

Youth Participation in Agriculture in Delta State – the Integrated Youth to Land Agricultural Model as a Viable Model for Improvement

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines youth participation in Agriculture in Delta State. Undermining the avalanche of opportunities for youth empowerment through agriculture, participation of youths have been low as a result of several interacting factors such as poor career guidance, inadequate land and funds amongst others. The Delta State government in a bid to address these problems put in place well articulated youth in Agriculture programmes such as Youth Empowerment through Agriculture Programme (YETA), Live-on and Own a Farm Programme (LOAF) and the Delta State Communal Farm Programme amongst others. Some of these programmes did not make the desired impact because the number of youths recruited to participate were too few, political patronage was a consideration for involvement of youths, the facilities granted to the youths after training were not effectively utilized and there was poor monitoring and evaluation of the youths who participated in the programmes. In view of the foregoing, the paper recommends a viable model for enhancing youth participation in agriculture to be known as the INTEGRATED YOUTH TO LAND AGRICULTURAL MODEL to enhance the participation of a larger number of youths in agriculture with emphasis on the local communities/wards in each local government area without emphasis to political patronage, monitoring and evaluation of the youths after training in order to provide additional support by government in order to be able to provide additional support for sustenance of youth participation in Agriculture.

Keywords : Youth participation, Agriculture, Integrated, Viable model

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I. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture of one of the economic pillars of Nigeria, providing employment for 70% of the population (Ekenta, Olaniruha, Afolabi & Bakare, 2012). It thus provides a space for young people to be crucial players. The role of agriculture as a priority area in any development agenda is therefore unquestionable and hence demands the attention, interest and participation of youths in any nation or community (Valerie, 2009).

Globally, youth is described as the period in an individual's life that runs between the end of childhood and entry into the world of work (Onuekwusi and Effiong, 2002). The Nigerian National Youth Development Policy (2001) describe youths as individuals who comprise the ages of 18-35years. In some societies, as long as one remains a bachelor or spinster, one is a youth (Nnadi, & Akwiwu, 2008). Youths constitute a very large percentage of the population, characterized by greater physical strength, greater knowledge acquisition propensities, faster reaction time, innovation prones, minimal risk aversion and love of adventure amongst others (Ekenta *et al.*, 2012). In this regard they are considered to be assets to agriculture (Nnadi & Akwiwu, 2008).

As a result of the marked deviant behaviour among the youths, which is unacceptable for healthy community living and the quest for state viability, stability and development, there is the need to chart a course for the re-orientation of the youths for purposeful

living through their voluntary participation in agriculture. Youth participation in Agriculture has the capacity to improve their standard of living, stem rural urban migration as most of them who were hitherto interested in moving from rural areas where most agricultural production takes place to urban areas will remain. It would also generate increased and sustainable food production to help in realizing the goal of food security. It will also provide production alternative for youths to be engaged in to reduce crime and other social problems plaguing the society (Valerie, 2009).

The ageing farming population in Nigeria having an average age of 47years and life expectancy of 47 - 50years (NBS, 2008, Oboh & Sanni, 2009) as well as the 2009 unemployment figure of 19.7 percent with the youths accounting for more than 75 percent indicates that youth participation in agriculture is important as it has the capacity to reduce the ageing farming population and increase youth employment.

In recognition of the importance of youth's participation in agriculture, the Federal, State and Local governments in Nigeria have initiated programmes at different times aimed at eliciting interest of youth participation in Agriculture. Amongst some of the programmes initiated by the Federal government are National Directorate of Employment (1986), Better Life for Rural Women Programme (1987) Fadama Program (1992) and lately the Sure-P program (2012). On the other hand, the Delta state government programmes include the Delta State Communal Farms Project(1996). Live On and own a Farm Project (2004), Young Farmers Club (2005) and lately the Youth Empowerment through Agriculture YETA (2007). However, several other private initiative are ongoing, but the successes and failures of these programmes leaves much to the desired. Hence this paper examines;

- i) Youth participation in Agriculture in line with the opportunities available;
- ii) Programmes embarked upon to encourage youth Nparticipation in Agriculture;
- iii) Factors affecting youth participation in Agriculture and
- iv) Strategies needed to promote youth participation in Agriculture.

