

Mitigating Unemployment and Enhancing Sustainable Self Employment of Youths in Nigeria through Agricultural Education

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Abstract: There are several challenges faced by government and these include inter alia: high rate of unemployed youths, incessant cases of restiveness and political thuggery and overdependence on government for social infrastructure among others. The need for sustained agricultural production remains the ultimate concern of government in any country for her citizens to attain food security in the country. Hence, the urgent need for a kind of education that would turn out graduates who are highly skilled and self-employable in agricultural vocations. This paper examines the desirability of agricultural education for enhancing skill development and sustainable self-employment of youths in Nigeria. Six specific objectives were developed and broadly treated under the concepts of agricultural education; significance of agricultural education; causes and effect of unemployment; strategies for skill development through agricultural education; and its benefits for the Nigerian economy. A number of recommendations were made and if brought to bear, the country would join the mainstream of globalization in the 21st century.

Keywords: sustainable self-employment, youths, unemployment, vocational skills

I. INTRODUCTION

The interest and concern of every nation in the universe is to attain socio-economic stability and hence, ascend above her contemporaries. On this basis, relentless efforts have continued unabated, to the extent that sustainable national development remains top in priority. Series of development reforms have been put forward by Nigerian policy makers in recent times and as

a national agenda, emphasis have been focused on youth empowerment through agricultural education for Sustainable self-employment. No doubt, education is an ultimate instrument for empowering youth in Nigeria. It provides them with the essential knowledge and experiences needed to meet the challenges of life. It is undisputedly considered as the bedrock of any meaningful social, economic and political development (FGN & Akpomi in Abubakar, 2010). Osanyi in Akpotu and Jike (2004) stated that the expected end product of education is a matured and cultured individual who is skillful in his chosen field of endeavour. According to the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE, 1998) the mission of agricultural education is to prepare individuals for careers in agriculture and to build awareness of, and develop leadership for food, fibre, and natural resource systems. Agriculture holds the key to sustainable development and self employment of any nation including Nigeria and other developing countries such as Lesotho, Liberia, Niger, Benin, etc.

By Sustainable self-employment, it means the nation or individual youth have been empowered with skills necessary to be independent and satisfy his personal needs while prudently utilizing available resources to the anticipated benefit of future generations. Youth is a concept used to describe group of individuals of school age and it encompasses teenagers, adolescents and young adults. Notably, Western education saw the need to introduce agriculture into the school system at all levels and this was clearly perceived in the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria (FME, 2004). It was

conceived with the goal of youth empowerment. The 21st century is characterized by challenges of youths' unemployment, dwindling sources of livelihood and a deepening impact of globalization.

This paper therefore set out to discuss the significance of agricultural education for ensuring skills development for sustainable self-employment and hence, reducing unemployment rates amongst youths in Nigeria. It specifically discussed:

1. causes and effect of unemployment on the Nigerian economy,
2. significance of agricultural education for the youths in Nigeria,
3. constraints and prospects of agricultural education in Nigeria and
4. strategies to enhance agricultural education.

II. CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

Unemployment is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the socioeconomic and political atmosphere of our Nigerian democracy. Several regimes have battled with this feat without remarkable achievements due to numerous reasons. Such reasons are overpopulation, large number of graduates and school leavers from Universities, Polytechnics and other skills acquisition and training centres. Nwankwo (2006) said youths are the most afflicted by the scourge of unemployment and the fact remains that these youths are so numerous in various institutions of learning. The question is, when they graduate, what next?

Basically, the followings are other reasons responsible for the persistent unemployment situation being grappled with in our country and other sub-Saharan states. Thus, school curriculum is highly methodological rather than being child-centred; recruitment policies place more emphases on paper qualification; political and religious sentiments which culminate in the popular slogan "who you know syndrome" and theoretical training with little or no

vocational or practical training sessions. Furthermore, there is poor remuneration and work benefits for employees and deliberate industrial rationalization by government and other employers of labour. Ultimately, personality and individual youth factor also predisposes them to unemployment. Moreover, report says youth unemployment is as a result of globalization, structural reforms in developing countries, level of fluctuations in aggregate demand for labour, demographic trends and changes, level of economic activity and sustainable growth, education and training outcomes, and so on (International Labour Organization, ILO, 2004).

