

# PEASANT FARMERS' RESEARCH IN NIGERIA

## A LESSON FOR P.N.G. ?

By Samuel B. Lahis, Formerly, Extension Advisory Officer  
Education and Training Branch, D.P.I., Konedobu

### INTRODUCTION

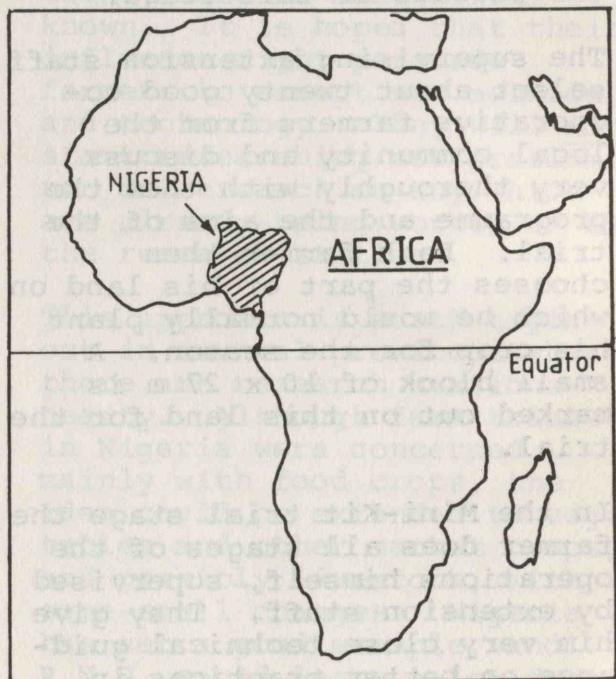
Nigeria is a country on the west coast of Africa. Like Papua New Guinea, it is mainly an agricultural nation with 70% of its 72 million people living on subsistence farms. Most of these are scattered small farm holdings. Extension and Research Services are important in changing subsistence to practical commercial farming.

This change has been made difficult over the years by a number of problems. Among these are the lack of enough properly trained extension workers, and the unwillingness of rural farmers to make changes because they are afraid of the risk.

In trying to solve such problems, the Nigerian Federal Government launched the National Accelerated Food Production Project (N.A.F.P.P. or 'Peasant Farmers' Research').

### AIMS OF N.A.F.P.P.

The first aim is to speed up the production of six major food crops (rice, maize, cassava, sorghum, millet and wheat) by using a field-tested package of improved practices which will produce more food for the people and more money for the farmers.



This map of Africa shows the position of Nigeria.

As well as organising research on a community basis, the N.A.F.P.P. lets the farmers know the results of research. It will encourage them to share technical information and to use better seeds.

### ORGANIZATION OF N.A.F.P.P.

As the project is a Federal project, it has the responsibility of making guidelines for the states taking part. It also trains staff and co-ordinates the state activities.

N.A.F.P.P. is organised in three stages, namely:

1. Mini-Kit Trial
2. Production Kit
3. Mass Awareness

### 1. The Mini-Kit Trial Stage

This stage is very important because the farmer's willingness to go into the next two stages will depend entirely on the success of this stage.

The supervising extension staff select about twenty good co-operative farmers from the local community and discuss very thoroughly with them the programme and the aims of the trial. Each farmer then chooses the part of his land on which he would normally plant his crop for the season. A small block of 10 x 27 m is marked out on this land for the trial.

In the Mini-Kit trial stage the farmer does all stages of the operations himself, supervised by extension staff. They give him very close technical guidance on better practices in land preparation, field layout, times for planting, culture, the right amount, method and time of fertiliser application, proper weeding and when to harvest.

The farmers taking part are given four to five improved varieties of seeds, fertilisers, crop protection chemicals, and other 'agricultural inputs' in small packs called 'Mini-Kits'. These are all free of charge.

The farmers are encouraged to call the improved varieties by local code names which can be easier for them than the scientific code names.

After receiving the kits, the farmers are encouraged to hold

simple, non-replicated (each is unlike all the others) variety trials, on their own farms. They plant the improved seed varieties and their local varieties on different, equal, strips of the 10 x 27 m plot they have chosen.

Agu and Akinnawo (See 'Further Reading', below) report that the Mini-Kit trial stage gives a unique opportunity for a farmer to judge the performance of improved varieties when grown under local conditions and following the recommended practices. It also helps him to compare the yield from the improved varieties with the yield from his best local varieties.

Some farmers have obtained ten times the yield of their local variety from some of the improved varieties. These farmers quickly realised that the new recommended practices were better than those which they had used before.

This project has proved successful in many farming communities in Nigeria.

### 2. The Production Kit Stage

In this stage the farmers are helped to see the economic advantage of the new improved package over their traditional farming methods. They go through the processes all over again but the inputs (seeds, fertilisers and crop protection chemicals) are given to them at subsidised costs, no longer free of charge. This helps them to work out their real profits.

### 3. The Mass Awareness Stage

When the first two stages have been well planned and supervised, the 'mass awareness' (all the people knowing what

has been done) happens almost by itself. It happens quickly through spreading the news from farmer to farmer, much more than through the extension agents or being in the newspapers or on the radio.

It is reported that N.A.F.P.P. has been a very successful applied research project in the Nigerian Agricultural Extension Service, and is capable of greatly improving agricultural production in that country.

#### CAN P.N.G. LEARN FROM THIS EXPERIENCE?

The report from Nigeria is certainly encouraging as far as the Extension-Research Services liaison is concerned, in giving better agricultural production. Though this type of project has not been actively encouraged in P.N.G. perhaps it is time to look again at the situation, and learn something from what has been done in Nigeria.

In P.N.G., traditionally research into our major export crops and other products has been done by the department's research stations throughout the country. However, the Horticulture Section has now appointed Field Horticulturalists who are working more directly with extension workers and farmers. An important part of their work is to arrange trials and demonstrations of promising varieties or farming

practices in farmers' fields. As it takes a long time to get results of research and to tell people about them, these trials involving extension officers and farmers will be a short-cut way of publicising the results of research programmes.

On-farm trials use the results of research, whether in crops or livestock, and so would certainly help in making them known. It is hoped that their influence might persuade farmers to accept new methods and technology. They will not start researching new problems, nor do research on any which are already being worked on by the research stations.

This approach is worth trying out in several provinces where there are research stations nearby. Although farm trials in Nigeria were concerned mainly with food crops, the idea could be extended to vegetables and other market crops, and possibly livestock, with some small changes. Nigeria has set a good example, and P.N.G. could learn a lot from it.

#### FURTHER READING

Agu, E.C.P. and Akinnawo, C.B. (1977). Peasant farmers' research in Nigeria. *Extension Forum* No. 14. N.S.W. Department of Agriculture.