II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The level of youth participation in agriculture has been low over time as agriculture is considered an ageing and undervalued profession for which reason there is a declining interest amongst young people (Consortium, 2013). There is also a negative perception by youths that most farmers are uneducated, unskilled and physical labourers with extremely low economic return. The absence of effective career guidance in schools is one huge component that derails youth participation in Agriculture

as young people pose questions on their employment prospects after attaining an agricultural qualification. The question of where will I farm? poses a challenge particularly for youths in urban settings where land is a huge concern. Also, most young people do not have access to funding as the youths profile does not meet the funding requirement need for collated by financial institutions Bruce (2013) noted that those challenges has resulted in a dwindling agricultural culture amongst youths.

The major consequence of low youth participation in Agriculture is that there will be reduced food production and in the near future, there will be greater dependence on imports making Delta state vulnerable to catastrophic events and other exogenous shocks that have negative impact on food production from external sources. Hence there is a compelling need to address the challenges to increase youth participation in Agriculture.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Opportunities for Youth Participation in Agriculture

Mwende (2011) stipulated that inadequate extension services presents an opportunity for young people to assess up-to-date information on modern ways of practicing agriculture. She noted that through social sites such as facebook, Google.com, Google. chrome and Google. scholar amongst others, youths can keep in touch with one another and learn about varieties of crop that are early maturing and drought resistant. The information obtained from websites on value addition has the capability to stimulate youths to draft a good business plan and obtain loans from financial institutions for them to start up good agricultural businesses.

Valerie (2009) elucidated that vibrant and expanding market for primary and secondary agricultural commodities offers tremendous opportunities for youth participation in agricultural activities. With a teeming population in Nigeria there is an increasing demand for varying agricultural products. These needs can only be met when youths take advantage of the existing incentives and policies geared towards encouraging youth's participation in Agriculture. On the other hand, the hike in the prices of agricultural commodities constitutes a basis for youths to engage in agricultural production to earn a reasonable income for sustenance. This has the capability to change the perception of other youths about the perceived low economic status of agriculture and stimulate them to becoming players in the sector of the economy.

Tertiary training opportunities also exist for youths interested in Agriculture with an increasing number of Universities, Polytechnics, CollegeS of Agriculture, Colleges of Education and Innovation centres. Youths who gain admission into those institutions certainly acquire the needed skills such that after graduation, the skills may be put into practice either in paid employment or in self employment (Mathew- Njoku and Ajaero, 2007).

With an increasing number of agricultural agencies, youths have more opportunity to be engaged by any of these to empower other youths in order to address the problem of unemployment which will in turn guarantee Nigeria's economic survival (Okachie, 2013). He noted the case of a non-governmental agency; Nehemiah Youth Empowerment Initiative which is engaged in utilizing youths skilled in agriculture to train youths in agro-entrepreneurship skill in order to create more businesses and value in the agricultural sector.

Review of some programmes geared towards engendering youth participation in agriculture in Delta State

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Republic of Ghana (2011), the objectives amongst others of any youth in agriculture programmes are;

- (i) To make youths accept farming as a commercial business venture and life time vocation;
- (ii) To generate appreciable income to meet farmers domestic and personal needs;
- (iii) To improve the standard of living of youths through improved income;
- (iv) To motivate youths to stay in rural areas where inputs can be delivered at their farm gate on credit and interest free;
- (v) To provide productive alternatives for the engagement of youths to reduce crime and other social problems and;
- (vi) To make youths produce enough food crops, meat and fish using modern methods;
- (vii) To terminate the apprenticeship of youths in the devils workshop and redirect their youthful energies to a more honourable vocation and dignifying means of earning a living amongst others.

Several youth Agricultural programmes designed by the Delta State government to enhance youth participation in Agriculture include;

(i) Youth Empowerment Through Agriculture (YETA).

The Youth Empowerment Through Agriculture Programme is a spin off of the Delta Road map on Agriculture - a concept of the Farm Infrastructure Foundation (FIF) in July 2008. (Osa Agbanigbi, 2011).