Hitherto, unemployment has caused serious concern to Nigerian democracy. Akpotu and Joke (2004) lamented that lack of basic skills for self reliance has made youths to indulge in various kinds of social vices. Research have confirmed that the number of unemployed have increased steadily over the past decades with the last figure at 88millions in the year 2003 and this figure represents a tip of the iceberg, as many more of the youths are forced to seek a living in the informal sector of the economy in dangerous circumstances without social protection, working for long hours for very low wages (Tjahjono, 2005). Hence, those unemployed able-bodied youths join or form bad gangs as the case of Niger Delta Militancy and Sea piracy, terrorism, and the Boko Haram Saga most common, in the Northern States of Nigeria.

A popular adage says "the idle mind is the devil's workshop". Therefore, ILO stated that unemployment is a sure precursor to poverty and food insecurity. Thus, the consequences of unemployment are so numerous but agricultural education has the key to a more meaningful living for the youths in Nigeria.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

Agricultural education has been variously by different authors. Osinem (2008) defined agricultural education as a process of imparting knowledge, skills,

and attitudes in Agriculture to the learners at any levels. Umoh (2006) sees it as a systematic programme of instruction for school leavers, out-of-school, post-secondary youth, and established farmers, organized farmers, organized for the purpose of improving rural living. On the other hand, Egbule (2002) defined agricultural education as the type of education that trains learners in the improved agricultural production processes, and in the techniques for the teaching of agriculture. The author further said that in schools, agricultural education teaches skills, values, attitudes, and related knowledge in production, processing, and marketing of agricultural and related products. Based on the above agricultural education has immense significance to the learner, and the society as a whole.

It is worthy to note that education in agriculture makes it possible for the efficient use of different forms of power, mechanization, science and technology in modifying the physical, chemical, biological, economic and social aspects of the total environment in Nigeria in the 21st century (Egun, 2009). In addition, Osinem (2008) stipulated that agricultural education provides learners with sound academic knowledge as well as opportunity to apply this knowledge through classroom activities, laboratory experiments, project participation and supervised agricultural experience.

The major aim of agricultural education for the youth in schools is to expose them to various occupations in agriculture and prepare them for different occupational skills. Agricultural education is therefore a formal programme of instruction systematically organized for in-school learner and to established farmers who are willing and prepared for careers in agriculture. This implies that agricultural education is provided either in formal school or in the non-formal education settings such as; research institutions and other vocational centres (Agbulu & Ekele, 2004). Thus, agricultural education plays tremendous role in training both interested persons and those who have already

chosen and are established in the occupation of agriculture, hence, require further knowledge, skills and aptitudes to progress in it. According to Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 2004), the objectives of agricultural education at the secondary school include to:

1. stimulate and sustain students' in agriculture,
2. develop basic agricultural knowledge and skills in students,
3. enable students to integrate knowledge with skills in agriculture and
4. prepare students for occupations in agriculture.

It was further stated that through agricultural education, farm skills are taught, the trainees or graduates become self employed and being self employed means becoming directors and managers in their chosen enterprises (Osinem, 2008). The author further stated that through agricultural education, learners are taught the following virtues: desirable work habits and ethics in agriculture; competences and skills in agricultural occupations; leadership and entrepreneurial skills; and the relationship between agriculture and the economic environment. However, many challenges tend to bare Nigerian youths from engaging in gainful ventures in the agricultural sector. Thereby, making them remain unemployed.

IV. CONSTRAINTS OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

There exist a number of factors militating against effective attainment of the national philosophy of agricultural education. Such constraints include the following.

Inadequate Human Resources. Human resources required for effective teaching and learning of skills in agriculture are grossly in short supply. Inadequate qualified teacher is one major constraint to agricultural education in our schools and colleges, including other skills training and acquisition centres.

