

Public Servants Engagement and Expected Roles in Enhancing Increased Agricultural Production and Reduction in Food Prices in Delta State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

Public servants constitutes a vital segment of the working class population of Delta State that could be productively engaged in agriculture.. There is no documented statistics of Public Servants engagement and their required roles in increasing agricultural production and reduction in food prices in Delta State. The study was therefore designed to investigate Public Servants engagement and expected roles in enhancing increase agricultural production and reduction in food prices in Delta State. A cross-sectional research design was adopted. A sample of 655 from the State Civil Service (170), Post-Primary Education Board,(185) State Universal Basic Education Board (160),Boards, Parastatals and Government Owned Companies(70) as well as Tertiary Institutions (70) was taken. The Public Servant perceptions were rated using questionnaires and focus interviews, with the hypothesis tested using analysis of variance at 5% level of significance. Five hundred and ninety Public Servants representing 90.08% responded. The finding of the study show that Public Servants in most of the organizations believe that they should be engaged in agricultural production as they have a vital role to play;. Majority of the public servants in the state civil service (48.24%), Post Primary Education Board (31.35%), State Universal Basic Education Board (20.63%) and Tertiary Institutions (18.57%) consider provision of a percentage of their income to support research and development, volunteering to serve in government agric. programmes, formation of specialized farmers' co-operative societies, fashion of new technologies to increase cultivated area and suggestion to government of appropriate and workable agricultural policies as their expected roles, while majority of the public servants in the Boards, Parastatals of government owned companies (22.86%) have a contrary view; Public servants in all the organizations believe that government needed support should arise from allocation of land, provision of farm inputs, guaranteeing of loans, organization of capacity building programme, reduction of work time, provision of work, free days, outright purchase of harvested products, provision of free transportation scheme and increase in salary and allowances. The study recommends that the Delta State government should set up a Public Servant farmers empowerment scheme, improve public servants access to land, provide highly subsidized farm inputs and encourage public servants to levy a small assessment of their sales to support agricultural production.

Keywords : Agricultural production, Delta State, Expected Roles, Food prices, Public Servants

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I. INTRODUCTION

Public servants are persons in the public sector employed for a government department or agency (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, 2013). They are persons who hold a government position by election or appointment (America Heritage Dictionary, 2011). They are regarded as those outside the private sector. They work as governors, judges, legislators, in the educational sector, in the armed forces, health sector, and defense amongst others (Dee Smith, 2015). In Nigeria, public servants are either in the Federal, State or local governments. The state government public servants are government employees who work in any of the departments of a state or territory of government (Hobsons, 2015).

The role of public servants as stipulated by Junaidu (2005) includes (i) implementation and enforcement of economic, political and social policies of current government; (ii) raising revenue for government; (iii) ensuring managerial, political and financial accountability; (iv) serving the people; (v) monitoring and

evaluating performance of organizations (public, private or non-governmental) that are rendering service on behalf of government; (vi) driving all development initiatives and (vii) rendering quality public service. Public servants can therefore be considered as crucial to the overall efforts of nation building.

Experience overtime in Delta State shows that most public servants particularly those within the middle and high cadres are educated to a reasonable extent and perceive that their only means of survival is white collar jobs and are therefore adamant towards agriculture. Except for those within the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources that perform their assigned roles in supporting agricultural production, other public servants regard agriculture as what is supposed to be engaged in by local farmers in the rural areas. They regard it as being for people who had no formal education, are retired or old. They regard it as a non-lucrative profession due to perceived low earnings, manual labour and farm drudgery amongst others. These persons prefer to buy agricultural products at any price as against being engaged in it. They go further to discourage those engaged in agricultural production and encourage them to take up other ventures such as welding, okada riding, and any other perceived "fast money making" ventures. This as grossly affected agricultural production as fewer persons are now engaged in it. The massive rural-urban drive to seek alternative sources of earnings is a typical example.

