

PrOpCom

Making Nigerian Agricultural Markets Work for the Poor

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Ogun State RIFAN Institutional Assessment Report

**Prepared by:
RBS Consulting Ltd
Alausa-Ikeja, Lagos**

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Forward

The following institutional assessment report relates to the Ogun State Rice Farmers' Association of Nigeria (RIFAN), a network of rice farmers in Ogun State. The report which is about assessing the health status of the network surfaced and addressed systemic institutional issues confronting the network as an organisation. Generally, the assessment was done engaging predominantly process-consulting protocols which focused principally on taking along the client in the process of assessing its health status and in addressing issues generated there-from

RIFAN happens to be one of the partner organisations isolated by the PrOpCom Management Team in the execution of its Ofada Rice Intervention Project. We would at this point, like to take this opportunity to thank our local consultants Mr. Cyril Ugwu and RBS Project Staff (Mr. Wilfred Ayisire and Miss. Ladun Oyeniyen) and above all, the leadership, membership of RIFAN and their various external stakeholders for making the assessment and its reporting possible.

PrOpCom is considering partnering with the Ogun State RIFAN in addressing some of the issues associated with the Nigerian rice value chain. However, it is not entirely clear to what extent RIFAN is able to deliver the services espoused in its mission statement as an institution. From experience, working with industry network organizations, it is clear that most of them are challenged by a number of issues which constrain their ability to function efficiently, effectively and in being proactive or futuristic in thinking. Leadership crisis, inept governance structure, limited accountability to membership, absence of transparent financial and administrative systems, conflicts, over bloated or weak membership base, limited institutional and human resources capacity, etc are some of the issues observed in most cases. With this in mind, PrOpCom seeks to conduct a collaborative institutional assessment of this network as an institution with the hope of building its capacity for effective and efficient service delivery within the chain of interest. Thus this report represents RBS Consulting Limited's outcome of an institutional assessment of Ogun State RIFAN conducted by the firm based on the Terms of Reference developed by PrOpCom.

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Executive Summary

PrOpCom is considering partnering with the Ogun State RIFAN in addressing some of the issues associated with the Nigerian rice value chain and as such commissioned RBS Consulting Limited to assess the health status of the network as an institution. The process of conducting the assignment involved documents review which was complimented with, interviews, discussions and feedbacks with the leadership, members, groups and management of the network. In so doing a number of systemic institutional issues confronting the network were isolated and discussed with its leadership with the hope that they will take ownership of them, and start thinking of how issues of strategic importance to them could be addressed with out delay.

As a form of introduction, The Ogun State Rice Growers Association was reportedly established July 13, 2000. Its Secretariat is located in Massaba Estate, besides Ita-Osin Garage, Ita-Osin, Abeokuta. The location is readily accessible all year round and is serviced by public utilities. The secretariat used to belong to the defunct Ogun Farmers Association to which the Ogun Rice Growers Association belonged. Though there were no official documents to indicate that this is the registered office of the network, there were no reasons to believe otherwise. The network became an affiliate member of RIFAN in 2002, after it was advised so to do by prominent and notable individuals with interest in the commodity. These notwithstanding, there are limited or no documents presented in support of Ogun Rice Growers Association's affiliation to RIFAN. In spite of the absence of a formal certificate of affiliation from the national RIFAN, several receipts of payments and other transactions between the National RIFAN and Ogun State Rice Growers Association were sighted, which strongly support the claim that the network is an affiliate member of RIFAN. To further attest to this fact, the National Treasurer of National RIFAN, Mr. Adams Elegbede is equally the Treasurer of the Ogun State Rice Growers Association. In the process of getting to understand the Identity and Processes of This Organization, it was observed that the identity of the network seems fluid and multiple in nature. On one hand it is Ogun State RIFAN and Ogun Rice Farmers Association on the other. The leadership of the organization affirmed this observation and noted that it was a coping strategy, informed by their negative experiences with other government sponsored networks and the fear of suffering a similar experience with the national RIFAN, which could be considered a one man organization. The implications of the adoption of this strategy became obvious as the assessment progressed, with the leadership agreeing to address it pending its formal registration with the appropriate government agency.

The network's Membership Strength, Gender Composition, Admission Requirements and Farmers Representation Mandate was critically examined and from all indications, its membership strength is estimated at about 1,000. It was however difficult verifying this, neither could the gender composition be accurately reported as most of the registered members were unavailable for verification. The network membership as at now consists predominantly of smallholder farmers devoting approximately 1.5 hectares of their land holding on the average to rice cultivation. The issues of membership strength and fee are rather cloudy as at now, however there are indications that the female composition of its membership may not be more than 20%. The main criterion for membership is that an applicant must be a practicing rice farmer either residing in or farming in Ogun State. The number of rice farmers in the state could also not be readily ascertained as relevant statistics on this subject were unavailable. However, there are indications that the active membership strength of the network could not, in all fairness, be more than 2% of the rice farmers within the state. The figure is certainly not a fair representation of the state rice farmers. With this in mind, it is not clear to what extent the network can claim representation of the state rice farmers' interest. This issue was discussed at length with the network leadership, and there are indications that the membership of the network is being expanded to accommodate the interest of other stakeholders within the chain.

Nature and Structure of Organization, Its Vision, Mission, Leadership Emergence and Commitment: RIFAN's espoused institutional positioning is that of a commodity network but it currently functions more as a farmers' network. It envisions improving the socio-economic wellbeing of Nigerian Rice Farmers in general and this is adequately shared within the network. There are strong indications to suggest that even at the national level, RIFAN is still largely a farmers' organization rather than a commodity network as espoused. In spite of this, there is strong indication that Ogun Rice Growers' Association (Ogun State RIFAN) is working to expand and deepen its membership base to include other stakeholders within the rice value chain in the state. As per its horizontal and vertical hierarchical structure, the network seems to have a well-defined structure comprising of the village units, local government branches and the state chapter. Presently, there are 8 rice-growing local governments in the state, but membership of the association for now is limited to 6 out of the 8 local government areas. According to the network leadership, there is a plan to expand membership to cover the 8 local governments. At the Ogun State chapter, leadership within the network emerges through consensus and not strictly through an electoral process. From all indications, the leadership of the network seems to enjoy the full confidence and trust of its membership. Presently, the network has no staff at either the state and branch levels. At the Ogun State chapter, the leadership of the state network doubles as the policy-making organ and **Management** of the organization. The network has survived basically on voluntary donations and services from its membership. Management and book keeping functions are rather rudimentary and does not reflect the networks income and expenditure profiles adequately. For the network to grow rapidly as a viable commodity network, it has to install and institutionalize a reliable but sustainable governance and management structures as well supporting systems if it were to survive as a credible institution.

It is difficult to itemize the type of **Business Services** the network renders its members neither could much be said on the **Management and Plans for the Future**. However, there is no denying that the network is quite effective in facilitating its membership's access to government-subsidized inputs, credits and services. Most often than not, RIFAN's approach to accessing these services have largely been reactionary in orientation rather than futuristic. In effect, the Ogun State RIFAN Chapter presents a picture of an organization that simply reacts to emerging opportunities rather than thinking through how such opportunities tally with its organizational objectives, values and focus. With this type of service delivery approach, it becomes difficult conceptualizing a sustainable **Capacity Building Programs** for the leadership, membership and staff of the network. Though its national body occasionally organizes training programs, limited or no institutional capacity building activities have been organized or attended by the members of the network. Practically all the training workshops attended by the leadership and or members have been on production processes - seed trials, improvement in cultural practices, processing, etc. Even then, it is not clear how all these have benefited the network as there are no structures or systems on ground for institutionalizing the processes and outputs of these trainings. Still on the issue of strategic and futuristic thinking, RIFAN national seems not to be helpful in providing the much needed leadership in this direction, as it is largely perceived a "one-man show" by the Ogun State chapter. In effect, it is not strange that Ogun State RIFAN, seems to lack strategic focus and or any plan for its future.

With this in mind, it becomes necessary to dig a bit deeper into the **Ogun State RIFAN's Advocacy Focus and Program** if at all it has any. Though the network pride's itself in being instrumental in the successful advocacy for a 110% tariff on imported rice, the network is yet to fully understand, conceptualize and develop its advocacy program at the state and national level. The association's claim of having successfully lobbied the federal government to approve and establish Rice Development Committee at the national, state and local government levels to coordinate rice programs at the three tiers of government, though impressive, hardly reflects adequate and proper understanding of what the issues are within the chain.

