

Youth Organizations' Participation in Agricultural Activities in Omoku Metropolis, Rivers State, Nigeria

A. I. Oguzor
A. B. Odinwa
N. Amugo

ABSTRACT

This study examines youth organizations' participation in Agricultural Activities in Omoku Metropolis, Rivers State. The population comprises all the youth organizations in Omoku metropolis. A sample of 150 youths from five communities in Omoku is used. A structured questionnaire with 24 items is designed to elicit data for the study. A test retest is used to conduct the reliability of the instrument with Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient which yields 0.85. Data analysis is done with the use of arithmetic mean. The study reveals among others that majority of the youth organizations in Omoku metropolis do not engage in agricultural activities, youth organizations face a myriad of challenges which impede their involvement in agriculture; these range from lack of co-operation, land tenure and inadequate fund. The study, therefore, concludes that youth organizations' participation in agricultural activities in Omoku is relatively low. Hence, it recommends among others that the government at the State and local levels should ensure that re-orientation and youth mobilization programmes are designed to educate the youths on agriculture and its importance to national development.

Keywords: Youth organization, Agricultural activities, Participation

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, agriculture occupies a very prominent position in the development of the rural areas. Observably in the recent past, farming was the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. Farm resources were the major earners of foreign exchange and the means of sustenance. Farming in Nigeria is the highest employer of labour and it is estimated that about 70% percent of the populace is engaged in one form of agricultural activity or another (Emedo A. and Emedo G., 2005). In the past,

A. I. Oguzor and A. B. Odinwa are Lecturers in the Department of Agricultural Education, Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku, Rivers State, Nigeria, while N. Amugo is a Lecturer in the Department of Agriculture Technology, School of Biological Science, Port Harcourt Polytechnic, Rumuola, Rivers State, Nigeria. *E-mail: a.oguzor@fctomoku.edu.ng.*

the youths constituted the bulk of labour utilized for work in the farm, but in recent times the involvement of the youth in farm work appears to be on the decline.

Agriculture remains fundamental to poverty reduction and economic growth in the 21st century. The establishment of agricultural programmes is one of the boldest attempts by the Federal Government to tackle the multi-faceted problem of agricultural development in Nigeria. The aim is to initiate action towards change in the behavioural complex of people, especially youths that will translate to improvement in their standard of living.

Agricultural programmes assist youths to improve their productivity through active participation in agricultural activities (Ajayi, 2012). The youth has been looked at as a concept and described globally as the period in an individual's life which runs between the end of childhood and entry into the world of work (Onuekwusi and Effiong, 2002). Youth is seen as a universal stage of development. According to Nigeria's National Youth Development Policy 2001, the youth comprises all young persons of ages 18-35, who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Olusola, 2015). This category represents the most active, volatile and yet vulnerable segment of the Nigeria population. Carrino (2005) maintains that the youths are the largest generation ever to transit to adulthood. Comprising 30 percent of the population in the developing world, young people present a set of urgent economic, social and political changes that are crucial to long term progress and stability. People in this age bracket definitely constitute a sizable chunk of a nations population on which the burden of nation building falls.

It is better to motivate the youths to develop interest in farming and rural life through vocational agriculture in schools so that they will be able to participate in agricultural activities on their own and join the Young Farmers Club (YFC's) and other agricultural programmes in their areas to establish themselves as producers of food agricultural resources for the nation. Youth organization is synonymous with youth clubs, youth groups, youth association and youth movement. A youth organization is a formal organization aimed at children and adolescents for education and socialization. Youth organizations in agriculture are formed purposely to enhance the cognitive, affective and psycho-motive development of the youth (Mangal, 2009). This can encourage them to take up farming as a profession or on part-time. Participation in youth organization enhances the development of good leadership traits in youths. The overall effect will lead to the development of good citizens and nation. Conceivably, before the advent of the oil boom in Nigeria, the rural youths were engaged in farming