The Delta State government in a bid to diversify the economy from crude oil dependency through its, "Delta beyond Oil" project consider agriculture as a vital alternative to achieve the declared aims of Nigeria's National Agricultural policy to; (i) attain food security (ii) increase production and productivity; (iii) generate employment and income; (iv) expand and reduce food imports thereby freeing resources for critical infrastructure development and delivery of social services. FAO projections reveal that by the year 2050, there will be 9.2 billion people in the world to feed, hence overall food production has to increase by 70%(FAO, 2011). Delta State with a growing population that is increasingly dependent on imported food may not be able to guarantee adequate food for its populace with time. Any scarcity will eventually lead to an astronomical increase in prices of food items thereby making it imperative that individuals from all shades of endeavours including public servants should be persuaded to engage in varying forms of agricultural production to guarantee an increase in the number of persons engaged in agriculture that would cumulatively guarantee an increase in agricultural production to enhance supply meeting up demand to stabilize and possibly reduce food prices.

On the basis of the foregoing, this paper (i) determines whether Public Servants should engage in agriculture; (ii) finds out whether Public Servants role in agriculture is important; (iii) investigate the expected roles of public servants in enhancing increased food production and food price reduction and (iv) identifies the kind of support that should be provided by government to assist public servants perform the expected roles

effectively in enhancing food production and reduction in food prices.

Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant difference between the five groups of Public Servants with respect to their perceptions of their expected roles in increasing agricultural production and reduction in food prices.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Delta State, Nigeria. The State is located in the South-South geo-political region of Nigeria and was created from the defunct Bendel State in 1991. The state is bounded in the North and West by Edo state; the East by Anambra, Imo and Rivers States, South-East by Bayelsa and on the Southern flanks is Bight of Benin. There are twenty-five local government areas in the state covering a total land area of 18,050km². The average rainfall ranges from 1,910mm in the northern areas to 2,670mm in the coastal areas. The state is characterized by mangrove swamps along the coast to rainforest in the coastal parts and a derived savannah (grassland, wooded shrub land and immature forest in the northern stretch). The topographic features of the state include flat lands with poor drainage, swamps and vast estuaries in the South and central areas, while the northern areas is characterized by low lying plains and undulating terrains with low hills and valleys. The main agricultural commodities produced in Delta State include arable crops (cassava, yam and maize), tree crops and perennials (oil palm, rubber, raffia palm and plantain) fruits and vegetables (pineapples, citrus and tomato). Livestock production focuses mainly on poultry and piggery, while goat and sheep are on traditionally free range. People along the coastal areas are involved in artisanal fisheries, while aquaculture is carried out throughout the state (UNDP, 2014). The study adopted a cross sectional research design by examining a cross section of public servants with respect to their expected roles in agricultural production and reduction in food prices at a single point in time and analyzing it. The population of the study comprised of the 65,454 public servants in Delta State.

Table 1: Staff Strength of the Delta State Public Service

S/No.	Organization	Population	Percentage	Composition Rank
1	State Civil Service (Ministries, Departments and Agencies)	17,000	25.98	2
2	Post-primary Education Board	18,454	28.19	1
3	State Universal Basic Education Board	16,000	24.45	3
4	Boards, Parastatals and Government Owned Companies	7,000	10.69	4
5	Tertiary Institutions	7,000	10.69	4
Total		65,454	100.00	14

Source: Delta State Public Service Bulletin, 2015.

* 1-Highest * 4 - Lowest

The stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting the sample population from each stratum such that the number of sample subjects from a particular stratum is proportional to the stratum's share of the total population. In that regard, the list of all the members of each of the organizations was obtained and purposively, a sampling interval of 100 was used in selection.

Table 2: Sample Population of Public Servants

S/No	Organization	Population	Sample Population	Percentage (%)	Rank
1	State Civil Service (Ministries, Departments and Agencies)	17,000	170	25.98	2
2	Post-primary Education Board	18,454	185	28.19	1
3	State Universal Basic Education Board	16,000	160	24.45	3
4	Boards, Parastatals and Government Owned Companies	7,000	70	10.69	4
5	Tertiary Institutions	7,000	70	10.69	4
Total		65,454	655	100	14

Source: Delta State Public Service Bulletin, 2015.