The programme emanated from an idea to encourage youths to participate in Agriculture. The programme was launched on the 27th of November, 2008 at Songhai Delta, Amukpe in Sapele.

Ero (2009) reported that the rationale for the programme were amongst others to;

- a) Address youth unemployment through Agriculture;
- b) Address the problem of food insecurity;
- c) Revolutionize the Delta State Agricultural sector;
- d) Diversify the states economy to an agricultural based multi-sectoral economy with youths in the drives seat;
- e) Drive the Delta State dream of existence without oil;
- f) Create a generation of youth farmers to succeed the ageing farming populations.

The programme was focused on 450 pioneering youths within the age range of 18- 40years with 18 each drawn from the 25 local government areas of the state. In the programme, youths are encouraged to practice agriculture in cluster groups by which they are empowered through training, provision of inputs and funds to make agriculture more attractive.

The components areas in which the youths are trained as part of the programme are;

- * Crop production;
- * Poultry
- * Fishing and
- * Snailery

The graduates of the programme organized in the 25 YETA clusters according to the local governments are encouraged to practices their areas of specialization in their local governments areas to earn income thereof. They are given state sponsored financial starter packs to establish their own farms. Some Micro-finance banks were also commissioned to disburse loans to the youth farmers and recover same when due. Additionally, the beneficiaries of the programme are required to repay only 50% of the cash or fund at first harvest.

Tabowei (2009) observed that one of the major achievements of the programme is that it has sourced positive behaviour from youths hence it constitutes one of the ways to achieving the three point agenda of Peace and Security, Human Capital Development and Infrastructural Development of the Delta State government. This plays out in the sense that through agriculture people can be empowered to achieve human capital as well as infrastructural development. Thus, engaging youths means that they would not be involved in criminal activities and by that the peace and security agenda can be achieved.

However, the monitoring and evaluation system appears to be defective in the sense that there is no strict rule to ensuring that the graduates of the programme must establish farms or face sanctions. The resultant effect is that after collecting starter packs and loans, they may be diverted into other ventures considered to be more profitable thereby negating the attainment of the overall objectives of the programme.

(ii) Live-On and Own A Farm Programme (LOAF)

The Live-on and own a farm programme was implemented for three years (April 2004 - December 2007). According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (2004), the broad objective of the programme was to encourage Deltans to make a living from farming and increase agricultural production. Specifically, the programme was geared towards ensuring the attainment of self-sufficiency in food production; reactivate the establishment of commercial farms; adequate utilization of abundant land, water and human resources especially youths and providing inputs for crop farming, livestock and fishery.

As part of the programme, youths and other categories of individuals were encouraged to form agricultural co-operatives to secure loans for establishing farms. Many youths in Delta State took advantage of the loans offered to establish farms. Commercial farms were established on a small scale in line with the programme. However, many of the loan beneficiaries did not establish farms but diverted the funds into other ventures. On the other hand, the communal farms established lacked livestock enterprises and under the reactivation of cash crops, only oil palm was successful. Ovwigho (2010) noted that the programme did not make any meaningful impact on the lives of farm families as many of them could not benefit from the programme as beneficiaries were tied to political affiliation. In this regard, most of the youths who were empowered to participate in the programme were those who served as thugs to the ruling party during the election, but did not eventually engage in Agriculture.

(iii) Delta State Communal Farming Programme.

The Delta communal farming programme was established with the objective of providing gainful employment to the teeming rural youths, reduce rural urban migration, alleviate poverty and improve living standards. The programme is geared towards;

- Facilitating farmland securement for local and sustainable food production;
- Helping new farmers access affordable land (particularly youths who cannot afford land);
- Providing an information hub of farm related governance models, best practices, management tools and training; and
- Assist a network of farmers, landowners and local communities to support community farm development.

The major achievement of the programme has been the securement of land for youth participation in agriculture against the backdrop of ongoing development pressures in local communities. It has also constituted a knowledge base for farming by youths.

