

Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project Highlights

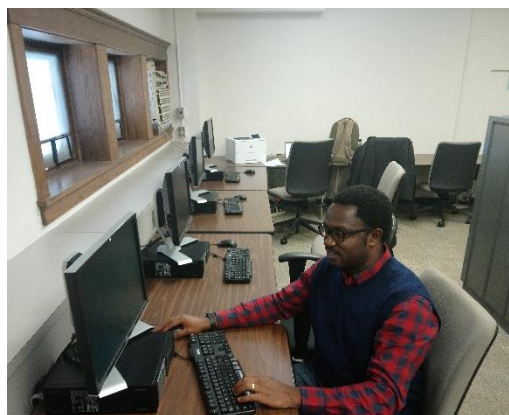
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Scholar Program 22

THE GULF BETWEEN AFRICAN AND AMERICAN GRADUATE PROGRAMS: THE EXPERIENCE OF ONE VISITING SCHOLAR FROM NIGERIA

My visit to Michigan State University (MSU) under the USAID funded Feed the Future Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project - has opened up a whole new gamut of experiential knowledge and learning that I never thought possible.

The culture of hard work and diligence in intellectual and academic pursuits at MSU is second to none. Having grown up with parents, who though not well educated, were extremely hardworking and diligent, I live with this family tradition. For example, my late father had a local printing press and was engaged in subsistence agriculture on family farmland at the same time. Thus, I grew up in an environment where we did not cut corners or compromise standards. My educational experience was formed within such a framework but this MSU experience has challenged me to further improve my goals and practices.



WELLINGTON OSAUE AT THE MSU AFRE'S COMPUTER LAB

Within the first week of arrival at MSU, I knew I was in for something different. I expected an experience similar to that with my Master's program in the UK. I was prepared to take my classes and flow along. Within the first few days of arrival, I realized that MSU students were totally immersed in work. Your mind and intellect are constantly being put to task as you are working on an assignment, writing a review, making a presentation, developing a proposal or engaging in

some form of academic discourse. As the saying goes in the institution, **“Who Will.....? Spartans Will!”**.

The department of Agricultural Food and Resource Economics (AFRE) and in fact the entire school environment, stimulates you to work and think innovatively on ways to solving critical development challenges. I found the AFRE graduate program, where I attended classes as a Visiting Scholar through the Policy Project, to be thorough and intellectually-stimulating. You are driven by the environment to search for new ideas, knowledge and resources to extend the frontiers, rather than waiting for a push from a few individuals. The experience was therefore much richer than my previous ones in Nigeria and the UK.

As a result, I feel strongly that the status quo in Nigerian universities needs to change. Why are Africa trained graduates not as competitive as their American counterparts? I have a background in Agricultural Economics with a reasonably good exposure in this field. My professors have done their best to pass on their knowledge and skills to us but the system here is different. There is an infrastructural deficit in Nigerian institutions; the know-how, the curriculum and the process of learning is fraught with challenges that need to be fixed if Nigerian programs are to be competitive with the rest of the world.

The American program (with MSU as a case study) may not be perfect, but it is worth learning from. There is in Nigeria, a need to entrench a culture of deep learning and understanding of the subject matter particularly so, with graduate programs. Topics should be delivered so that researchers are so well trained, they can stand their own anywhere they find themselves across the globe. Two questions to ask: “What are American programs offering that Nigerian programs do not? What are we doing that needs improvement?” No doubt, there are many areas to

focus on as we dissect the critical challenges that prevent us from bringing out the best from our graduate programs.



WELLINGTON OSAWE WITH MSU AFRE PROFESSOR, ANDREW DILLON

constantly updating their knowledge of subject matters, research methodologies and building this into graduate program curriculums. This, in my opinion, effectively helps to raise graduate students that are highly versatile and up-to-date in their approach to solving global development challenges with new methods and skills. This is the kind of thinking that could be introduced into graduate studies in Nigeria institutions of learning in order to produce researchers that are internationally competitive. One way by which this could be done is to learn from the Nigeria Agricultural Policy Project's innovative strategy of bringing Nigerian professors and their graduate students to observe what is currently being done in American Universities and to try to make use of some of the approaches and methods in their respective departments and institutions at large. Further, Nigerian universities have to be equipped with requisite and up-to-date infrastructure that stimulate opportunities for continuous upscaling of the skills of professors and their graduate students.

by Mr. Osawe, Osayamon Wellington
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

One area that will benefit from change is an improved graduate program curriculum. From my experience at MSU so far, students learn cutting edge skills required to address current problems. For example, in my field, professors are

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