From our limited exposure with the organization, it is blessed with knowledgeable and skilled individuals. It is yet to be seen how much of these talents (*Sources of Expertise*) are being deployed in the interest of the sustainable growth of the organization. The network focus on production seems to have limited its horizon as a commodity oriented network. It depends almost entirely on the Ogun State Agricultural Development Program (OGADEP) for technical and production inputs. It is not particularly clear why OGADEP and even the West African Rice Development Association (WARDA) have focused largely on technical capacity building of individual members rather than building the capacity of the network to become a viable and sustainable institution. Knowledge and skills for now appear resident in individuals with no clear strategies for institutionalizing learning and experience sharing among its members and thereby empowering the network. It is left to be seen how long the network can maintain and support its culture of dependency on external service providers.

As a standard and unquestionable practice, an institutional assessment cannot but be inclusive of an assessment of the *Relationship* between an institution and its *External* stakeholders. In the case of RIFAN, the network has a long history of robust relationship with the Ogun State agencies responsible for the agricultural production, notably Ogun State Agricultural Development Program (OGADEP) and Agro Services Corporation (ASC). The network looks up to these state government agencies particularly OGADEP for directions in almost all issues bordering on the variety of rice to cultivate, supply of needed inputs, extension services, processing and sometimes, the marketing of the produce. As good as these may seem, it is not quite clear how this has benefited the network, as it seems rather patronizing and paternalistic in nature. There are indications that tend to suggest that the network has become very much cultured to dependency on government even to the point that it is unable to identify and take advantage of opportunities in other sectors of the economy.

This is buttressed by the fact that the networks relationship with financial service providers has been limited to government institutions alone. It maintains a savings account with the Nigerian Agricultural, Cooperative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB), Abeokuta branch and the Ogun State Agricultural Micro Credit Agency (OSAMCA). It is not particularly clear how helpful the relationship has been, as the network cannot lay claims to having obtained nor enjoyed any customer services from both organizations neither could these organization claimed to have provided any tangible or intangible services to the organization. Talking in terms of credit relationship, none exists between the two government banks and the network. The culture of dependency on public institutions seems to have limited the ability of the network in understanding the symbiotic nature of the relationship between a bank and its customer within the context of a network setting. In effect, the network seems helpless and often complains of the agencies service provision processes being influenced by political considerations; yet it has been unable to look elsewhere for practical alternatives.

Perhaps the only notable relationship the network had with a private sector organization was with Ofada Veetee Rice Limited (OVRL) in 2005, which ended a disaster. OVRL, through OGADEP approached the network and entered into an unwritten contract for the network to produce Nerica-1 rice for and on behalf of the company. The contract was never honoured and the network membership ended up with a commodity that has no market options because nobody was interested in Nerica -1 variety in the state. This incidence created a crisis of confidence within the network and it is being blamed for the dwindling membership of the network. Though the network claimed not to have ever had any relationship with any donor agency, it is well known that it partnered with WARDA, an International NGO, in its rice breeding efforts. It is not clear how helpful this partnership has been in the building of the network as an institution.

CONCLUSION: there are a number institutional development gaps which were isolated and needs to be addressed. Since all of them can not be address immediately, the network isolated five critical strategic issues it hopes to address soonest. Issues relating to its *Identity as an Organization* is one of them. While the network has resolved to identify with the national RIFAN, it is concerned that it has no formal accreditation with it. The issue of identity is further complicated by the fact that the

network which was established about six years ago, still does not have a constitution and or bye-laws of its own, and have not been formally registered with any authority at the local, state or national level. Again, this speaks of lack of knowledge on the part of the network's leadership on how an institution should be built and thereafter functions. Discussions at various levels of the network suggest an unclear understanding of institutional building.

Apart from the problem associated with its identity, the *Vision and Mission* of the network is lacking in objectivity. Its leadership and members seem to have a vision, but they seem constraint by their understanding of its implications in terms of actualization. For all practical reasons, the problem of the network is not lack of commitment or vision, but a lack of the requisite knowledge and skills in actualizing their objectives as a commodity network. Its leadership also seem not to have a clear understanding of how a commodity network is positioned, organized, and works for the purpose of advancing and sustaining the long-term socio-economic interests of its members and other stakeholders within the value chain

Talking in terms of *Membership Drive and Composition* the network membership drive has being suffering a reversal since 2005 following the disaster trailing the business relationship facilitated by the state government between the network and OVRL. From membership strength of about 1,000, the group has lost close to 70% of this number, leaving an active membership size of about 300. While they are gearing efforts to resume active membership drive, it is obvious the network does not have a clear understanding of what this involves. Apart from the above, RIFAN seems to have very limited capacity for membership development which is one of its biggest problems and was so acknowledged. For example, there are no mechanisms for tracking membership attendance at meetings; neither were there institutional structures in place for tracking issues relating to the growth and development of members' business interests. This apart, the network has been unable to identify the relationship and interlink reciprocity within the chain of interest. However, one needs to give kudos to the organization and its leadership for accepting this critical shortcomings and their willingness to address them.

The three major issues afore discussed, will undoubtedly pose a challenge in an attempt to have a network with structured *Governance, Management* with supporting systems in place. In the absence of these, the leadership of the network is saddled with the responsibility of the day-to-day running of the network. This has so far been sustained because of the limited size and activities of the network, which has little or no value-added services for its members. This again has largely contributed to the poor book and record-keeping performance of the network. This management approach cannot be sustained if the network must grow rapidly and function effectively as a commodity network. Therefore there is need for the network to develop, install, deploy and institutionalize relevant structures and supporting systems for efficient and effective governance and management.

Finally, the network's *External Relationship* has largely been with government agencies which seem to be patronising and paternalistic in nature. This prompted in 2005 the donation of rice milling machines, which have no direct relevance to the strategic issues confronting the network. If the network had had the opportunity to develop a clear focus on how best to go about pursuing its interest as a true commodity network, perhaps it would have been in a better position to define and negotiate the terms of its business relationship with its stakeholders, be it government, corporate or donor agency. Due to this lack of bargaining power, the network can hardly advocate nor promote the interest of its trade and members, thus the urgent need for bridging this gap.

THE ISSUES EMERGING, from the presentation on the previous three pages, point in the direction of a network with an espoused mission without clear understanding of what this entails. The seeming lack of understanding presents serious issues on what its programs are all about, what they are out to achieve, whom they are meant to benefit, how to go about them, how to measure progress when to do what and by whom and of course at what cost. The absence of these, led to the gradual emergence of institutional predation (one institution

feeding on other's weakness to achieve its purpose) masquerading as paternalistic support from its major external stakeholders. This has resulted in systemic issues limiting opportunities for creative and innovative thinking within the network in isolating issues and addressing them. It also has resulted in the emergence of a rather strong institutional culture of dependence as well. With limited ability for creative and futuristic thinking, the network has largely missed the opportunities for isolating challenges, opportunities and in learning to convert them into benefits. In effect its membership base seems unipolar in nature and even dwindling, as there are limited opportunities for thinking, conceptualising and in coming up with strategies and programs in isolating membership service needs. It also lost such opportunities for widening and deepening its membership base, for developing and installing proper governance and management structures as well as systems to propel the network now and into the future.

In effect the suggested ways forwards isolated by the network include among several others:

- a. Membership base widening, deepening, service needs isolation, etc
- b. Proper isolation of the vision and mission of the network and using this to determine its service orientation and delivery, advocacy program, governance and management structures and systems as well as in defining its external relationships.
- c. Commence all the above institutional capacity building, human and material resource mobilization process through a short term strategic plan development (one to two years).