The Ministry of Agriculture (2012) reported that ten communal farms exist in the state with 398 participants drawn as follows;

i) Ogwashi-Uku in Aniocha South LGA	83
ii) Deghele in Sapele LGA	80
iii) Irri-Emede in Isoko South LGA	80
iv) Owhelebo in Isoko North LGA	34
v) Ovade-Oghara in Ethiope West LGA	16
vi) Tamigbe in Burutu LGA	28
vii) Abigborodo in Warri North LGA	20
viii) Kokori in Ethiope East LGA	45
ix) Bomadi in Bomadi LGA	10
x) Ute-Ogbeje in Ika North East LGA	12
Total	398

The programme has not however been sustainable due to inconsistent government support and unnecessary bureaucracy adopted by government officials in the operations of the farm. Inadequate expertise and poor funding have also constituted some of the constraints.

Factors Affecting Youth participation in Agriculture in Delta State

A number of factors derail youths from very active participation in Agriculture. Aphunu and Atoma (2010) reported one of these as the perceived attitude towards Agriculture. They noted that most youths believe that Agriculture is for school drop-outs and illiterates. They believe that Agriculture promotes poverty and is a bad business, hence it should only be for the less privileged in the society. This negative attitude to Agriculture as a livelihood occupation makes youths to see those engaged in it as inferior and would therefore rather than participating in it seek alternative in other non-agricultural sectors that are considered prestigious and money spinning.

Bruce (2013) noted the absence of effective career guidance in schools, employability of Agricultural graduates, land and capital as limiting factors of participation by youths in Agriculture. In Delta State, there is the poor promotion of Agriculture in schools as a tertiary study unit resulting in poor interest. Youths are not properly guided on what they can achieve in studying Agriculture. On the other hand, no incentive by way of scholarship is usually provided. Well established Agricultural agencies do not also encourage good performance by way of prizes to students who exhibit distinguished academic performances in theory and practice. The unemployment scare even makes youth participation in agriculture more daunting as many of them are usually in doubt as to whether they would be gainfully employed and or supported at the expiration of their participation in the study of agriculture in schools. The availability of land for agriculture might not pose a huge problem of concern to youths in rural communities where land may be provided more easily. But in urban settings, it poses a problem to youth participation to a greater extent as the several demands for land for non-agricultural purposes may subdue the demand for land for Agriculture. Taking Asaba the capital of Delta State - Nigeria as an example, adjourning towns such as Okpanam and Ibusa that used to provide land for youth participation in Agriculture are however now being threatened by development demands as areas which were hitherto used for Agriculture have been sold to individuals for the building of residential houses, schools and factories. The youths interested in participating in Agriculture either have to move to the rural areas where development demand are less to obtain land or switch their participation to non-agricultural activities such as transportation and other service rendering activities in urban areas. Funding constitutes a crucial element to youth participation in Agriculture, but this is usually lacking as most youths do not have enough to carry out agricultural activities. Youths find it difficult to access services provided by financial institutions. Even where

access is got, the collateral security demanded is difficult for youths to provide. The youths therefore even when interested in participating cannot do so because the needed funds are lacking. The poor visibility of agriculture on print and electronic media, radio, television, local and national stations constitutes a problem to youth participation in Agriculture. Youths are more involved in watching movies because they are considered to be more interesting. Even where agricultural programmes are tailored to encouraging youths to participate in agriculture, they are not shown at "prime time" when people are watching. Testimonials of successful youths in agriculture are not shown to encourage other youths to emulate the feat. Thus, even when such programmes are aired, they may have little or no effect.

Ekenta *et al.* (2012) reported that youth participation in Agriculture is affected by the profit and returns from the activities. They noted that agricultural activities that will not bring immediate profit returns would probably be ignored. Bush clearing by youths was discovered as the agricultural activity in relation to digging of holes as well as bagging of agricultural products to be an activity that is a more profitable undertaking.

Yisa (2013) in examining the problems that deter youth participation in Agriculture noted them to include drudgery of farm operations, lack of competitive market for agricultural products and lack of buy back scheme from government. Farm operations have proved over time to be difficult to accomplish as a result of the continuous use of farm tools. Some areas are difficult to cultivate due to the nature of the soil. Youths therefore in their quest for "easy life" consider themselves as not fit enough to go through the difficult tasks involved. On the other hand, the prices of agricultural products have not been encouraging in Delta State compared to those in other countries of the world, with a corresponding higher quality to export such products.

