Alhaji Monsuru Ajayi is a successful Ofada rice farmer and miller from Ogun state. He graduated in 1993 with a certificate in marketing from Odua University in Ife, Osun state. Uncommon for someone with this training, he then entered into rice processing, an occupation he had been practising in his family’s business since 1983. His father, a leading rice farmer and miller in Ifo town of Ogun state, had owned and run more than ten milling machines. Ajayi had managed the family mill in the past, before handing the business over to his younger brother.

In 1999 Ajayi set up his own small rice mill in Igbogila village in Ogun state, where he processed approximately four metric tons (MT) of rice per week. Ajayi purchased his paddy from 90 farmers; however, he did not own any land, and the amount of paddy he could buy from nearby farmers was limited. He sold the rice he milled mostly to local customers in Ogun state.

“My income was so low. I made about ₦200,000 (£800) per year after expenses, which included cost of fuel to power the milling machine, workers’ wages, rent for the shop and other operating costs—not to mention the cost of the paddy. If I had had access to land, I would have been able to produce my own paddy.”

One of the challenges Ajayi experienced in gaining access to land, however, was that the nearby farmlands were communally owned. At the time, many of the plots were being used for cassava farming. Given the traditional Nigerian communal land tenure system, the land in the periphery of urban areas lie under the custody of the Obas, the traditional rulers of the communities. In order to gain access to a local plot, the ruling Oba must approve a farmer’s request to lease the plot for a specified period of time. Without such approval, farmers seeking access to fertile lands are forced to move further into the rural areas.

**Intervention**

In 2007 the Ogun state politicians decided to harness the strong potential of local rice production to improve the state’s economy, and in 2008 the state government requested PrOpCom’s assistance in drafting a rice sector policy. PrOpCom, however, asked the government to adopt a specific policy design process—something that was new to the policymakers. PrOpCom encouraged state politicians to work in a collaborative manner with business leaders, farmers and traditional rulers to draft a policy that would include the perspectives of all stakeholders. In the past, policymakers had relied on the opinions and advice of academics and select political patrons to make policy decisions. Getting the opinions of the people who would be affected by the policy decision was a completely innovative approach.

Ajayi was selected to take part in a series of public-private dialogue (PPD) meetings—due to his father’s former status as a major rice processor in the community, and also due to his own knowledge in rice farming and processing, gleaned from the family business. Earlier, in 2007, Ajayi had also been invited to attend PrOpCom-sponsored workshops on bird-scaring, record keeping, and product marketing and packaging, which the programme was conducting as part of its parallel interventions focusing on the Ofada rice value chain in the state.

“I participated in the PPD meeting as a stakeholder and RIFAN member. We engaged with several elected officials of the state and local councils to discuss the rice policy, and it was enlightening to watch how they responded to our requests. The Oba of Orile Ifo was the only Oba who participated at one of the stakeholder meetings facilitated by PrOpCom; but at the local level, RIFAN engages the Obas in advocacy activities. Additionally, my business has improved as a result of the knowledge I gained by participating in PrOpCom’s Ofada rice workshops and the PPD meetings. I now approach my business more professionally.”

**Expanding spheres of influence**

Through PrOpCom’s collaborative dialogue process, Oba Tinuoso-Joshua learned more about the politicians’ support for the rice sector, and discovered that lack of access to land was a serious constraint to its growth. Unlike the Ogun state political leaders, the local Oba is the community leader that citizens trust. The Oba is also the leader whom local farmers can approach with requests for support.
HRH, Oba Samuel Oludademun Tinuoso-Joshua, Oba of Orile-Ifo community

Samuel Oludademun Tinuoso-Joshua is a retired civil servant, previously having served as the Secretary General for a labour union. As the Oba of Orile-Ifo, he is considered the paramount leader of the community. Upon his retirement from civil service, he was nominated as the branch chairman of the Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria (RIFAN), due to his political influence. After attending one of the PPD meetings facilitated by PrOpCom, he gained valuable information from political and business leaders about the growth potential of the rice sector for local farmers; this motivated him to become an ardent supporter of Ogun state's rice policy.

“I attended a seminar facilitated by PrOpCom for stakeholders in the rice value chain in Lagos, where I gained useful information about Nigeria’s potential in rice. It made me realise that there is no need for Nigeria to starve for rice, when we have the potential to cultivate it ourselves. We have enough suitable land for rice production to meet local demand—and someday could even produce for the export market. Rice is an important commodity in Ogun state, so any effort to modernise the production process will go a long way in improving the livelihood of the people. We need to develop a consistent policy framework for the entire rice value chain, to harness the economic potential of the crop. A careful implementation of the Ogun rice policy document will transform the economy.”

Ajayi's strong knowledge of Ogun’s rice sector empowered him to approach Oba Tinuoso-Joshua and another local ruler, and ask for their support in releasing to him land on which to develop a medium-sized commercial paddy farm. He says, “I embarked on an advocacy campaign to the Obas, sensitising them on the job creation potential that large-scale production of Ofada rice could bring to the community.” As a result of his participation in the PPD meeting and Ajayi's request for support, the Obas granted him the rights to farm on local communal lands. For Ajayi, this meant he could now grow the paddy he processed at his mill.

“My life has improved tremendously. I now own the rights to eight hectares (ha). Additionally I supervise another 25 ha of rice farmland in Igbogila, owned by other rice farmers. I am engaged in a 25-member cooperative society, which is where I sourced the money to clear the land. I contribute my savings of ₦50,000 (£200) weekly, after paying for the workers and other running costs. I now earn about ₦2.6 million (£10,450) per year.”