Though presently weak, the network presents very several interesting opportunities that could be developed in the interest of rice interventions proposed by PrOpCom in Southwest Nigeria. It has the right attitudes of a learning organization, an honest leadership at different levels which is committed to the ideals and espoused vision of the network. Perhaps the most interesting opportunity this network presents to PrOpCom is its weakness (culture of dependence on government agencies) as well its robust relationship with government. In other words one could deploy these weaknesses in achieving PrOpCom's goal of influencing government agricultural policies and programs through the activities of its partners. Government as we all know is rather strategic at the level of change envisioned by PrOpCom. It has the material and financial muscles to effect change but seem constrained by not only a work force with limited understanding of what governance is all about but also lacks the capacity for innovative, creative and futuristic thinking. In building RIFAN's capacity lies the opportunity for engaging, motivating and building the capacity of the civil servants working them into advocates for change within their various systems. Since there would be a number of capacity building activities targeted at RIFAN, it may not be out of place to consider inviting their principal stakeholders to be part of the processes as observers. The principal benefit of so doing is that the change process would be initiated across the chain while also building the number of change advocates, who are likely to promote and carry on the process in their various respective capacities.

1. Introduction

PrOpCom is considering partnering with the Ogun State RIFAN in addressing some of the issues associated with the Nigerian rice value chain. However, it is not entirely clear to what extent RIFAN is able to deliver the services espoused in its mission statement as an institution. From experience, working with industry network organizations, it is clear that most of them are challenged by a number of issues which constrain their ability to function efficiently, effectively and in being proactive or futuristic in thinking. Leadership crisis, inept governance structure, limited accountability to membership, absence of transparent financial and administrative systems, conflicts, over bloated or weak membership base, limited institutional and human resources capacity, etc are some of the issues observed in most cases. With this in mind, PrOpCom seeks to conduct a collaborative institutional assessment of this network as an institution with the hope of building its capacity for effective and efficient service delivery within the chain of interest. Thus this report represents RBS Consulting Limited's outcome of an institutional assessment of Ogun State RIFAN conducted by the firm based on the Terms of Reference developed by PrOpCom.

2. Problem Isolation

In coming up with a workable organizational development and capacity building program for RIFAN, there is a need to have a good understanding of the organization as a corporate entity. This would provide the baseline on which future organizational development activities could revolve. The main purpose of the assignment was to provide the actionable information required in coming up with an intervention framework through which RIFAN's capacity as an institution could be developed, its human and material resources enhanced, all of which were unknown as the time the project was commissioned and without which the institutionalizing strategic and futuristic thinking within the organization could have been impossible.

3. Objectives

The primary focus of the assignment was to carry out an organizational assessment (OA) of RIFAN with the hope of coming up with actionable information and an intervention framework for its institutional capacity building. The assessment focused on the following aspects of the organization's life among others:

- Organizational vision, philosophy, legitimacy and identity
- Accountability, transparency in governance and of leadership
- Community/group intervention process.
- Policy formulation and intervention process
- Resources and program delivery support system.
- Organizational methods, management structures and their relevance in the running of the affairs of the organization of interest.
- External relationships

4. Our Process

4.1. Entry Point Negotiation

This involved meeting with the institution membership at all levels of the organization to discuss the OA process and solicit or negotiate their support for the process. In so doing, their areas of concerns (concluded their terms of reference) were isolated, analyzed and incorporated with that of PrOpCom. The purpose of so doing, was to come up with a consolidated terms of reference (ToR) which takes into consideration the interest of all the parties involved in this assignment.

4.2 Activities/Task Implementation Approach

The document review process was complemented with interpersonal, telephone chats, interviews or discussions with the leadership, members and management of the Network. Such interpersonal engagement helped in clarifying emerging issues arising from the outcome of the review. This process was particularly helpful in providing initial insights into the status of RIFAN, using non threatening questioning style. This provided opportunities for entry, as well as relationship and confidence building, which are required for a successful assessment.

4.2.1 Primary Information Gathering

This aspect of the assignment was the most strategic among all the tasks listed in our proposal. It required skilful entry and moving from known (overt process - what is on the table) to those unknown (the subconscious and supra conscious). We deployed highly exposed but holistically thinking personnel in executing this aspect of the assignment with the hope that by so-doing, we would deepen our understanding of the presenting issues within the organisation, through the use of the qualitative information gathering tools earlier mentioned in our proposal. We applied in most cases, appreciative enquiry and psychoanalytical questioning techniques in a one-on-one or group setting.

4.2.2 Analyses

All the qualitative data obtained were predominantly through group process and were equally subjected to analyses on the field by the groups involved. Detailed debriefing sessions were held following every day's activities, the outcomes of which were recorded either on flip charts or note card. When field work is concluded, these records were pasted on the wall and qualitatively analyzed by the consultants who obtained them. Following this, another set of OD professionals who were not part of the information gathering process were invited to analyze the same record and come up with their independent interpretation. The outcome of the analysis conducted by the respondents, consultants and independent consultants were thereafter triangulated. Finally, the outcomes of the situation analysis (document review coupled with informal inter personal interviews), qualitative process (group discussions, one-on-one in-depth discussions, panel discussion, etc) and were all triangulated thereby presenting a holistic picture of the issues at stake.

4.2.3 Feedback and Suggested Ways Forward

We met with the leadership of the Network and fed them back individually. We made it clear at the beginning of these feedbacks that the data obtained will not be changed nor massaged-in during these courtesy feedback sessions (avoidance of collusion and suppressing critical issues). At this point we negotiated and agreed with them on sensitive issues which needed to be filtered out before presentation in a group setting to avoid surprises and embarrassment at such formal group feedback sessions. Interestingly, there were no issues to be filtered out, so a group feedback involving most of the stakeholders of the network was held on October 19, 2006 to isolate issues and brainstorm on possible ways forward.

We would as professionals avoid forming too narrow or too strong opinions on how information should be interpreted. Our aim during the feedback sessions would be to work with the Network stakeholders to jointly assess the data and determine its

implications. Where possible, our feedback would be limited to issues and would in most cases be less than 20 minutes thus providing adequate time for the network to discuss and optimize ownership of the emerging issues. As much as possible our feedback would be descriptive, not prescriptive and surely not in critical language.

Following the feedback session, stakeholder would have about a week or so to internalize the issues raised and commence their internal process of how to deal with them. Following this a one or two day workshop using large group intervention protocol called Search Conference would be organized to deal with issues relating to what next.

5. Field Findings

The activities that would ensure that these broad objectives were met were clearly stated in the ToR. Though not in any way exhaustive, they were well digested, internalised and well executed after a well structured entry process that facilitated the active buy-in of RIFAN's leadership and membership. The organization's action standard having been duly negotiated at the point of entry and incorporated with that of PrOpCom as a basis for negotiating a mutually beneficial partnership between both parties, the leadership and membership RIFAN fully participated in the process and their.

5.1 Background Information on RIFAN, Ogun State Chapter

5.1.1 Organization Identity

Ogun State Rice Farmers Association originated from the willing desire of Ogun Rice Growers Association to affiliate with an apex commodity organization, known as Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria (RIFAN). This network came into existence as a result of the Federal Government's prompting of commodity stakeholders to organize themselves into commodity networks. Before then, there have been a number of government-prompted national farmers' organizations, such as All Farmers Association of Nigeria (ALFAN), National Farmers Association of Nigeria (NAFAN), etc. A number of these organizations could not withstand the test of time, and of course, faded away. The Ogun State Rice Growers Association's decision to affiliate with RIFAN was said to have undergone a democratic due process (consultation and approval of the organization's membership), however, no documentary evidence were made available to us in support of this assertion. We observed in the process of carrying out this assignment that the Ogun State RIFAN uses double identity in its transactions. At its convenience, it is known as RIFAN and in other instances, it is known as Ogun Rice Growers Association. The reason for this seems to be largely informed by the need to maintain its original identity, while at the same time, demonstrating to its partners, that it is an affiliate organization of RIFAN. From further inquiries, it became obvious that the network's decision to maintain their original name was informed by the fear of the corporate stability of the national RIFAN, which is presumed as a one-man organization.

5.1.2 Year of Establishment

The Ogun State Rice Growers Association was reportedly established July 13, 2000. However, there are strong indications that the network was never registered as legal entity by any of the local, state and/or federal agency or authority. The network became an affiliate member of RIFAN in 2002, after it was advised so to do by prominent and notable individuals with interest in the commodity. These

notwithstanding, there were no documents presented to us in support of Ogun Rice Growers Association's affiliation to RIFAN. In spite of the absence of a formal certificate of affiliation from the national RIFAN, we were able to sight receipts of payments and other transactions between the National RIFAN and Ogun State Rice Growers Association, which strongly support the claim that the network is indeed an affiliate member of RIFAN. To further this fact, the National Treasurer of National RIFAN, Mr Adams Elegbede is equally the Treasurer of the Ogun State Rice Growers Association.