Structured questionnaires and focus group discussions were used in generating data for the study. Six hundred and fifty five questionnaires were administered and five hundred and ninety were retrieved properly filled, while the others were discarded. Five focus groups (one for the aforementioned organizations) were constituted. Each of the focus group had ten members (the moderator (researcher) and nine other members). The nine members were selected based on their interest on the subject matter and their willingness to contribute relevant ideas towards the successful completion of the study. Data collated from the questionnaires were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages and mean where necessary. On a five point likert scale, mean computations of 3.00 and above means acceptance, while below 3.00 resulted in rejection. The outcome of the focus group discussions were summarized and presented. The hypothesis was analyzed using analysis of variance (ANOVA) at 5% level of significance.

III. RESULTS

Personal characteristics of Public Servants

Data in Table 3 indicates a larger proportion of the Public Servants are males (51.53%), fall within the age range of 31-43years (47.63%), are married (85.42%) worked for period of 11-20years (35.59%), have a household size of 1-3 (66.78%), earn a range of income of ₦60,001 - ₦90,000 (31.02%) and have poultry production as their preferred area of agricultural specialization (41.69%). The implication of this result is that more of the

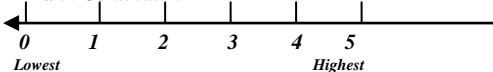
respondents are males, fall within the youthful production age, with family commitments, have been engaged in public service in the long term, possess a small family, earn an average income on a monthly basis and prefer poultry production to other areas of agriculture.

Table 3: Personal Characteristics of Public Servant

S/No.	Characteristics	Options	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1	Gender	Male	304	51.53	1
		Female	286	48.47	2
2	Age Range:	18-30	92	15.59	3
		31-43	281	47.63	1
		44-56	140	23.73	2
		Above 56	77	13.05	4
3	Marital Status:	Single	62	10.51	2
		Married	504	85.42	1
		Divorced	18	3.05	3
		Widowed	6	1.02	4
4	Length of Service:	0-10	148	25.08	3
		11=20	210	35.59	1
		21-30	200	33.7	2
		Above 30	32	5.42	4
5	Household Size:	1=3	394	66.78	1
		4=6	129	21.86	2
		Above 6	67	11.36	3
6	Range of Income:	₦0 - ₦30,000	79	13.39	4
		₦30,000 - ₦60,000	134	22.71	3
		₦60,001 - ₦90,000	183	31.02	1
		₦90,001 - ₦120,000	135	22.88	2
		Above N120,000	59	10	5
7	Area of Agricultural Specialization of Preference	Crop Production	152	25.76	3
		Livestock Production	12	2.03	4
		Poultry production	246	41.69	1
		Fisheries	180	30.51	2
		Others Please. Specify	-	-	5

Source: Survey Data, 2015

* Rank Continuum



Perception of Engagement of Public Servants in Agriculture

Table 4 shows that public servants in organizations such as the State Civil Service (\bar{X} =2.95), and Boards, Parastatals of government owned companies (\bar{X} =2.83) do not believe that public servants should be engaged in Agriculture, while those in the Post Primary

Educations Board (\bar{X} =3.37), State Universal Basic Education Board (\bar{X} = 3.46) and Tertiary Institutions (\bar{X} =3.76) accept that public servants should be engaged in agriculture.

Table 4: Perception of Engagement of Public Servants in Agricultural Production

Response Variables	Organization/Frequency				
	SCS	PPEB	SUBEB	BPGOC	TI
Strongly Agree (5)	52 (260)	78 (390)	43 (215)	09 (45)	23 (115)
Agree (4)	18 (72)	20 (80)	51 (204)	16 (64)	19 (76)
Undecided (3)	10 (30)	08 (24)	13 (39)	08 (24)	07 (21)
Disagree (2)	49 (98)	50 (100)	30 (60)	28 (56)	20 (40)
Strongly Disagree (1)	41 (41)	29 (29)	36 (36)	09 (9)	11 (11)
TOTAL	501	623	554	198	263
N	170	185	160	70	70
\bar{X}	2.95	3.37	3.46	2.83	3.76

* $\bar{X} = 3$ or $> 3 =$ accept $\bar{X} < 3$ – reject **N= 590**

Perception of Importance of Public Servants Roles and Expected Roles in Boosting Agricultural Production.