activities, especially during the period of Operation Feed the Nation, School to Land, Green Revolution, etc. Of recent, there is attainable conviction that the participation of youths in agricultural activities has changed drastically. This negative trend can also be seen in Omoku. The youths in Omoku metropolis do not pay much attention to family or community matters any longer. This negative attitude is seen more conspicuous towards agricultural activity which is seen to be mostly manual activities with long gestation period with no quick financial returns unlike the other sectors. The lack of interest or enthusiasm of youth organization in Omoku towards agricultural activities could be traced to the influx of oil companies that provide enough job opportunities to the youths with so much cash inflow. Hence, agriculture is looked upon with disdain. They tend to crave for/indulge in social and political activities which they believe to yield benefit. Obviously, this trend may have been implicated in a very high level of social vices. This apathy of youths in agricultural activities could be traced to the problem of land tenure system. However, the common index is a steady decline in the labour force which directly affects the level of agricultural production in the face of global food security threats among other growing youth related social vices. It is on this basis that the study sought to evaluate the participation of youth organizations in agriculture. To fully bring this study to light, the following questions were raised.

1. What are the agricultural activities that youth organizations engage in Omoku?
2. What are the contributions of youth organizations towards agricultural activities in Omoku?
3. What are the sources of support for youth organizations that involve in agricultural activities in Omoku?
4. What are the challenges of agricultural activities faced by youth organizations in Omoku?

However, a comprehensive purpose is to evaluate the participation of youth organizations in agricultural activities in Omoku metropolis.

A number of views have been expressed with respect to the meaning of the term 'participation'. Participation is the act of taking part in an activity or event. The World Bank (1995) posits that participation is a process through which stakeholders' influence and share control over development initiatives, and the decisions and resources which affect them. Egenti (2001) identifies some of the objectives and functions of participation which include making local wishes known, generating development ideas, providing local knowledge and testing proposals for feasibility and improving them. Others are increasing the capability

of communities to handle their affairs and to control and exploit their environment, demonstrating support for regime, doing what is required of government to be done, extracting, developing and investing in local resources (labour, finance and managerial skills among others) and change that is effective, authentic and enduring, and is the kind of change that is talked about when nodding towards notions like sustainability. According to Osuji (1991), not every action of the community members can be considered as participation. The author then identifies some actions that could be referred to as participation, and asserts that the elements of participation in a general conception include:

- Taking part in decision making to identify needs.
- Taking part in the mobilization of resources and planning of projects to be undertaken.
- Taking part in the activities to implement and put the project in place.
- Taking part in monitoring and evaluation of projects.

The involvement of the community members in any of the above activities is considered as participation. However, it should be noted that programme designers and executors have the right to determine what action of the people would amount to participation in a particular programme or project. This is importantly so, because various community development programmes are designed to achieve different objectives.

Youths and Agriculture

The new Webster's dictionary defines youth as the "state or quality of being young" the period from childhood to maturity. Gideon (2005) observes that investment in the youth is the only way to ensure the future growth and development of any country. He further asserts that increasing number of young people must be trained and as quickly as possible to provide leadership in agriculture, industry, government and rural development projects. These youths must be developed intellectually, morally, socially and with relevant skills to face a rapidly advancing technological world. However, researches have emphasized the need to add agriculture to the school curriculum as a way of involving the youths in agricultural programmes. Hence, Adeyemi and Adekunmi (2005) observe that most youths in Nigerian schools lack access to training on agricultural activities. In most cases, these youths were not encouraged to participate in agricultural programmes. Hence, the situation above means that the youths will not perceive agriculture as a future career and consequently the lack of involvement in agricultural activities.

Agriculture and the Economy

Agriculture is an important sector in the economic development and poverty elevation drive of many countries. The importance of this sector is more pronounced in the developing countries including Nigeria where it is the main thrust of national survival, employment, food and foreign exchange earnings (Adeyemi and Adekunmi, 2005). Before the oil boom in 1970s, agriculture was the mainstay of Nigeria's economy. Each region was known for a particular agricultural produce, for instance, groundnut in the North, cocoa in the West and palm oil in the East. These agricultural products made Nigeria the beauty of Africa while contributing up to 60% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Currently, Nigeria has over 75% of its land suitable for agriculture, but only about 40% is cultivated despite the country's teeming population and level of unemployment (Omorogbe, Jelena and Fatima, 2014). According to National Bureau of Statistics, the national unemployment rate as at 2013 is 23% with the youths accounting for more than 70% (Omorogbe, Jelena and Fatima, 2014). Agriculture has been considered one veritable tool to address the challenge posed by unemployment in the country. Hence, the government considers it a key solution going by the fact that it was the mainstay of the country's economy prior to the oil boom era. The current downturn in the economy occasioned by the dwindling revenue has further strengthened the drive to make agriculture the power house of national development (Omorogbe, Jelena and Fatima, 2014).