5.1.3 Secretariat

The current secretariat according to the information at our disposal, used to be that of the defunct Ogun Farmers Association to which the Ogun Rice Growers Association belonged. The secretariat of interest is located in Massaba Estate, besides Ita-Osin Garage, Ita-Osin, Abeokuta. For all intents and purposes, the location is readily accessible all year round and is serviced by public utility companies. Though there were no official documents to indicate that this is the registered office of the network, we equally have no reason to believe otherwise.

5.1.4 Admission Requirement/Membership Criteria

The main criteria for membership are that the applicant must be a practicing rice farmer either residing in or farming in Ogun State. In addition to this, would-be members are required to undertake to participate fully and regularly at the monthly meetings and other activities of their units and local government branches. It is difficult isolating the financial responsibilities of members to this network. However, it is on record that members make voluntary donations in the sum of N20 to N50 during meetings. These voluntary donations have recently been raised to N100. It is however not clear whether members are responding to this demand. The issue of membership fee is rather cloudy for now. According to the national body, members are supposed to pay a membership fee of N1,500 each, out of which N1000 is retained by the national body while the remaining N500 is split between the state chapter and the local government branches members belong. However, it is left to be seen how this arrangement is working out, as the Ogun Rice Farmers Association made us to know that the newly imposed N1000 membership fee is being raised purposely to facilitate the down-payment for the grant-in-kind (Kubota Rice Milling Machine) offered them by the Ogun State Government.

5.1.5 Membership Strength and Gender Composition

According to the leadership of the network, the membership strength is about 1000. However, there are very strong indications that a significant number of these are dormant members. Also going by our observations and the information provided, approximately 30% of the network membership seems active and have paid or are about paying the N1000 newly imposed membership fee. Since membership registers are unavailable, we can only rely on the feedback from the organization's leadership. In effect, it is estimated that the female composition of the network is about 20%, a percentage readily attested to by majority of the women we spoke to.

5.1.6 Membership Strength Relative to Rice Farmers Population in the State

We do not have relevant statistics on the number of farmers in rice farming in the state, neither was the Ogun State Rice Growers Association in a position to provide the required data. However, there are indications that the active membership strength

of the Ogun Rice Grower Association could not, in all fairness, be more than 2% of the rice farmers within the state. The 2% percentage is certainly not a fair representation of the state rice farmers and this issue was discussed at length with the network leadership.

Their response tends to suggest that membership is not growing because of the numerous disappointments they have had to contend with from the government and of recent, that of Ofada Veetee Rice Limited. Many of the members complained that they were mobilized by the state government to grow NERICA-1 Rice for Veetee under a non existing contractual arrangement, to which, regrettably they responded. Apart from the necessary production inputs being supplied late, Veetee, we were made to understand, simply walked out of its contractual obligation to these farmers, thus resulting in severe losses to them as they had no alternative market for the commodity (NERICA-1) as has very limited market demand. It is worth mentioning here that all the inputs supplied to these farmers in respect of the failed Veetee Out-growers' Contractual arrangement were done as loan-in-kind through the Ogun State Agricultural Credit Agency (OSAMCA). This incidentally has led to many of them being still heavily indebted to OSAMCA. Equally, a crisis of confidence seems to have been created between the leadership and membership of the organization as there were silent but wrong insinuations (as we found out) of collusion between the leadership of the network and Veetee.

5.1.7 Nature of Current Membership (By Farm Size)

The Ogun State Rice Growers' Association membership consists predominantly of smallholder farmers devoting approximately 1.5 hectares of their land holding to rice cultivation. However, there are indications that this can be significantly increased if there are viable market opportunities.

5.1.8 Nature and Structure of Organization

The organization has positioned itself as a commodity network. However, there seem to be indications of lack of clarity and understanding of what such networks are all about. Even by its name, one is made to believe that it is purely an organization of rice farmers. This notwithstanding, there are evidences that the network is in the process of widening and deepening its membership base to cut across stakeholders within the commodity chain. As a matter of fact, the Rice Miller Association in the state is being mobilized for membership in the network. Efforts are also underway to woo rice merchant associations in the state into the commodity network.

As per its horizontal and vertical hierarchical structure, the network seems to have a well-defined structure comprising of the village units, local government branches and the state chapter. Ordinarily, 3 to 5 village units make up a local government branch. Presently, there are 8 rice-growing local governments in the state, but membership of the association for now is limited to 6 out of the 8 local government areas. According to the network leadership, there is a plan to expand membership to cover the 8 local governments.

Coming to the issue of bye-laws and constitution, we could not lay hands on the constitution or byelaws of the network. We were informed that the Ogun Rice Growers Association had initiated steps to develop a constitution for itself. A draft copy was said to have been produced, but because of some challenges that confronted

the organization, the final copy was yet to be ratified and adopted before the process was stalled.

Even at that, nobody could lay hands on the draft copy. However, we were able to obtain a copy of the National Constitution of RIFAN, from one of the National Officers who is member of the state chapter. The fact that neither the State Chairman nor the State Secretary had a copy of the constitution tends to suggest that the network is not making use of the constitution in the day-to-day running of the network. It is also tends to indicate that the relationship between the state and the national body is rather weak and that the national body is limited in the discharge of its oversight function over its affiliate members.

5.1.9 Local Chapter (Branches) and Their Leadership Composition

Each of the village units and local government branch has its own executive. However, leadership currently seems to be mainly visible at the local government branch. The emergence of leadership at all levels is purely by consensus which is based on the perceived integrity and capabilities of the incumbents. For instance, it was observed that all the chairmen and secretaries of the branches are quite literate in English and Yoruba and have good written and verbal communication skills. The composition of the leadership in the state and the five local governments covered by this assessment is as follows;

State Chapter

S/N	Position	Names
1	Chairman	Pastor Bode Adenekan
2	Vice Chairman	Mrs Comfort Oyetayo
3	Secretary	Elder A.A. Ojobo
4	Assistant Secretary	Mr. James Okewale
5	Treasury	Mr Adams Elegbede
6	Auditor	Moshood Adedayo
7	PRO	Pastor C.O. Alamutu
8	Ex-Officio	Chief (Mrs) Lola Adeoye
9	Ex-Officio	Mr. O. Fadairo

1. Yewa North Branch

S/N	Position	Names
1	Chairman	Alh Tairu Oje
2	Vice Chairman	Jimoh Tairu
3	Secretary	Mrs. Wasilatu Elegede
4	Assistant Secretary	Mr. Fatai Adesina
5	Treasury	Mrs. Mutiatu Karimu
6	Auditor	Mr Jimoh Oje
7	PRO	Mr. Lukuman Jimoh
8	Ex-Officio	Mrs. Abeni Olaniyi
9	Ex-Officio	Alh. Fabiu Adesina
10	National/State Treasurer	Mr. Adams Elegbede

2. Ewekoro Branch

S/N	Position	Names
1	Chairman	Mr. J.O. Okewale
2	Vice Chairman	Mr. Akindele Nofiu
3	Secretary	Mr. Akeem Gbadamosi
4	Assistant Secretary	
5	Treasury	Mr. Peter Fadairo
6	Financial Secretary	Mr. Michael Awaga
7	PRO	Idrisu Dasaolu

3. Ifo Branch

S/N	Position	Names
1	Chairman	Elder A.A. Ojobo
2	Vice Chairman	Elder E.A. Beyioku
3	Secretary	Mrs. Bolanle Aremu
4	Assistant Secretary	Mr. Siji Odebunmi
5	Treasury	Chief (Mrs) Lola Adeoye
6	Financial Secretary	Mr. Segun Akinbode
7	PRO	Vacant
8	Ex-Officio	Mr. K. Odutola
9	Ex-Officio	Otunba S. Sangolana
10	Ex-Officio	Mr. D. Emmanuel