Table 5 indicates that public servants role in agricultural production is important as shown by the mean computation of the public servants of the State Civil Service (\bar{X} =3.52), Post Primary Education Board (\bar{X} =3.02), State Universal basic Education Board (\bar{X} =3.16), Boards and Parastatals of Government Owned Companies (\bar{X} =3.28) and those of Tertiary Institutions (\bar{X} =3.49).

Table 5: Perception of Relevance of Public Servant Roles in Agricultural Production

Response Variables	Organization/Frequency				
	SCS	PPEB	SUBEB	BPGOC	TI
Strongly Agree (5)	63 (315)	56 (280)	38 (190)	18 (90)	201 (100)
Agree (4)	34 (136)	37 (148)	49 (196)	24 (96)	21 (84)
Undecided (3)	12 (36)	18 (54)	08 (24)	05 (15)	10 (30)
Disagree (2)	50 (100)	40 (80)	30 (60)	06 (12)	11 (22)
Strongly Disagree (1)	11 (11)	34 (34)	35 (35)	17 (17)	08 (8)
TOTAL	598	559	505	230	244
N	170	185	160	70	70
\bar{X}	3.52	3.02	3.16	3.29	3.49

* $X = 3$ or $> 3 =$ accept $X < 3$ – reject **N= 590**

Table 6 shows that the public servants perception of a combination of providing a percentage of their income for research and development, volunteering to serve in government agricultural programmes, formation of specialized public servants farmers co-operative societies, fashioning out of new technologies that will increase cultivated area and suggestion to government of appropriate and workable policies dominated in the State Civil Service (48.24%), Post Primary Education Board

(31.35%), State Universal Basic Education Board (20.63%) and Tertiary Institutions (18.57%) as the expected roles of public servants in Agricultural production and reduction in food prices. Conversely, public servants perception of their expected roles in the Board, parastatals of government owned companies (22.86%) indicates that a combination of providing a percentage of their income for research and development, volunteering to serve in government agricultural programmes and formation of specialized public servants Farmers Co-operative Societies dominated amongst others.

Table 6: Perception of Expected Roles of Public Servants in Boosting Agricultural Production and Reduction of Food Prices.

Expected Roles	Organization/Frequency/Percentage				
	SCS	PPEB	SUBEB	BPGOC	TI
(i) Provide a Percentage of their Income to support Agricultural Research and Development	03 (1.76%)	14 (7.57%)	20 (12.50%)	03 (4.29%)	12 (17.14%)
(ii)Volunteering to serve in Government Agricultural programmes	- (-)	03 (1.62%)	08 (5.00%)	07 (10.00%)	06 (8.57%)
(iii)Form specialized Public Servants Farmers Co-operative Societies	12 (7.06%)	09 (4.86%)	20 (12.50%)	08 (11.43%)	05 (7.14%)
(iv)Fashion out new technologies that will increase cultivated area	07 (4.12%)	10 (5.41%)	30 (18.75%)	07 (10.00%)	04 (5.71%)
(v)Suggest to government appropriate and workable agricultural policies	09 (5.29%)	05 (2.70%)	02 (1.25%)	02 (2.86%)	09 (12.86%)
(vi)Encourage and promote Gender equality in Agriculture	04 (2.35%)	03 (1.62%)	04 (2.50%)	01 (1.43%)	01 (1.43%)
(vii)Encourage and re-orientate other categories to be engaged in agricultural production of varying forms	15 (8.82%)	10 (5.41%)	08 (5.00%)	06 (8.57%)	05 (7.14%)
(viii) Organize Seminars, Workshops and symposia to provide more information and knowledge	08 (4.71%)	04 (2.16%)	03 (1.88%)	03 (4.29%)	03 (4.29%)
(ix) Encourage use of improved tools and equipment, soil improvement, protection of crops and animal health	12 (3.06%)	13 (7.03%)	10 (6.25%)	04 (5.71%)	02 (2.86%)
(x) i, ii, iii.	- (-)	20 (10.81%)	03 (1.88%)	16 (22.86%)	07 (10.00%)
(xi) i, ii, iii, iv & v	82 (48.24%)	58 (31.35%)	33 (20.63%)	05 (7.14%)	13 (18.57%)
(xii) i, ii, iii, iv, v, vi, viii & ix	16 (9.41%)	34 (18.38%)	18 (11.25%)	03 (4.29%)	03 (4.29%)
(xiii) None of the above	02 (7.18%)	01 (0.54%)	01 (0.63%)	01 (1.43%)	- (-)
Total	170	185	160	70	70

Source: Survey Data, 2015

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Perception of Governments needed Support to Public Servants to performing their Expected Roles in Agricultural production and Reduction of Food Prices.