Moreover, the problem is more pronounced at the basic education levels and in rural schools. One could imagine a situation where different subject teachers are co-opted to teach agricultural science especially at the adult sessions. In any case, teachers of agriculture at every level should possess the requisite training and certifications to qualify them for the job. Besides, the complimentary roles of extension officers for the farm families have not met its expectation in the rural settings. It is therefore the role of agricultural education, to help the rural farmers use their meager resources and prevailing socio-cultural constraints to produce food in excess of their consumption which, the family can exchange for money. Of course, this could be achieved through agricultural extension education and training programmes.

Inadequate Funding. There has not been adequate fund to build infrastructure, pay workers and procure all the necessary materials and equipment for training learners. Saliu and Mohammed (2008) reported that expansion of schools is not commensurate with its financing. Hence, they argued that proportionate increase in school aimed at meeting the high demand for schooling require proper funding to cater for learning infrastructures and staff welfare. Nonetheless, funds are required to establish school farms and demonstration centres. On a general note, planning and implementation of programmes and projects in agricultural education is very expensive and requires huge capital investment. For instance, agriculture training requires laboratory experiments where electricity supply is very essential. This is because light is required to undertake, exhibit and display some electrically powered equipment. Apart from that, laboratories are essential in teaching empirical experience but which are non-existent in most secondary schools in the country (Agbo, 2008).

Non Implementation of Educational Policies. There has been a policy that funding of vocational schools should be separated from conventional schools but

nothing has been done for implementation. Various policies of government have almost always remained on paper. While the implementation strategies are left in the doldrums. In fact, governance and leadership at local, state and federal levels are never stable and yet, overridden by corruption. Hence, most policies of preceding governments have often been discontinued and funds earlier earmarked or appropriated for them were diverted. Typical example is the farm settlement scheme of 1956 in Nigeria which was to settle young school leavers and graduates for them to be trained in agribusiness. Its goals were hitherto not achieved due to the absence of efficient programmes implementation mechanisms.

Socioeconomic and Cultural Hindrances. The consequence of this constraint is observed in areas of poverty; conservativeness; religious taboos; gender bias and sex discrimination among others. This, according to Osinem (2008) makes agricultural education to be treated with contempt. Consequently, non-agricultural students in schools even look down on those in vocational agricultural areas as unfortunate. Moreover, the teacher of agricultural is seen by others as very low in intelligence. For instance, the general misconception by public is that vocational agricultural education is meant for those who do not have the brain power for rigorous academic demands (Oluyomi, 2011). At the end, this prompts young adults/ youths to prefer vocations other than agriculture in the cities.

Slow adoption of Agricultural Innovations. Imparting knowledge on modern farming practices suffer serious setback due largely to farmers' low cognitive abilities (Idachaba, 2006). According to Idachaba, adopting new technologies can assist the farmers in stabilizing their yield, reduce unpredictable loss, increase yields while sustaining resource base and avail themselves of an increasing volume of external inputs. Specifically, most of the farmers have never, and may not have the opportunity of attending formal education

for life. Let alone to talk of abilities to utilize the modern information and communication technologies such as the World Wide Web or Internet services.

Wrong Attitude towards Vocational Agricultural Education. General attitudes of trainees of vocational education constitute problems. Research report by Uwadaie in Agbo (2008) found that some students only choose Agriculture at the tertiary levels with different motives namely; passers-by motives, gamblers motives; employee motives; and career motives which, is a cumulative effect generated from their early childhood. Thus, those who enter with motives other than career are not likely to do well. Agricultural vocations require the utilization of efforts and total commitment. Most students these days feel so lazy to do any hard work. As such, acquiring relevant manipulative skills is hampered. This leads to eventual dropout and ineffectiveness on the part of those who graduate later on.

Faulty Curriculum Content. The curriculum content of agricultural education at virtually all levels does not adequately equip school leavers with requisite skills and experiences for becoming self-reliant and functionally self-employed. Emphases have rather being laid in training and certification for white collar jobs to the detriment of skill training for hands-on jobs. The design of content hardly takes care of practical sessions where specific skills are impacted through demonstrations and exhibitions. Hence, much of the training is lecture method oriented where theories are basically taught by teachers. At the end of the day, students acquire little or no practical or hands-on skills to make them self-employable.