4. Obafemi Owode Branch

S/N	Position	Names
1	Chairman	Mr. Poopola Sikiru
2	Vice Chairman	Mr. Michael Oduntan
3	Secretary	Mr. G.F. Olonade
4	Assistant Secretary	Sufiyan Odenike
5	Treasury	Chief Adekunle Soyoye
6	Financial Secretary	Mr. Alani Idowu
7	PRO	Mr. Isiaka Folonrunso
8	Ex-Officio	Mrs E.A. Lapite
9	Ex-Officio	Mr. Niyi Oloyede

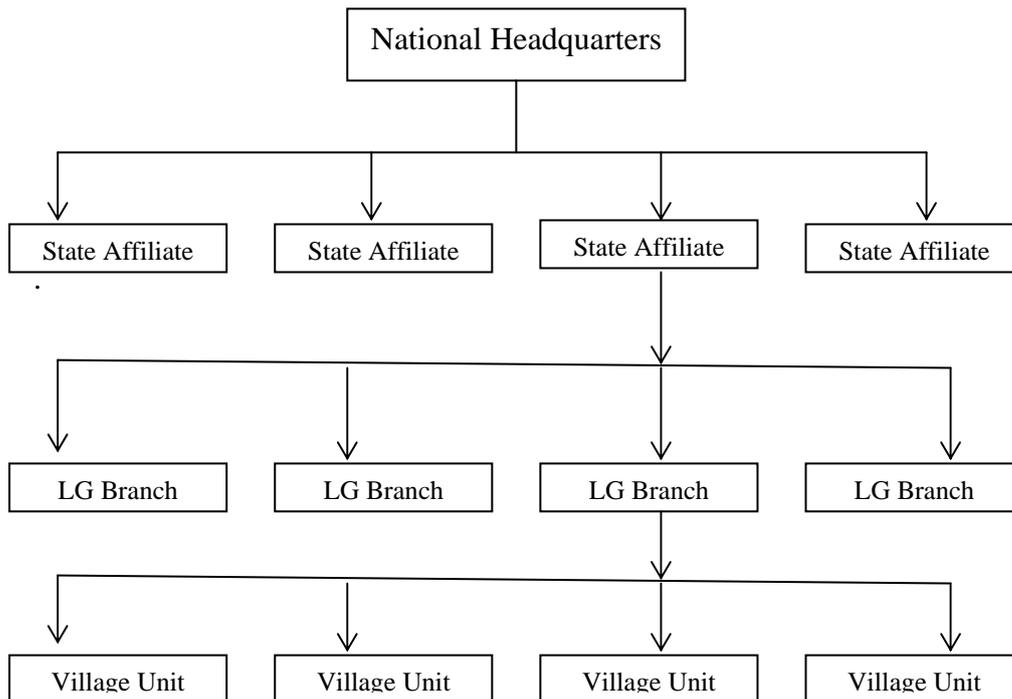
5. Abeokuta North Branch

S/N	Position	Names
1	Chairman	Mr. Mathew Alegbata
2	Vice Chairman	Pastor C.O. Alamutu
3	Secretary	James Sogunle
4	Assistant Secretary	
5	Treasury	Mrs John Whomi
6	Financial Secretary	
7	PRO	Mr. Julius Okegbenro

5.1.10 Organization and Management

RIFAN has a simple organizational structure that in theory can facilitate the flow of authority and responsibility at various levels of its governance. At the national headquarters, it has a functional secretariat composed of paid staff. At the Ogun State

chapter, the leadership of the state network doubles as the policy-making and executive organ of the organization. The Working Committee acts as the advisory organ of the General Meeting which has the highest authority for policy and strategic decision-making at the state level. However, the chapter has no secretarial staff to follow-up and implement its decisions. The result is that the members of the executive, who by themselves are farmers with numerous farming and other business-related responsibilities, are saddled with the implementation of policy decisions which they have limited time to cope with. Please find below Ogun RIFANs Organogram indication its relationship with the national body.



The absence of an operational secretariat has made it difficult for the installation of an appropriate system of administration for the proper functioning of the network. The state financial secretary maintains a rudimentary system of bookkeeping to capture the income and expenditure profiles of the network. Same is true in some of the branches, while in others, the function is handled by the Treasurer. Each officer handles the job in his/her own style and within the limits of his/her competence, thus making record keeping very problematic. In addition, none of the accounting officers has undergone any training in bookkeeping or accounts in the recent past under the auspices of the network. However, one book that is well maintained by the state chapter and all the branches visited is the Minutes Book, but without paying attention to the Book of Register.

After meetings, officers go home with the various books maintained by them. In a situation where the officer fails to attend a meeting, there is no recourse to these books of interest. This situation played out itself repeatedly during our field visits as we could not cite many of the books of the network due to the absence of the particular officers charged with the responsibility of maintaining them, both at the state and branch levels. And this we consider a worrisome development.

5.1.11 Banking History

The network maintains a sole savings account (no. 2177) with the Abeokuta Branch of the Nigerian Agricultural, Cooperative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB) in the name of Ogun Rice Growers Association which was opened in November 2002. The account is operated by the state executives with the Chairman, Secretary and Financial Secretary as signatories. The mandate provides for the Chairman and any one of the other two signatories to sign before withdrawal can be effected. The account is active and the last transaction on it was a withdrawal made in May, 2006. The balance in the account as at October 16th 2006 was in the lower four figures. Interestingly, none of the branches visited has a bank account opened and operated in its name.

Lodgments into the State Chapter's account are constitutionally the responsibility of the treasurer. However, because he resides outside Abeokuta and their monthly meetings usually end after banking hours, he has not been able to carry out this function for a while. The State Chairman has been filling this gap and for convenience, also keeps the passbook since he resides in Abeokuta. However, for the purposes of transparency, the passbook is circulated to all members to inspect at every general meeting which we consider impressive and innovative.

The authority to withdraw any amount of money from the account is given by the general assembly and from discussions with relevant officers, there has never been a breach of this procedure. This notwithstanding, there were no vouchers and or any accounting records to document the request and approval prior to the withdrawal. The procedure is that once the house approves a payment, the signatories go to the bank and cash the money.

5.1.12 Financial Sustainability

As mentioned earlier, the network has been surviving basically on voluntary donation and voluntary services from its membership. The leadership reasoned that the non-imposition of compulsory monthly or annual dues on members is to allay their fears of someone using the network to dupe them, as has been the case in several instances in the past. Though contributions from these voluntary sources have been paltry, the network has always been able to fund its major pressing obligations through this means. The operation and balance in the Chapter's bank account readily points to the financial melancholy of the network. It is obvious that for the network to grow rapidly as a viable commodity network, it has to institutionalize a reliable and sustainable pattern of funding.

5.1.13 Orientation to Provision of Value-Added Services

As earlier mentioned, RIFAN's espoused institutional positioning is that of a commodity network but currently functions more as a farmers' network. This is not unexpected, as most trade networks in the agricultural industry are from time immemorial been farmers-inclined in terms of value, orientation and service delivery. The idea of commodity networking is rather new in the country, and same is true of the idea of networking stakeholders along commodity value chains for effective advocacy, market expansion and deepening. However, there are strong indications to suggest that even at the national level, RIFAN is still largely a farmers' organization rather than a commodity network as it espouses. All these put together, there are

strong indications that Ogun Rice Growers' Association (Ogun State RIFAN) is working to expand and deepen its membership base to include stakeholders within the Ogun State rice value chain. It is currently focusing its efforts particularly on rice millers and merchants.

5.1.14 Business Services Rendered and Plan for the Future

It is difficult to itemize the type of services the network renders its members. However, it is quite effective in facilitating its membership's access to government-subsidized inputs, credits and services. Most often than not, RIFAN's approach to accessing these services have largely been reactionary in orientation rather than futuristic. In effect, the Ogun State RIFAN Chapter presents a picture of an organization that simply reacts to emerging opportunities rather than thinking on how such opportunities tally with its organizational objectives, values and focus. As a matter of fact, this approach to service delivery which is largely focused on membership mobilization for taking advantage of presenting opportunities have made it impossible for the network to look beyond government. It has therefore not been able to demonstrate its capability in taking advantage of the challenges in the business environment in which its membership operates to either strengthen itself and or its members. It is left to be seen how beneficial government patronage has been to the organization and this has become a source of extensive strategic debate and discussion within the network as a whole. In effect, the leadership of the organization is already thinking about its future as a commodity network but seems to be hampered by its limited capacity for strategic and futuristic thinking as an institution as well as within its leadership and followership. Still on the issue of strategic and futuristic thinking, RIFAN national seems not to be helpful as the organization is largely perceived as a "one-man show" even at the state chapter level.

