WORKSHOP ON PARLIAMENTARY AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE
FROM MARCH 4-6, LILONGWE MALAWI

DAY 1

THE FUNCTIONING OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS

The Senate Committee on Agriculture of the National Assembly of
Nigeria is one of the Standing Committees of the Senate of the Federal
Republic of Nigeria. It is referred to as ‘the Senate Committee on
Agriculture and Rural Development’ with jurisdiction to handle matters
relating to:

(a) agricultural production and marketing, and stabilizing prices of
agricultural products and commodities
(b) animal husbandry and disease control
(c) crop insurance and soil conservation
(d) dairy products
(e) extension of farm credit, farm security and national food security
(f) forestry and forest reserve
(g) livestock and meat produce
(h) plant, soil and agricultural engineering
(i) commodity exchange
(j) rural development
(k) fisheries
(l) poultry
(m) agricultural inputs, fertilizers, production of farm products,
marketing distribution and stabilization of prices of such inputs;
and
(n) annual budget estimates

The primary function of the Committee is to make laws on the above
listed items and to exercise its supervisory oversight on the activities of
the federal ministry of agriculture and rural development, departments
and agencies of agriculture that have direct bearing on agriculture.

By way of appropriation, the Senate Committee on Agriculture allocates
funds to the agricultural sector through the Federal Ministry of
Agriculture and other departments and agencies in order to develop the
sector. In the present government’s parlance, the emphasis is now to
transform the agricultural sector through the government’s ‘Agricultural
Transformation Agenda’ which the Committee has also keyed into in
order to ensure that there is a radical transformation of agriculture to
ensure food production and security. The aim is to eradicate poverty
and to ensure that agriculture is more-viable and seen as a driver of the
Nigerian economy. The government has come to realize that this will
be possible only when agriculture is taken as a business. So the Committee joined forces with the government to realize this vision.

To achieve its functions, the Committee has overtime increased research funding when exercising its budgetary role. Although this has been hindered severely due to the meager annual budgetary allocation to the sector. The Committee reinstates that at least 10% of the nation's budget should be allocated to the sector in line with the Maputo Declaration of 2003. This has never been possible. For instance, 2013 allocation was about 1.7% whereas this year, the proposal stands at about 1.4% - a far cry from what obtains elsewhere.

As a Committee we have strived to make visible changes to the sector through our oversight activities, publicity and awareness raising programmes, investigative and public hearings. We have also sponsored agriculture related Bills for assent by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Today, the government sees agriculture as very relevant to boost the economy and gives the sector some funding intervention. The government recently assisted the sector with N14bn towards Dry Season Farming. Our role is to ensure that farmers directly benefit from these government initiatives.

By way of appropriation, the Committee has improved research funding of agricultural research institutes; provided funding through the Bank of Agriculture in order to enable farmers have access to credit facilities at single interest rate. Farmers also have access to insurance through the National Agricultural Insurance Corporation.

The Committee works with the federal government by supporting mechanized agriculture; training of youth through several empowerment programmes, providing rural access farm roads among others.

The Committee is a supervisory body of the activities of the executive. It monitors policies and programmes of government and its agencies by way of oversight in order to ensure that funds appropriated in each fiscal year are judiciously utilized and accounted for. It therefore conducts oversight visits to specific projects of agencies, and invites the ministry, departments and agencies to justify their annual budgetary performance and defend budgetary estimates of a particular year. The agencies also defend utilization of any internally generated revenues and overseas development assistance accruing to them. The essence is to ensure accountability and proper budgetary implementation.
NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

Agricultural Science is very relevant to Nigeria. This is because it aids in researching into modern and improved methods of farming, thereby ensuring food production and food security. With agricultural science, the country will eliminate the traditional methods of farming for mechanized farming which will bring about increased production and increase in the country's economy.

Nigeria needs to improve on its production techniques such as irrigation and management of its soil through mechanized farming in order to improve agricultural productivity.

Agricultural scientists through research would help Nigeria to develop new pesticides, technologies, weed controls that are harmless to humans and would not hamper the growth of crops.

Through a well-organized value chain approach, primary products can be transferred without hindrance to the end user. Therefore with adequate mechanized farming tools, good soil and ecosystem management, proper silos in place, good road network, and a ready market, the country will move from subsistence farming to industrial agriculture thereby increasing food production, and at the same time creating jobs and boosting the economy.

In Nigeria, there are a number of agricultural science and research institutions. They include:

The Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria (ARCN) which oversees all agricultural research institutions in Nigeria.

There is also the Nigeria Institute of Crops Scientists (which is an umbrella body for all Soil Science practitioners). Although this Institute is yet to have an enabling law, its Bill is before the National Assembly for passage. However, the Institute is already working but awaits legislative backing.

Others are:

The Nigerian Institute of Animal Science
The Veterinary Research Council of Nigeria
National Veterinary Research Institute of Nigeria
National Root Crops Research Institute
Nigeria Institute of Oceanography and Marine Research  
Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria  
Rubber Research Institute of Nigeria  
Nigeria Institute for Oil Palm Research

The Nigerian Parliament has had quite a positive experience working with both national and international research institutions international agencies such as the Food and Agricultural Organistaion (FAO), IFAD, DfID, IITA, ICRISAT among others. The Committee visited ICRISAT in 2012 and commended it for its positive activities on semi arable crops. Its sister agency in Nigeria, the IITA is also doing quite a lot of research. But compared to these international research institutes, the national research institutes are a far cry due to poor funding. The manpower is there but the funding for research is inadequate. The Committee is aware that Agriculture being timely needs urgent response and attention and that is why it strongly advocates for urgent intervention.

Senator Adeogboye Sefiu, Raka  
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