Table 7 reveals that governments needed support to public servants in the performance of their expected roles in enhancing agricultural production and reduction in food prices involved a combination of allocation of land for agriculture, provision of farm inputs, guarantee of loans, organization of capacity building programmes, reduction of work time for 8am - 4pm to 8am -2pm, provision of work free days to public servants engaged in agriculture, outright purchase of harvested products, provision of free transportation scheme to and from the farms when needed and increase of salary and other allowances. The combination of these dominated as shown by the responses derived from public servants in the State Civil Service (28.82%), Post Primary Education Board (34.05%), State Universal Basic Education Board (22.50%), Boards and Parastatals of Government Owned Companies (27.14%) and Tertiary Institutions (20.00%).

Table 7 Perception of Needed Support from Government by Public Servants in their Expected Roles of Increasing Agricultural Production and Reduction of Food Prices.

Needed Government Support	Organization/Frequency/Percentage				
	SCS	PPEB	SUBEB	BPGOC	TI
(i) Allocation of Land for agriculture	08 (4.71%)	02 (1.08%)	35 (21.88%)	11 (15.71%)	05 (7.14%)
(ii) Provision of Farm Inputs	-	-	-	-	-
(iii) Guarantee of loans	11 (6.47%)	01 (0.54%)	08 (5.00%)	03 (4.29%)	06 (8.57%)
(iv) Organization of Capacity Building programmes	23 (13.53%)	01 (0.54%)	07 (4.38%)	04 (5.71%)	08 (11.43%)
(v) Reduction of work time from 8am-4pm to 8am-2pm	07 (4.12%)	20 (10.81%)	28 (17.50%)	10 (14.29%)	12 (17.14%)
(vi) Provision of work free days to public servants engaged in agriculture.	01 (0.54%)	28 (15.14%)	03 (1.88%)	08 (11.43%)	05 (7.14%)
(vii) Outright purchase of Harvested products	02 (1.18%)	12 (6.49%)	05 (3.13%)	03 (4.29%)	06 (8.57%)
(viii) Provision of free transportation scheme to and from farms when needed other Allowances	08 (4.71%)	04 (2.16%)	10 (6.25%)	02 (2.86%)	04 (5.71%)
(ix) Increase in Salary and	03 (1.76%)	02 (1.08%)	- (-)	- (-)	01 (1.43%)
(x) All of the above	49 (28.82%)	63 (34.05%)	36 (22.50%)	19 (27.14%)	14 (10.00%)
(xi) i, ii, iii, iv & v	48 (28.24%)	34 (18.38%)	21 (13.13%)	06 (8.57%)	07 (9.00%)
(xii) i, ii, v, vii & viii	10 (5.88%)	13 (7.03%)	07 (4.38%)	04 (5.71%)	02 (2.88%)
Total	170	185	160	70	70

Source: Survey Data, 2015

Table 8: Summary of Outcome of Focus Group Discussions in Public Service Organizations