5.1.15 Sources of Expertise

Most of the expertise required by the group is production-focused and these have been largely provided by the Ogun State Agricultural Development Program (OGADEP) and partly by WARDA. It is not particularly clear why these organizations have focused largely on technical capacity building of individual members rather than building the capacity of the network as a viable and sustainable institution. From our limited exposure with the organization, a reasonable number of its members are literate, knowledgeable and skillful farmers. Knowledge and skills for now appear resident in these individuals with no clear strategies for institutionalizing learning and experience sharing among its members and thereby empowering the organization as a learning network.

5.1.16 Governance:

a) Type and Nature of Organization

Ordinarily, the organization and management structure of a network of this nature is usually a function of its vision, mission and service delivery strategies. Nothing much can be said in this regard as RIFAN for now is largely a farmers' organization rather than the commodity network it espouses to be.

b) Leadership Emergence

One is not particularly sure when last there was a leadership change within the network, as there were no documents to support that. One could have referred to the constitution of the organization with the hope of seeking clarity on how leadership

should emerge, but there was none. In effect, one can only rely on the historical background of the organization as reported by its founding members and confirmed independently at the branch level. All things being the same, it is glaring that leadership within the network is neither through an election nor by fiat, rather, leadership seems to emerge through consensus building. This has proved very effective in the emergence of credible and trust-worthy leadership within and across the network. This also could largely have been responsible for the near absence of intractable conflicts within the network.

c) Issues Discussed At Meetings and Decision-Making Process

At the state level, two types of meetings are normally held every month. The working committee which consists of the state executives and two delegates from each of the branches meets on the third Wednesday of every month. It meets to consider issues relating to the management of the network, the outcome of which is usually considered and ratified by a general meeting. The General Meeting membership consists of the working committee and the entire state membership. Its meeting is usually held on the third Thursday of every month and its decision-making process is usually by consensus. This process of consensus-building has proved to be very effective in conflict avoidance within the organization. From the information available in the minutes books, it seems most of the discussions of both bodies are largely centered on their relationships with government agencies in connection with supplies of inputs and services and occasionally, on fund-raising to finance specific commitments of the organization.

d) Leadership Credibility Among Its Membership and External Stakeholders.

From all indications, the leadership of the network enjoys the full confidence and trust of its membership. Same is true of all their external stakeholders with whom we had discussions. Though we planned meeting with rice farmers and millers in Ifo, unfortunately, on the day of the proposed visit, there was a big electioneering campaign in the town, involving the political leadership of the state. This made the meeting impossible. We therefore were unable to establish the perception of non-member farmers with regards to the network. These notwithstanding, our discussions with rice millers and merchants at the Lafenwa market in Abeokuta where the bulk of the milling and trade in rice is conducted suggests positive disposition towards joining ranks with Ogun State RIFAN.

5.1.17 Human Resource Capacity and Capability

Presently, the network has no staff at the state and branch levels. All executive functions are carried out by the executive members on voluntary basis, many of whom are retired civil servants.

5.1.18 Capacity Building Programs Attended by Leadership and Staff

From information gathered, no training programs have been organized or attended by the members of the network for the building of its internal institutional capacity. However, members of the network have participated in a number of training workshops organized by external bodies in areas of production processes - seed trials, improvement in cultural practices, processing etc. Members attended such workshops in their individual capacities, and the knowledge obtained from such workshops remains resident in them as there is no mechanism within the association for the dissemination of such knowledge.

5.1.19 Organizational Vision, Mission and Leadership Commitment

The vision of the Ogun State Rice Growers' Association is basically to improve the socio-economic wellbeing of rice farmers in general, and this espoused vision is adequately shared by its members. This seems to be largely responsible for the rather unusual over-reliance on government production subsidy by the group in aid of its membership farming operations. Though its mission is not clearly stated, neither are there documented strategies and programs in support of this vision, there are evidences on ground to support the assumption that the group has entrenched itself within government-sponsored agencies in particular. Also, one is aware of its relationship with the West African Rice Development Association (WARDA) and of recent, with Veetee. There is no doubt whatsoever in one's mind that the leadership of the network and its followership are quite committed to the vision they all share. This however is not to say that all is well with the service programs and their delivery mechanisms. Without mincing word, there seems to be limited well-thought out programs on ground, neither are there institutional structure that could help this emerge and support their implementation.

In a situation where the leadership of the organization is so much focused on mobilizing its members in support of various government initiatives with the hope of receiving subsidized farming inputs, there certainly cannot be opportunities for critical reflection on the need of its membership. Everything revolves around how to obtain seeds, fertilizers, herbicides, planting machinery and equipment etc at subsidized prices from government at the expense of serious strategic issues that could aid strategic and futuristic thinking within the network. In the absence of this, one will be expecting too much of the network by asking for the number of proposals it has written, how many have been approved and by whom. That is certainly not the thinking and orientation of this organization which for now, largely functions as a farmers' mobilization agency for government-supported initiatives. And finally, it is not unusual to hear the organization being referred to by government officials as "our baby" and this repeated itself several times during our visit.

5.1.20 Ogun State RIFAN's Advocacy Focus and Programming

As stated earlier, the Ogun State chapter of RIFAN (Ogun Rice Growers Association) is not yet focused on the issue of advocacy. However, as part of the national RIFAN, it participated in the advocacy that gave rise to an increased tariff on imported rice as a strategy for creating a favourable price differential for the Nigerian rice. It is expected that the difference in price will boost the demand for locally produced rice. As a result of this advocacy campaign by RIFAN, it was stated that the federal government placed a 110% tariff on imported rice. The association also claimed to have successfully lobbied the federal government to approve and establish Rice Development Committee at the national, state and local government levels to serve as the coordinating points for the harmonization of rice programmes at the three tiers of government. The network was reported to be working on a proposal that is calling for government support for its members by way of allocation of 5% of the annual budget to agriculture.

5.1.21 External Relationship

a). With The State Government and/or Its Agencies

The network has a long and robust relationship with the Ogun State agencies responsible for the agricultural production, notably OGADEP and Agro Services Corporation (ASC). In the case of OGADEP, the relationship can best be described as paternalistic. The network looks up to OGADEP for direction in almost all issues bordering on the variety of rice to cultivate, supply of needed inputs, extension services, processing and sometimes, the marketing of the produce. OGADEP on the other hand, gladly welcomes this relationship and has effectively used it to advance its mandates, even when this seems not to be beneficial to farmers. A clear case in point was in 2005, when OGADEP advised farmers to drop the cultivation of Ofada variety in place of Nerica-1 variety, simply because of its desire to advance government interest in a contractual relationship with a private sector organization, Veetee. This advice was not backed up with any market survey on the acceptability of the new variety in the local market. When Veetee eventually backed out of the contract, the farmers were saddled with a commodity that they could not sell in the open market, and therefore lost substantial amount of money in the process.

When the farmers cried out about the non-marketability of their produce, OGADEP, on behalf of the state government offered them 10 Kubota rice-milling machines (with de-stoners and polishers) at 50% subsidy. This again was without addressing the issues of local market rejection of Nerica-1 rice (also locally called Rice Mokwa) which was largely soggy in nature following cooking. If the issue of the market rejection of Nerica-1 was attributed to poor processing, one would have considered the rice mill as one of the available options in addressing the subject matter, but this seems not to be the case. The offer of grant 'in-kind' of Kubota rice-milling machines was seen and clearly so, by government as a compensation for the losses incurred by the group due to the non-execution of the buy-back contract with Veetee.

This was also without an assessment of the capacity of the network to acquire and manage these milling machines, and more importantly, whether the machines are financially viable and serviceable within the local business environment context. Unfortunately, the network bought into it without a second thought. In essence, it is yet to be seen if the relationship with OGADEP can be described as healthy as it has created a dependency syndrome to the network.