Strategies to Enhancing Youth Participation in Agriculture

Promoting youth participation in Agriculture is one of the emphasis of the current administration's Agricultural Transformation Agenda of President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria. Adesina (2012) observed that to achieve success, the era of old age farmers need to be over such that subsistence agriculture has to give way to commercial agriculture and the hard earned naira currency used on food importation has to be redistributed to farmers.

Valerie (2009) noted some viable strategies to include;

- i) Improved access to training and development such that agriculture is made compulsory for all youths at the Secondary and Tertiary level no matter the discipline of study. In relation to this, on-farm training should be incorporated to avoid emphasis on theory without a practical perspective that could be more meaningfully useful.

- ii) Improved and easier access to resources such as land, capital, technology and information. In this regard, youths interested in Agriculture need be provided land and funds to establish farms. From time to time, experts and individuals who have recorded breakthroughs need to be invited to intimate youths of recent, advances to stimulate their interests. Agricultural agencies should also be encouraged to build up a data base of information on advances in Agriculture that should be accessible by youths interested in agriculture easily so that they can build up from it.
- iii) Facilitating networking amongst youths through their collaboration to engage in group activities in order to be motivated by each other. This should result in the formation of youth groups that are only engaged in agriculture and will help to identify an umbrella to which they could be contacted and assisted as against as individuals that may be more difficult to handle.
- iv) Improving the image of agriculture through proper public enlightenment of the varying opportunities available and the expected returns. Testimonials need to be shown in this regard within the local environment and outside to convince youths of the authenticity of the facts provided.

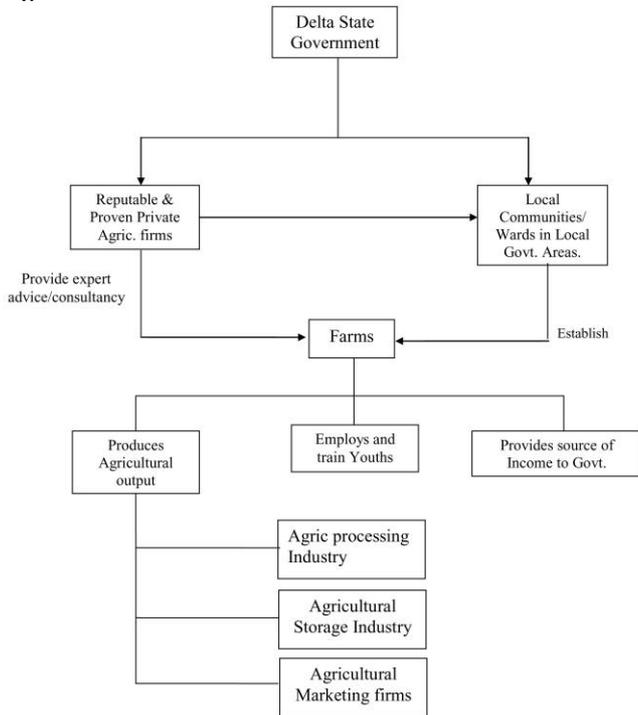
Adesina (2012) opined that a value chain approach that promotes the agricultural sector from a primitive development vocation meant for the rural peasants entrapped in a vicious cycle of poverty to a lucrative agribusiness that can take millions of youths off the street is a good measure. This will involve the concerted efforts of all stakeholders.

Viable model for Improving Youth Participation in Agriculture in Delta State

Although the Delta State government has shown a strong commitment to improving youth participation in Agriculture, these efforts have not been able to yield the desired results as a result of factors such as accommodation on only very few youths for training and poor monitoring and evaluation to attainment of results amongst others. In this regard, it is imperative to have in place a model that should be in place to enhance food production to feed the teeming population of Delta State and enhance food security.

The initiative to be known as **INTEGRATED YOUTH TO LAND AGRICULTURAL MODEL** is one which should entail a public private partnership between the Delta State government, reputable and proven private Agricultural firms and the local communities. A concise inter-linkage relationship is shown below;

Fig 1: Inter-relationship in the Integrated Youth to land Agricultural Model.