Moderator /Researcher Presentations	Summary Opinion of Panel Members
* What do you think of Public Servants engagement in agriculture?	Public servants should be engaged in agriculture to provide food for themselves their families and others for sale to supplement their income. They should be engaged in agriculture to enhance self sufficiency in food production, reduce dependence on imports and purchase from the market and conserve income for other important activities such as education of their children, building of houses, buying cars amongst others. They should be engaged in agriculture in either small, medium or large scale to increase the population of those engaged in agriculture to increase agricultural production. But however, a good number of public servants are not engaged in agriculture.
Why have most public Servant not been engaged in agriculture?	Most public servants have not been engaged in agriculture as a result of the belief that farming is tedious, difficulty in acquiring land, lack of expertise, erroneous belief that farming is for old and uneducated people mostly resident in the rural areas, lack of adequate funds, and lack of encouragement from other farmers, government and relevant institutional stakeholders.
Do you think that the engagement of public servants in agriculture can make a difference in the level of production and reduce food prices?	The engagement of public servants in agriculture will increase numbers of persons in agriculture which will ultimately increase the overall scale of production as larger area will be cultivated more inputs will be used and greater output will be expected. This will ultimately increase the supply of food in relation to the demand such that prices of food will become reduced as competition to sell in the face of availability will enhance this.
How can the afore-mentioned be achieved?	There is the need for concerted efforts by stakeholders such as Government, public servants, agricultural institutions, international organizations and other farmers. There is the need for proper enlightenment and re-orientation of public servants on the relevance of agriculture to their overall well being and that of others and thus the need for them to be engaged in it. Relevant agencies on their part should organize capacity building programme, provide loans to intending and existing public servants who wish to or are engaged in agriculture, provide farm inputs at highly subsidized rates and enhance the acquisition of adequate land at strategic points in the state as well as farm tools and machineries for use in the operation of the farms. A specialized government agency should be created to oversee public servants engagement in agricultural production in Delta State.

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Table 9: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the Mean Response of Five Groups of Public Servants on their Expected Roles in Enhancing Increased Agricultural production and Reduction in Food Prices.

Sources of Variation	Degree of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F-ratio	Critical Value	Significance	Decision
Between groups	(K-1) 4	75.37	18.84	0.11	2.53	N.S	Reject Ha
Within groups	(N-1) 60	10.199.16	169.99				
Total	(N-1) 60	10,274.53					

P >= 0.05

Decision: From the F-ratio distribution, the critical value of F with 4 and 60 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance is 2.53. Since the F computed value of 0.11 is less than the critical value of 2.53 there is good reason to reject the alternative hypothesis (Ho) and accept the null hypothesis (Ha) which states that there is no significant difference between the five groups of public servants with respect to their perceptions of their expected roles in increasing agricultural production and reduction in food prices.

IV. DISCUSSION

In Nigeria, agricultural production is dominated by small holders farming system which is known to be responsible for about 25% of total production (Fasoranti, 2006). Increasing agricultural production to meet the needs of the teeming population in Delta State has become very important. Population census figures for 1991 and 2006 show an increase from 2,570,18 to 4,098,391 (NPC, 2015) Population projection by GTZ (2004) indicates that the population of Delta State in 2015 will be 4,877,000 and this will increase to 5,681,000 in 2020. The population increase should be matched by concerted efforts at enhancing agricultural production. In this regard, efforts to enhancing agricultural production should be geared towards diversification of the economy towards agriculture taking its "pride of place" to promote self sufficiency in food production. All categories of persons in Delta State, public servants inclusive should therefore be engaged in agricultural production. This falls in line with the findings of the study (Table 4) as stipulated by the public servants in the PPEB, SUBEB and TI that public servants should be engaged in agriculture. To enhance public servants engagement in agricultural production, new mandates should be introduced and defined. This should be area-specific and should recognize the needed contributions of public servants to overall agricultural production (Nogueria, 2006). The engagement of public servants in agricultural production has the capability to enhance the generation of income from sale of products to supplement their income and provide food for themselves and their families.