In terms of the Ogun State Agro Services Corporation (ASC), the relationship is not as close. The ASC sells mechanization services and agricultural inputs to the farmers at cost recovery rates. Their relationship with the network is largely indirect as either OGADEP or the Ogun State Agricultural and Multipurpose Credit Agency (OSAMCA) buys in bulk from ASC and distributes to the network members. The network for now seems not to have been in a position to deal directly with the ASC on behalf of its members.

b) Relationship with Financial Service Providers

The network maintains a savings account with the NACBRD, Abeokuta branch for the running of its activities. In terms of credit relationship, none exists between the two organizations. Though some members of the network have credit relationships with the bank on individual basis, the network has never borrowed from the bank. Infact, both the bank and the network seem to have limited clarity about their banking

relationship. The network maintains a view that the bank has been inconsistent with them on the requirements for a pending loan application, the bank on the other hand maintains that it has no formal loan application from the network. OSAMCA, the state government agency with responsibility for credit delivery to agriculture and small scale enterprises said it has no direct relationship with RIFAN as an organization, but could have credit relationship with its individual members. The fact that the network cannot even access credit facilities from government lending institutions clearly indicates its limitation to network and pull resources from sources other than those it currently relates with.

c) Relationship with Private Sector Organizations

The notable relationship the network had with a private sector organization was with Ofada Veetee Rice Limited in 2005, which ended in a disaster. The company, through OGADEP approached the network and entered into an unwritten contract for the network to produce Nerica-1 rice for and on behalf of the company. The state government acting as an intermediary supplied inputs on credit to the farmers while the farmers provided land and labor. After harvesting, the company reneged on the purchase agreement and the variety in question has very limited market acceptance. The result is that the farmers lost substantial income from this transaction; and they are still saddled with unpaid loans from the state government. This incidence created a crisis of confidence within the membership of the network and has been blamed as the major reason for the dwindle membership of the network. Some members even accuse the leadership, though wrongly, of connivance with the company.

d) Relationship with Donor and Internal Agencies

According to the network, they have never had any relationship with any donor agency. However, the network as Ogun Rice Grower Association has been partnering with West African Rice Development Association (WARDA), an International NGO in some collaborative efforts in rice breeding. Feelers from members were that the collaboration was successful and they were happy with the outcome of the relationship.

5.1.22 Relationship and level of Integration with RIFAN headquarters, Abuja

a) Background Information about RIFAN

The National RIFAN came into existence in January 2002, following on the heels of an All Farmers Summit organized by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in November 1999. The association got registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) in January 2002 as a non-governmental, non-political organization, with its national secretariat located at Block C Suite 5 and 6, Anyisan Wodi Shopping Village, along Kaduna-Lokoja Express, Gwagwalada-Abuja. The structure of the association provides for ward, local, state, regional and national levels of administration. Each level is expected to have an Executive Committee that guides its operations. It is an apex organization with membership open to individuals who are engaged in rice production, processing or marketing. Its secretariat is coordinated by the Chairman of the association with support from a full complimentary of secretariat staff, comprising the Director of Administration, Finance Clerk, Extension Officer, Computer Assistant, Office Assistant, Cleaner and Night Guards.

One of the greatest strengths of the association is that it has some form of legitimacy in view of its registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission and its recognition by the federal government and relevant agencies as an advocacy organ for rice value-chain development in the country. Also the association seems to have succeeded in establishing itself as a national body without receiving subvention from government. This has enhanced the ability of the leadership to speak on issues affecting its members. The association also offers a window of opportunity for national and international development partners to interact with rice farmers across the country.

On the flipside, it appears that the present chairman is the brain behind the association and one wonders how the association would carry on without him. For example, the national secretariat is located in an office complex belonging to him. Also the national leadership of the association seems to be uncomfortable with any initiative (from development partners) with a State chapter that does not originate from the national office. Though members of the national executive were elected, it is yet to be seen how they carry out their statutory functions. For instance, the national treasurer who resides in Yewa, Ogun State stated that he has never made any lodgement into the account of the national association. Though he is a signatory to this account, he has also never signed any cheque or document for the withdrawal of money from the national association's account.

b) Integration between the National RIFAN and the State Chapter

It does appear that the Ogun State Chapter maintains a fair level of integration with the national body. The Treasurer of the State Chapter, Mr. Adams Elegbede also doubles as the Treasurer at the national level and the national executives meet monthly. This gives the chapter an opportunity to keep abreast of the plans and programs of the national body. From time to time, and subject to availability of funds coupled with the issues on the agenda, the state chairman sometimes joins the treasurer to attend such meetings. In addition to this, there was evidence of a number of correspondences from the national body to the state chapter on sundry issues including request for payment of levies outstanding among several others. Apart from these, we were not made aware of any on-going activities of the national RIFAN which the state chapter is participating in presently, save for a training program organized by it a week before our visit.

6. Discussions

6.1 Organizational Identity

Currently, the organizational identity of this network is unclear. At best, it can be said to have a dual identity. When convenient they take the identity of Ogun State RIFAN while at other times, it takes on its original identity of Ogun Rice Growers' Association. This dual identity is informed by the genuine fear of the group that dropping the original identity in favor of the new could spell doom for the group if the national RIFAN just like many earlier national farmers organizations should collapse. While they are contented identifying with the national RIFAN, they are bothered that there is no formal accreditation with it. The issue of identity is further complicated by the fact that the association has been formed about six years ago, and it still does not have a constitution or bye-laws of its own, has not registered formally with any authority at the local, state or national level. Again, this speaks of lack of knowledge on the part of the group on how an institution should be built and thereafter function. Discussion at various levels revealed an unclear understanding of institutional building.

6.2 Mission and Vision

From all indications, Ogun State RIFAN, as a network of rice commodity chain players cannot be said to be a strong association. It lacks the proper orientation of a commodity network. However, we found out that both the leadership and membership have a strong commitment to the espoused vision of the group. Leadership and members seem to have a vision to improve the socio-economic status of rice farmers, but they seem to have limited understanding of its implications in terms of actualization. For all intents and purposes, the problem of the network is not lack of commitment or vision, but a lack of the necessary knowledge and skills on how to actualize their objectives as a commodity chain network. They also seem not to have a clear understanding of how a commodity network is organized, positioned, and works for the purpose of advancing and sustaining the long-term socio-economic interests of its members and other stakeholders within the value chain.

6.3 Membership Drive and Composition

Membership drive has been suffering a reversal since last year following the disaster trailing the business relationship facilitated by the state government between the network and Veetee. From a membership strength of about, 1,000 the group has lost close of 70% of this number, leaving an active membership size of about 300. This is grossly low in a situation where the population of rice farmers (according to RIFAN) is estimated at about 20,000 in the state, a figure which excludes the potential of substantial membership increases from rice millers, rice merchants and other stakeholders in the rice per-boiling, wholesaling and retailing. From the field visits, it was discovered that women are very active in rice production and constitute a far higher percentage of processors. In fact, they are exclusively rice merchants. Yet only 20% of the current active membership is women. While they are gearing efforts to resume active membership drive, it is obvious they do not have a clear knowledge on how to go about this. Apart from the above, RIFAN seems to have very limited capacity for membership development which for all intents and purposes, is one of its biggest problems and was so acknowledged. For example, there are no mechanisms for tracking membership attendance at meetings; neither was there institutional

structures put in place for isolating issues relating to the growth and development of members' business interests. In spite of a presenting but challenging opportunity in facilitating a process that largely accommodates that of other stakeholders within the chain, the network has largely been unable to identify the interlink and trade relationship reciprocity within the chain of interest. However, one needs to give kudos to the organization and its leadership for accepting this critical shortcomings and their willingness to take it on.

6.4 Management

In the absence of a secretariat, the leadership of the network is saddled with the responsibility of the day-to-day running of the network. This has so far been sustained because of the limited size and activities of the group, which has no value-added services for its members. This again has largely contributed to the lack of proper bookkeeping and record-keeping performance of the group. Executive members come to meetings when they are able to attend, and they come with the relevant books. But when they are unable, the meeting loses the use of these books. This approach cannot be sustained if the network must grow rapidly to act as a change agent that can function effectively as a commodity network which seems to be the thinking within the Ag. industry.