Advancement in technology. There are serious changes in the technology utilized in agriculture that are required for training of students. Due to the new developments in science and technology, many subjects have become highly needful for the understanding of agriculture. FAO (1997) maintained that although

agriculture and agricultural education have generally kept pace with scientific progress in the past, the pace of change is much faster today; requiring continual updating of curricula.

V. STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING SKILL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

It was reported that agricultural productivity in the United States stems from educational delivery system available to agricultural industry (Egun, 2004). Furthermore, Egun opined that there was need to refocus the methodologies and curriculum of agricultural education in Nigeria for better productivity in the 21st century. Therefore, agricultural education should help students acquire academic knowledge, manipulative skills; and ample opportunity to apply this knowledge through classroom activities, laboratory experiments, and project participation and supervised agricultural experiences (Osinem, 2008).

Teaching methods which abounds in agricultural education included: Demonstration, Lecture, Fieldtrip, Discussion, Project, Task Instruction, Agricultural shows and Farmers' forum (Osinem, 2008). In continuation, Osinem stated that teaching-learning in agriculture is presently gaining technological basis hence, Multimedia equipment and Computers are receiving a boost. Suffice it to say that the use of Land Laboratory and a more recent Modular approach are all very effective mechanisms for teaching vocational skills in agriculture. Land laboratory or School farm was defined by Agbulu and Ekele (2004) as a selected plot of land on the school premises where students are taught the art of farming such as crop production and Animal husbandry. It is most suitable for adopting demonstration method of teaching earlier mentioned.

VI. STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Practical Session (IHPS) for Secondary School youths, particularly, those who have showed high enthusiasm for farming should be organized. By this, it means designing a programme that enables the students to be retained in the school during the long vacation or for a specified duration after their School Leaving Examination. During which, the students would be given intensive training on production skills in the various vocational areas of agriculture, including crops, animal, fishery, and farm mechanics. This would make farming more attractive to the youth in the secondary school.

The funding of vocational education, in which agricultural education is an aspect of, should be separated from conventional education. The will enable the federal government know the appropriate amount on vocational education to provide adequate human and material resources for proper implementation of agricultural education in Nigeria.

Parents or guidance should allow their children to make choice of the course they wish to study at higher institutions based on the abilities and interest. They should desist from influencing their children through examination malpractices.

VII. CONCLUSION

Generally, agricultural education is expected to assist the youths make a comfortable living in their social and political environments. Since agriculture is regarded as a composite occupation with many interwoven vocational areas, individual youths can choose from them and be trained to earn a self-sustaining living. Thus, there is need for government to introduce these occupations in different learning institutions and vocational training centres to accommodate these teaming youths. It should be noted, one thing is to teach youths to acquire those skills and another, is to establish and maintain an institution framework that would monitor and ensure the sustainability of the self-employed youths. If not so then, all attempts would

continue to be on paper and youths would continue in their old tradition as job seekers and continue to exhibit their frustrations in different social vices.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Farm Settlement Scheme initiated in the past needs to be resuscitated and reviewed by our present democratic government; national directorate of employment (NDE), be adequately funded and financed. Through which, agricultural skills would be imparted on both graduates and other school leavers.
- Teachers, trainers and instructors are highly needed and their ratio to the trainees must be adequately catered for by the human resources development centres.
- Government should provide needed modern farming tools and equipment in existing agricultural training institutions. This would facilitate the development of mechanized farming skills and attitudes in the youths.
- Expatriates and technocrats should be recruited and contracted to train, service and maintain the tools and equipment so provided for agricultural education.
- Effective insurance policies and risk management, as well as emergency relief structures be put in place. This would provide confidence for the would-be farm entrepreneurs.
- Corporate and private organizations should also be encouraged to establish vocational agricultural training centres to augment government owned outfits.
- The newly introduced entrepreneurship development programme for schools, colleges and universities should be matched with implementation actions.

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