Youth Organizations Involvement in Agricultural Activities

The role agriculture has played in the industrial growth and development of most of the industrialized countries in the world cannot be over-emphasized. Youths-in-Agriculture programme has been described as a very important structure for land and agrarian reform which will go a long way towards promoting the interest of youths in the agricultural sector of the economy (Adeyemi and Adekunmi, 2005). According to Mangal (2009), there is insufficient youth involvement in agricultural programme even though this class of people is the most productive of any society as it contains people in the prime of their life physically and mentally. However, the need for youth organizations in Nigeria stems from the fact that young people require to grow and develop capacity in a positive way which can take place in the context of the family, peer group, school, neighbourhood as well as the community. Nonetheless, the youths who are the most active group in the society need to be nurtured and cultured agriculturally, to have a proper footing in the agricultural vocation. The various youth

organizations in agriculture therefore should be of great importance. Thus, they include: Nigeria Future Farmers (NFF), Young Farmers Club (YFC) School-to-Land Programme, Nigeria Association of Agricultural Students (NAAS), etc. The different organizations provide opportunities to be actively involved in group work, participation in various endeavours and training for some skills, hence, the activities of these organizations are probably agriculture-oriented (Adesope, 2007).

Factors Influencing the Involvement of Youth Organizations in Agricultural Activities

In the words of Dike (2000), youth organizations engage in tremendous rural development activities such as planting of crops for elders and community farms, construction of village squares, maintenance of peace as well as fighting any war. Viable youth organizations full of life and vigour achieve a lot for their communities though within the limit of resources available to them. Hence, the approaches and strategies aimed at improving the condition of the rural poor through agricultural development are faced with a myriad of problems ranging from inadequate credit facilities, inadequate transportation, poor storage facilities to low prices for farm product in addition, there is an increasing shortage of labour which currently constitute a serious threat to agricultural production. For instance, there has been a continue rise in the migration of youths, especially males, to the urban centres in search of better jobs thereby living the women and old men to carryout farming activities. Returns from farming are significantly low compared to returns from non-farming activities in the urban centres hence, the trend in migration (Olayiwola and Oyeranti, 2005).

In a submission on this, Njoku (1999) enumerates constraints faced by youth associations to included drudgery nature of agriculture due to the independence on hand tools; investment in developing countries usually discriminate against agriculture, backwardness of the rural areas where farming activities predominate-lack of social amenities such as electricity, good roads, pipe borne water, transportation, schools, market, hospital and communication facilities. Recent research efforts have identified the financial problem, lack of co-operation among members, unavailability of extension agents, bad leadership, lack of community support and land tenure system as some of the major problems faced by youth programmes in Nigeria (Gideon, 2005).

METHOD

A survey design was adopted to examine the participation of youth organization in agricultural activities in Omoku metropolis. The study's population comprises all the youth organizations drawn from all the communities in Omoku metropolis. The study covered all the youth organizations in five communities which make-up Omoku metropolis, namely; Obakata, Obiohuru, Obieti, Obosi and Usomini community respectively for the study. From the population, a total of fifty (50) youths, which were randomly selected from the five (5) communities in Omoku viz; Obieti, Obakata, Obosi, Usomini and Obiohuru communities constituted the study sample. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of (24) items using the 5-point Likert scale rating design, ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD), Disagree (D) to Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by specialists in the field of agriculture. Data collected were analysed using arithmetic mean.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 indicates that the youths in the various organizations in Omoku metropolis involved in poultry and fish productions with the mean of 3.4 and 3.3 respectively which is greater than 3.0. The table also reveals a negative response for youth organizations participation in the aspect of farm labour in bush cleaning/weeding, cassava production and development of local food supply with mean values that are less than 3.0. From Table 2, results show that the youth organizations offer little or no financial assistance to farmers in the study area (2.1). The result also indicates that the youth organizations in Omoku metropolis do not organize lectures, workshops and symposium for rural farmers (2.1). They neither render medical service (2.0), nor serve as extension agents to disseminate information on current innovations (2.7). On the other hand, the mean 3.5 is accrued as a majority of the youth organizations are in one way or the other involved in the establishment and maintenance of social amenities.