6.5 Relationship with External Stakeholders

The relationship with the Ogun State RIFAN has not been able to meet the objectives and aspirations of the leaders and members of the network. This they explained arose because of a lack of focus on the various options available to the network to meet its objectives and its over-dependency on state government agencies. The situation eventually devolved into an unhelpful paternalistic relationship between OGADEP and the network. This relationship gave rise to the donation of rice milling machines to the association in 2005 without their request. They also entered into an arrangement with Veetee for production without a Memorandum of Understanding. If the association had a clear focus on how best to go about pursuing their interest as a true commodity network, they would be able to define the terms of their relationship with any stakeholders, be it government, corporate or donor agency. They completely lack bargaining power.

7. **Emerging Issues and Suggested Ways Forward**

Though presently weak, the network presents an opportunity for an organization that has potential to be groomed for the kind of rice intervention proposed by PrOpCom in Southwest Nigeria. It has the right attitude of a learning organization, an honest and committed leadership at different levels, to the ideals and espoused vision of the network. What needs to be done is to reinforce the group in its areas of strengths while building its capacities in the areas of weaknesses.

During the feedback workshop held on October 19, 2006, the leadership and membership of the network suggested some of the following as areas the network could possibly need technical support to help in actualizing their dreams.

7.1 Membership Base Widening and Deepening

Ogun State RIFAN as is currently presented, certainly cannot function as a commodity network without the need of thinking through its membership composition and mandate. If it must function as a commodity network, then its capacity for membership mobilization, diversification and development need to be adequately strengthened. Interestingly, the kind of challenge that seem to be confronting Ogun State RIFAN is not peculiar to this commodity network alone, but is all-encompassing in most of the trade networks in existence in the country. Commodity networking is a new but evolving concept in Nigeria and as such, one needs to limit his/her expectations. In effect and since there are limited networks that can actually fit into the description of a typical commodity network in the country, one is of the opinion that PrOpCom may as well start building Ogun State RIFAN for others to copy. Therefore, a lot of membership capacity building particularly in areas such as stated below need to be considered for execution:

- Membership mobilization
- The principles of membership organization and how it functions
- Vision/Mission articulation and sharing
- Membership motivation and relationship building within and across stakeholders
- Leadership development and accountability
- Learning, resource sharing, and back-stopping as an instrument for institutional and membership growth etc.

The rice mills offered the network by the Ogun State government at 50% subsidy, if well managed, will be helpful for the growth and stability of the network. However, as it is currently constituted, it may not necessarily serve the needs of the association as such, but could serve as a source of diversion and possible conflict within the network on one hand, and the value chain on the other. However with the coming on board of rice millers and in particular rice merchants as members of RIFAN, this cannot but be an opportunity for membership widening and relationship-building within the network. And since PrOpCom has committed itself to assisting the network to install five of the said machines, it is imperative that this promise be fulfilled as quickly as possible to boost the members' confidence and commitment to PrOpCom and its interventions. Anything to the contrary will destroy the strong confidence presently existing between the network and PrOpCom. In effect, training and human capacity-building interventions such as the following:

- Community property ownership and management
- Record keeping and accountability
- Parboiling and milling techniques for the different rice varieties
- Market demand and supply information generation and dissemination
- Product standardization, branding and brand protection
- Equipment maintenance
- Contracting and risk leveraging in a commodity exchange transaction etc.

are perhaps some of the few membership capacity building programs that need to be carried out, upgraded and institutionalized for the sustainable development and futuristic positioning of the network. However, in going forward with the installation of the milling machines, it is strongly recommended that PrOpCom commission a quick study to ascertain the feasibility and financial viability of the machines. Some of the issues that need clarification include:

- The mode of management of the mills by the network;
- Their maintenance and availability of spare parts;
- The capability of the mill to handle other cereal grains (since rice is seasonal crop) as is currently the practice in the industry
- The potential capacity utilization of the mills in the various locations where they are to be installed
- The cost of installation
- The expected stream of income and outflow (to cover its operating costs), and above all,
- The ability of the mills to generate enough revenues to repay the loan to the state government (after subsidy removal)

7.2 External Relationship

For now, RIFAN's ability to think outside its zone of comfort is seriously challenging its ability to broker relationship with other commercial or donor entities. The biggest challenge that one could imagine, is the ability to motivate the network leadership to think wider and this has already commenced. Our suggestion is that this process be institutionalized and made to become part and parcel of leadership development attributes. In effect, the following are some of the capacity building programs in this area which could be considered for execution:

- Motivational and leadership development programming
- Entry negotiation and relationship facilitation
- Proposal development and report writing
- Contracting and contract negotiation
- Graphical and animated presentation
- Trade issues isolation and advocacy, etc.

7.3 Institutional Capacity Building and Human and Material Resource Mobilization

If RIFAN were to achieve the strength it envisages in positioning itself as a commodity network, the earlier it starts thinking over and above its current disposition as a farmers' mobilizing agency for government initiatives, the better. This will require the re-organization of the network with the hope of separating executive functions from that of policy making, and of course this will require staffing

it with the appropriate manpower and supported with necessary material resources. In order for this to happen, there is that critical need for assisting RIFAN in coming up with a proper identity which is registered with the appropriate authority. The implication of this is that the organization must come up with an acceptable and members'-approved constitution which governs its operations as a legal entity. In effect, the following interventions seem rather likely.

- Support in facilitating a rice commodity-based stakeholder conference to be hosted by Ogun state RIFAN
- Support RIFAN in isolating its vision, mission and using all these and other relevant inputs in developing an acceptable constitution attested to by the majority of its membership across commodity stakeholders' groupings.
- Support in helping RIFAN in isolating its identity and in registering same with the appropriate agency.
- Support RIFAN in developing a short and intermediate terms strategic plan that would encompass and clearly isolate among other things, how it intends to progress in the nearest future.
 - Provide policies and standards that would facilitate its staff and membership recruitment drive which ordinarily would include embedded structures that would facilitate institutional learning and futuristic thinking in terms of services, service delivery and advocacy orientation of the network.
 - This same document would creatively itemize strategies and activities that would inform and propel the governance, administrative and financial accountability responsibilities of the leadership to its followership. While also putting in place systems that would support the leadership and management in its day-to-day running of the network.
 - It is hoped that the document of interest would clearly provide an insight into how the network would advocate for and on behalf of the network for a rice market that is pro-poor in its thinking and which would ultimately network marginal rice commodity stakeholders into the formally structured market, without having them forgo their informality.
 - Finally, such strategic plan would rationally encompass a Plan of Action and necessary monitoring and evaluation indicators that would isolate the progress the organization is making or not making.

All these in combination with other issues is more than enough work to start with in the process of building Ogun State RIFAN as a viable commodity network. As the implementation of the activities suggested above commences, other issues of more immediate and future significance would certainly emerge, carefully thought through by the network and would ultimately put in place the necessary mechanisms for addressing them.

8. Next Step

We believe that the next step that needs to be taken is for PrOpCom to negotiate the outcome of this assessment process with the leadership and membership of RIFAN with the hope of clarifying what the issues are. Though this was partly done at the feedback session we had with them, we were not particularly convinced that they had enough time to think through our presentation and for them to come up with a plan to address these issues, and this they clearly stated. In effect, there would be a need to meet with the leadership of the association once again to agree on a possible work-plan which itself would inform the contracting process between RIFAN and PrOpCom.

9. Lessons Learnt

The critical lesson that we, as the consulting firm, learnt in the process of executing this assignment had to do with how to marry the expectation of the client in terms of activity-based output, delivery and output timing, with that of the client we are working to - in this case RIFAN, without jeopardizing our professional integrity and core corporate values. Timing is of critical importance to our main client (PrOpCom). However, RIFAN and its membership certainly need time to understand the assessment process, internalize them and reflect on the outcome of the entire process. Nevertheless, it seems that all these were not taken into consideration by the PrOpCom team. This time around, we were lucky to have worked with a network blessed with committed leadership and membership that could sacrifice their time, energy and engage with us. This we want to make clear is usually not the case. Most often than not, service providers have to learn to work within the time space provided by the institution being assessed. We hopefully have managed this rather carefully without compromising the interest of PrOpCom our primary client, RIFAN, the client we are working to and of course, our own corporate values and professional ethics.

Contact List of Persons Consulted

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