleagues! I was filled with excitement and I want to thank my supervisor Dr. Mrs. Blessing Iveren Agada, USAID, the Nigerian Agricultural Policy Activity (NAPA), and MSU for impacting me with knowledge, skills and a unique experience. I am quite certain that I will put my gains to good use and I will impact lives too!

By Oplekwu Benson Onah

This work was a product of collaborative research funded by the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets (PIM) and the USAID Nigeria mission under the Feed the Future Nigeria Agricultural Policy Activity. The contents are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding agencies.

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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.