From Table 3, the analysis indicates that little or no help is gotten from Non Governmental Organizations (2.6), Local Government (2.8), Cooperative Societies (2.9), The Banks (1.5), and the Council of Chiefs (2.0). However, it is not a total condescending result as some support is gotten from the oil companies (3.6) and philanthropists/wealthy individuals in Omoku (3.5). Table 4 reveals that the challenges faced by youth organizations involved in agricultural activities are lack of finance (4.2), inadequate farm implements (4.0), exhibition of low

interest due to the presence of oil companies (4.5), non-ownership of land (3.7), lack of cooperation (4.1), lack of basic amenities (3.0), drudgery and strenuous nature of agricultural activities. Hence, it can be deduced that these challenges impede the interest of youth organizations in agricultural activities in Omoku metropolis.

Agricultural Activities that youth organizations are engaged in Omoku

From the analysis of research questions, it was observed that youth organizations are involved mainly in poultry production and fish production. However, youth organizations do not participate in farm operation such as bush clearing/weeding, cassava production and development of local food supply (Table 1). This finding agrees with Mangal (2009) who states that there is insufficient youth involvement in agricultural programmes even though this class of people is the most productive of any society as it contains people in the prime of their life physically and mentally. Probably only few of the youths own farms and maintain poultry and other agricultural activities while majority prefer vocations outside agriculture.

Contributions of Youths Organizations toward Agricultural Activities in Omoku

The results indicate that youth organizations are only involved in the establishment of social amenities. However their participation in other meaningful activities is relatively low (Table 2). This tends to be in line with the report of Dike (2000) who posited that viable youth organizations full of life and vigour achieve a lot for their communities though within the limit of resources available to them.

Sources of Support for Youth Organizations Involved in Agricultural Activities in Omoku

The study reveals that youth organizations get support from the oil companies and philanthropists/wealthy individuals. However, no convincing support is accrued from the helms of the community (Table 3). Gideon (2005) stated unequivocally that lack of community support is one of the major problems faced by youth programmes in Nigeria.

Challenges faced by Youth Organizations Involved in Agricultural Activities in Omoku

This study reveals that youth organizations are greatly challenged by lack of finance, inadequate farm implements, low interest in agriculture, land tenure,

poor cooperation among others (Table 4). This assertion was buttressed by Njoku (1999) and Gideon (2005). The result of the study reveals that:

- Majority of the youth organizations in Omoku metropolis do not engage in agricultural activities invariably because they lack finance.
- Contributions of youth organizations toward agriculture is highly on the decline as it is probably not of their best interest and do not portray the motive of their establishment.
- Youth organizations are deprived of support from helms of the community since agriculture is not of their focal point or priority, hence, little help accrued are used for some other activities.
- Youth organizations face myriad of challenges which may have in one way or the other considered venturing into agriculture an impediment ranging from lack of cooperation, drudgery and strenuous nature, and land tenure amongst others.

Table 1: Mean responses on the agricultural activities that youth organizations are engaged in Omoku

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	REMARKS
1.	Youths in your organization are involved in poultry production	3.4	Accepted
2.	Your youth organizations serve as farm labour in bush cleaning/weeding.	2.1	Rejected
3.	Youth organizations are involved in cassava production.	2.0	Rejected
4.	Youth organizations are involved in fish production.	3.3	Accepted
5.	Development of local food supply is a major aim of your youth organization	2.2	Rejected

Source: Field survey, 2016

Table 2: Mean responses on contributions of youth organizations toward agricultural activities in Omoku

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	REMARKS
6.	Youth organizations offer financial assistance to farmers for agricultural production	2.1	Rejected
7.	Youth organizations organize lectures, workshops and symposium for rural farmers.	2.1	Rejected
8.	Youth organizations render medical services to rural farmers	2.0	Rejected
9.	Youth organizations serve as extension agents to disseminate information on new innovations	2.7	Rejected
10.	Youth organizations are involved in the establishment of social amenities such as road construction to ameliorate difficulties of farmers	3.5	Accepted

Source: Field survey, 2016

Table 3: Mean responses on sources of support for youth organizations involved in agricultural activities in Omoku

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	REMARKS
11.	Youth organizations get support from Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)	2.6	Rejected
12.	Youth organizations obtain support from the local government	2.8	Rejected