The perception of agricultural production being the output per worker (Shneider and Gugerty, 2011) indicates that the higher the number of public servants engaged in agriculture the greater the output. This supports the perception by all public servants in the organizations that public servants have a vital role to play in increasing agricultural production (Table 5). However, certain barriers to the engagement of public servants in agriculture such as perception of farm drudgery, lack of funds, lack of expertise and availability of little time to attend to farms amongst others could limit the roles of public servants in agricultural production. Considering the relevant roles that public servants have to play in agriculture, several of these are expected of them. Hence, Nogueria (2006) noted that public sector has new roles in agriculture for a development agenda. Some of the expected roles that constituted the majority of opinion of the public servants in all the organizations (Table 6) were; (i) providing a percentage of these income to support agricultural research and development. This comes into play either through a compulsory or voluntary contribution from earnings. There could be a collective agreement of contributing 0.5%, 1%, 2%, 3% or more as the case may be or an individual opting out to make some percentage contribution from salary at source into a stipulated account towards agricultural production. (ii) volunteering to serve in government agricultural programme. With the current Delta State governments "Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurship Programme" aimed at providing the necessary skills to youths in Agriculture for agricultural production, a public servant with interest in enhancing agricultural production can willingly opt to be posted to provide his/her service towards ensuring the success of the programme. (iii) form specialized public servants farmers co-operative societies. In this regard, public servants can form farmers co-operative societies based on their area of specialization in agriculture. For example, Public Servants Cassava Producers Co-operative, Public Servants Poultry Production Co-operative and Public Servants Maize Producers Co-operative amongst others. These co-operatives can as a body source for loans for their members to enhance the availability of funds amongst others towards enhancing the production activities of their members. (iv) fashion out new technologies that will increase cultivated area. This requires conducting research on the various technologies utilized in cultivating an area and based on experience over time develop new technologies such as new machines and new pesticides amongst others that will enhance agricultural production. (v) suggest to government appropriate and workable policies. Public servants need to be engaged in government think-tank groups. As a result of their experience in the shortcomings of various government agricultural programme, it can provide a basis for providing statement of actions that are most appropriate in addressing perceived flaws towards developing an agricultural programme of excellent status that will most favorably enhance agricultural production. The study also found out that the perception of lesser proportion of the respondents on the expected roles of public servants in enhancing agricultural production is (i)

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encourage and promote gender equality in agriculture. Men and women have vital roles in agriculture. The belief that one is the “weaker sex” such that agricultural production should be left for the “stronger sex” should be discarded. The co-operation of men and women in engaging their families in agricultural production will enhance greater output from farms through collective responsibility and effort. (ii) encourage and re-orientate other categories to be engaged in agricultural production of varying forms. An individual engaged in monocropping may be encouraged to enhance mixed cropping to provide for the varietal needs for food. On the other hand, individuals engaged in crop production should be encouraged of the need to embrace animal production to enhance mixed farming. This will in no small measure enhance agricultural production in the long-run (iii) Organize seminars, workshops and symposia to provide more information and knowledge. New innovation of immense relevance to enhancing agricultural production can only be learnt through interactions at such fora. Through this, suggestions on how to tackle the various observed shortcomings that negate agricultural production can be addressed.

The study found that the performance of the expected roles by Public Servants has the capability to increase agricultural production and reduce food prices. Shneider and Gugerty (2011) noted that increase in agricultural production catalyze a wide range of direct and indirect effects that mediate pathways to poverty reduction. In terms of the direct effects, increased agricultural production in the belief of Irz, Lin, Thirtle, Collins and Wiggins (2001) will promote farm economy by generating higher income from output (ii) promote rural economy by creating more jobs upstream and downstream in agriculture and food value chains (iii) promote the national economy by reducing prices of food and raw materials, raising real wages of the urban poor and reduce wage costs of non-farm sector; and (iv) help to earn foreign exchange from exports and allows import of capital goods and essential non-farm production. Increase in agricultural production lowers food prices, but the size of effect is difficult to estimate as liberalization of trade leading to internal and regional trade drives up food prices. In this regard, higher quality imported agricultural production in the face of competition with lower quality local agricultural products will attracts a higher price thereby making higher supply over demand not a determinant of price. Abdullah and Kalim (2004) opined that the demand and supply side factors determines food prices. In relation to this, an increase in agricultural production will lead to price reduction when elasticity of demand is low and markets are thin. Thus, when demand is inelastic, prices will fall more when production increase than when demand is more elastic, conclusively, where demand is more inelastic a greater share of the benefit will accrue to customers.