Today, Ajayi is joined by three other partners who have set up rice farms to promote Ofada rice production in Ogun state. Together they convinced the Obas to release a total of 70 ha in Igbogila village, and 20 ha in Iguawa village. After the Obas’ release of the lands for rice farming, Ajayi is now sourcing rice from 170 farmers. As a result, his mill has doubled its throughput to eight MT per week.

Increasing employment and incomes

Motivated by the expansion of his business, Ajayi approached another traditional ruler, Oba Samuel Atunda Oladipo, Oba of Ifo village in Ogun state, to request the release of more land. This time, Ajayi wanted to build a new rice mill in Ifo market. The

Ajayi (right) in front of his rice field with hired farm worker Ibrahim Sodiq.

Oba introduced Ajayi to the Ifo local government officials, who controlled the land at Ifo market.

“I went to the head of the community and explained my mission to him [i.e. to promote the tenets of the Ogun rice policy by expanding local investment in the rice sector]. The local government leaders assured me of their support, and released land for me to set up a new rice mill at Ifo main market. Furthermore, I told the leaders that establishing the mill in the area would create jobs for the people in the community, as more farmers would be engaged [in producing paddy for the mill]. When they listened to me, they bought into the idea. They had confidence that I would deliver. They were further convinced when they saw what was on the ground in terms of my modest efforts.”

From the increased revenue Ajayi earned at the rice mill, he was able to hire and pay labourers. On market days he provided a weekly salary of ₦4,000 (£16) to the rice mill labourers, plus a daily food allowance of ₦600 (£2.40). As a result of the improvement in

Wasiu Oyeyemi, operator at Alhaji Monsuru Ajayi’s rice mill in Ifo main market

Wasiu Oyeyemi (35), of Ifo village in Ogun state, was previously a farmer of cassava and maize. He used to earn ₦2,000 (£8) per week from his farm. While he still owns the farm, he now employs other people to manage it for him—thanks to his new employment as an operator at Ajaiy’s rice mill in Ifo main market. In 2005 a friend told him about the opportunity to work in Ajayi’s rice mill; he approached Ajayi for a job, so that he could better support his wife and two children. Ajayi took him on as a trainee, and trained him for six months. Ajayi pays him ₦4,000 (£16) in cash every week and provides him with a daily meal allowance of ₦600 (£2.40). He now earns a steady source of income—rather than the seasonal income of farming—which offers him more security in providing for his family.

“I reinvest my additional income into my farm, pay school fees of my two children and take care of my family. My family feels much happier now, and my wife sells rice in the market near our house.”

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his own income, Ajayi has been able to set up another new rice mill (nearing completion), and generate more jobs for the community.

"Whereas before I only had two casual labourers to work in the mill, now I have six casual labourers. I saw unemployed youths roaming about the streets and asked them to come and work part-time for me until I was able to offer them full-time employment. They accepted my offer. I now have between 18–20 casual youth labourers, depending on the amount of work in the farm, and 15 full-time farm workers. They receive a daily rate of ₦1,500 (£6). Today they are making money to take care of their families’ needs."

In conclusion, Ajayi said:

"My customer base has expanded greatly. Now I have over 100 customers, mainly from Lagos. My goal is to go into modernisation of rice processing. We want to go into packaging of rice in various sizes. I have also started work on getting my brand registered with the National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), to get required certification to enable me to sell my Ofada branded rice in the international market. I want to showcase Ofada rice to other countries.

"Participating in PrOpCom’s training workshops and PPD meetings exposed me to a whole new business model. I used the advocacy skills I learned in engaging traditional rulers in the communities to request them to release the rice farmlands to me. Today, my rice farm and mills have expanded, thanks to PrOpCom."

Mr Ibrahim Sodiq, farm labourer at Alhaji Monsuru Ajayi’s land in Igbogila

Ibrahim Sodiq (35), of Sopoto village in Igbogila, used to work on his father’s farm. He supported his wife, child and parents with a daily income of ₦1,000 (£4). He began working for Ajayi in April 2011—planting, bird-scaring, weeding and performing any other work required on the farm. From this work, he has increased his daily income to ₦1,500 (£6) or an extra ₦500 (£2) per day. He is saving it to buy his own land.

"I want to build my own house, and to become a successful farmer. My family is happy that my income has increased and we can live better lives. I want to remain a farmer with my own farm. I am looking forward to it."

PrOpCom (Promoting Pro-Poor Opportunities through Commodity and Service Markets) is an innovative market-driven programme that aims to reduce poverty in Nigeria. Funded by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID), the programme works with government institutions, businesses and individuals to enable agricultural markets to work better for the poor. PrOpCom’s full implementation lasts from April 2008 to December 2011.

The overall intention of the programme is to facilitate basic changes to market systems, to improve how markets operate, and to increase profits and revenue whilst providing benefits to the poor from these market interventions. Using a market-led, pro-poor development approach, PrOpCom aims to support the poor to enhance their incomes, increase their job opportunities, broaden their access to markets, and create more choice for them. PrOpCom facilitates and catalyses these changes—making them possible or making them happen faster—through active engagement of stakeholders, as opposed to direct service provision.

PrOpCom facilitates interventions in five markets (agricultural mechanisation, agricultural policy, fertiliser, financial services and rice), in order to promote agricultural market development that is beneficial to poor people in Nigeria.