In line with the model, a public/private partnership is of paramount importance. The role of the Delta State government in this regard is to create the enabling environment for agricultural ventures to thrive, thereby allowing the local communities made up of youths to play a leading role in the agricultural production process. Government in this regard is expected to create the institutions that improves the individual and develops infrastructure to enhance production. A partnership between government, and private reputable agricultural firms will ultimately encourage youths to become self reliant and independent of government as encapsulated in one of the three-point agenda of the Delta State government tagged as human capital development. Incentives provided by government will serve to re-direct the attitude of youths from dependency to self-reliance and make them yearn for sustainable agricultural production.

Based on the foregoing recommended model, it is imperative to note that the expected role of the major stakeholders are as follows;

1. Delta State Government; being a major driver of the agricultural model will be expected to stimulate youths in local communities to participate in Agricultural ventures by providing support in the areas of;

- i. Sourcing for funds from International Aid agencies;
- ii. Training of youths in specialized agricultural training centres such as Songhai Delta Amukpe, and International Institute of Tropical Agriculture amongst others;

- iii. Liaising with expert agricultural agencies for research and development to increase agricultural products;
- iv. Proper public enlightenment on the need for youths to embrace agriculture and
- v. Monitoring and evaluation of the operations of the farm in order to correct any observed anomalies.

2. Private Agricultural Consultancy Firms; being an intermediary between the Delta State government and youths of local communities will;

- i. Provide expert advice on the agricultural ventures that youths should engage in based on the environmental potentials of the area;
- ii. Provide technical support needed to run the agricultural projects by youths in the local communities through the supervision of the training of the youths in the farm as well as ensuring that their activities are in line with the established plan

3. Local communities of the youth; being the focus of the model will be expected to;

- i. Recruit 100 youths from each ward in a local government area such that from each local government made up of ten (10) wards, 100 youths will be involved. From the twenty five local government areas of the state two thousand five hundred youths will be involved.
- ii. Receive farm inputs from government and utilize it appropriately for agricultural production;
- iii. Set up management committees amongst the youths that will be saddled with the responsibility of managing the farms.

The Agricultural model should be focused on

- a) Crop Farming to produce crops such as cassava, yam, plantain, vegetable and rice
- b) Fishery
- c) Snailery

What will make this model distinct from previous models of enhancing youth participation in Agriculture in Delta State is that;

- i) The focus is on the wards in each of the local government areas of the state. Relatedly, in each ward, the farms will be managed by management committees made up of participating youths of the area. Such that the successes and failure lies with the people as against previous programmes managed by government officials.

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- ii) The number of youths to be recruited will be one hundred from each ward compared to the meager eighteen (18) from each ward under the YETA model. The number of persons is a function of productivity such that an increase in the number of youth participants could result in greater agricultural productivity.
- iii) Rather than using political affiliation to select youths that will participate or other discriminatory measures, the local communities who know their people and their capability will co-ordinate the process reasonably fairly.
- iv) Reputable private agricultural firms that operate in line with contemporary best practices are engaged. These firms rather than operating the farms that may be abandoned are only engaged to provide expert advice. This is to forestall a situation of abandoning the farms as in the case of Lalharn organization that was running a fish farm and rice plantation in Ogwashi-Uku but abandoned it without any cogent reason under one of the Delta State governments Agricultural programmes.
- v) Several associated agro-industries constitute the model agricultural programme such that it has the capability to generate employment for persons who were not part of the youths trained for the programme.
- vi) Awards will be instituted to participating youths for the best ward in each local government area and the best ward in the state. It will be tagged "Best Agricultural oriented Youths Award". This kind of award that has not been instituted before in any Delta State government youth agricultural programme will act as an incentive to motivating the youths to strive towards achieving greater successes.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that introduction of a viable model such as the Integrated youth to land Agricultural model by the Delta State government would enhance food production by about 84% as an increase in the number of youths from four hundred and fifty from all wards in the local government of the state as obtainable under the YETA programme to two thousand five hundred would produce this effect. The commitment of the Delta State government however in achieving this laudable feat of utmost importance.

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