As a result of the Land Use Act (1978) in Nigeria which provides that all lands belong to government and it is the responsibility of government to allocate and

designate lands to various activities, government should support public servants expected roles by providing land to them for agricultural production (Table 7). Rather than public servants depending on purchase, inheritance, gift and lease land tenure systems amongst others that may not be workable, governments assistance in this regard will serve to ameliorate the challenges of land acquisition for agriculture. Farm inputs on the other hand such as good quality improved seeds, seedling, machineries and pesticides amongst others are usually expensive and sometimes unaffordable. It is therefore imperative for government to support public servants in performing their expected roles in agricultural production by sourcing and providing the aforementioned at subsidized rates for onward delivery to public servants. The granting of loans usually requires the presentation of collateral security that surpasses the loan being sought. In that regard, only very small amounts that can support small scale farming in line with the financial standing of the public servants can be granted when sought. Government can encourage banks and other financial institutions to grant “huge” loans to public servants to increase their scale of agricultural production. These loans will then need to be guaranteed by government such that in the event of any discrepancies/ failure to pay, the government is there to the rescue. Public servants performance of the expected roles in agriculture may be “stalled” by lack of necessary information and knowledge. Entering into a different terrain requires acquiring the needed capacity through knowledge and information acquisition through seminars, conferences, workshop and symposia. The government in this regard can support public servants by organizing such programmes on a monthly, quarterly or bi-annual basis. Such programmes may be tailored to address the specific needs of the public servants farmers at the appropriate time. the International labour organization stipulated time of eight hours of work daily (8am-4pm) adopted by the public service in Delta State is inadequate for public servants to have time for agriculture on a daily basis. Agriculture is time consuming and as such a reduction in time of work to six hours (8am-2pm) as well as granting Fridays as work free days to allow public servants enough time to engage in agricultural production could be most helpful to public servants engaged in agriculture. Inadequate time to engage in marketing of harvested agricultural products can make public servants engaged in agriculture to reduce their scale of production. Combining assigned public service functions with agricultural production and marketing can be a herculean task that is unachievable. Thus selling agricultural products can pose a challenge. But the assurance of having government purchase outright all harvested agricultural products can enhance increased production. Transportation cost constitutes a vital aspect of agricultural production. Most farms are located in rural areas, mostly out of the city centre where most public servants live. To go to their farms therefore huge transportation costs may be incurred this may ultimately discourage engagement in agricultural production. In this regard, governments introduction of a special transport scheme to convey public servants to farms at very

minimal or no cost to and from the farms can serve to encourage them. The salary of most public servants today can “hardly take them home”. It is therefore of great necessity that salary package should be enhanced to meet up the realities of the time. Such enhancement will provide public servants more funds to be engaged in agricultural production and ultimately boost food production.

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study generated the conclusion that public servants should be engaged and have several expected roles to perform to increase agricultural production and reduce food prices. Most of these roles should arise from their voluntary actions such as providing funds for development of Agriculture, serving in government agricultural programme and forming public servants co-operative societies amongst others. The performance of those roles to guarantee effective results requires multi-dimensional support from government. Food price reduction is expected to be achieved in line with a higher supply of food from increased agricultural production over demand.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations arise from the findings of the study;

- (i) The Delta State government should put in place a Public Servant Farmers Empowerment Scheme (PSFES). This scheme should be geared towards providing the necessary incentives that will encourage all “shades” of public servants to embrace agriculture to boost agricultural production. The Delta State government in this regard should partner with International organizations such as FAO, USAID, IFAD, EU, and ECOWAS to acquire the needed expertise for the successful operation of the scheme.
- (ii) Delta State government should improve public servants access to land for agriculture by acquiring large expanse of land and introducing land use practices that will enhance sustainable agricultural production. The government on its part in land acquisition should respect the voluntary guidelines on responsible governance of tenure land and other natural resources, recognizing the need to engage with indigenous and community investors, recipients, private sector and civil society to ensure sustainable and transparent practices. They should also take into consideration the principles for responsible agricultural investment that respects rights, livelihoods and resources as stipulated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2011)
- (iii) Increased agricultural production and reduced food prices can be achieved through the Delta State government provision of very highly subsidized

farm inputs through its agencies to reduce the cost of agricultural production. In addition, the Delta State government can empower public servants to market their produce and buy them during the season at guaranteed minimum prices.

- (iv) Public servants engaged in agricultural production should be encouraged to levy a small assessment of their sales to support research towards boosting agricultural production in public institutions such as Research Institutes, amongst others. In this regard, a bill may be sponsored to the State House of Assembly seeking legislation to be put in place for all agricultural producers to make “checkoffs” mandatory for research and promotion of agriculture. This could also be regarded as end-point royalties particularly where new improved varieties are used.

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