13. Youth organizations obtain support from cooperative societies in the community	2.9	Rejected
14. Youth organizations obtain loan from banks to carry out agricultural activities	1.5	Rejected
15. Youth organizations get financial and motivational support from the Council of chiefs in the community.	2.0	Rejected
16. Youth organizations obtain support from oil companies	3.6	Accepted
17. Youth organizations obtain support from philanthropists/wealthy individuals.	3.5	Accepted

Source: Field survey, 2016

Table 4: Mean responses on the challenges faced by youth organizations involved in agricultural activities in Omoku

S/N ITEMS	MEAN	REMARKS
18. Lack of finance reduces the interest of youths in agriculture.	4.2	Accepted
19. Inadequate farm implement is a problem faced by youth organizations	4.0	Accepted
20. Youths exhibit low interest in agricultural activities due to the presence of oil companies	4.5	Accepted
21. Non-ownership of land a major constraint to youth organizations participation in agricultural activities.	3.7	Accepted
22. Lack of cooperation among members is a problem faced by youth organizations	4.1	Accepted
23. Lack of basic amenities which augurs rural-urban migration is a constraint to agricultural activities.	3.0	Accepted
24. Drudgery and strenuous nature constraints youth participation in agricultural activities	4.5	Accepted

Source: Field survey, 2016

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The participation of youth organizations toward agricultural activities in Omoku is relatively low. Majority of the youth organizations are mere social organizations whose aim is not directed towards agricultural development. This is because of the strenuousness of agricultural operations and the postulation of long gestation period with no quick financial lectures unlike the other sectors. However, the influx of oil companies tend to discourage youths involvement in agriculture, hence, they strive for employment in the oil industries rather than farming. Consequent upon the forgoing, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The government at the state and local levels should ensure that re-orientation and youth mobilization programmes are designed to educate the youths on the importance of agriculture in national development.
- ii. The community chiefs/leaders should ensure to make broader the issue of agriculture in the rural and urban areas as a supportive measure.

- iii. State government should make policies that will favour youth organization programmes in agriculture to attract others into farming and provide the necessary machinery as a prerogative.
- iv. Oil companies domiciled in the area should encourage and support youth agricultural activities.
- v. Extension agents should endeavour to reach out to the youth organizations to enhance and expedite their participation in agriculture.

REFERENCES

- Adesope, O. M.** (2007). *Agricultural Youth Organization: Introductory Concepts*. Omoku: Molsyfem United Services.
- Adeyemi A. A. and Adekunmi, A. O.** (2005). Assessment of Rural Children Involvement in Arable Crops Production Activities in Odu-Otin LGA of Osun State.
- Ajayi, B.** (2012). Agriculture as a Tool for Rural Development. Workshop Proceedings. Retrieved from www.wimockig.com/accessed.
- Carrino, A.** (2005). *Rural Youth Development*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization.
- Dike, R. O.** (2000). What you used to know About Aguata Local Government Area. *Aguata News Magazine*, 1, 8.
- Egenti, M. N.** (2001). The Influence of Citizen Participation in Self-Help Projects on the Welfare of People in Imo State, Nigeria. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Ibadan..
- Emedo, A. B. C. and Emedo, G. A.** (2005). *Comprehensive Agricultural Science for Junior Secondary Schools*. Onitsha: De Diamond J.M.B Publishers.
- Gideon, C. O.** (2005). *Youth Programmes in Extension and Rural Development in Nigeria*. In: Ike Nwachukwu (ed) *Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology* (pp: 197-199). Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd.
- Mangal, H.** (2009). Promoting Strategic Adolescent Participation: A Discussion Paper for UNICEF.
- Njoku, P. C.** (1999). Enhancing Youth Participation in Sustainable Agriculture. *Journal Research in Agriculture*, 6(4), 36-37.
- Olayiwola, K. and Oyranti, O.** (2005). Policies and Programme for Poverty Reduction in Rural Nigeria: An Interior Research Consortium. Nairobi for the 2nd Phase Collaborative Poverty Research Project, p:20.
- Olusola, O.** (2015). Encouraging Youths Participation in Agriculture. Radio Nigeria. 20 July, Ibadan. Retrieved from www.radionigeriaibadan.com/commentary-list/1552.
- Omorogbe O., Jelena Z. and Fatima A.** (2014). The Role of Agriculture in the Economic Development of Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, 4(11), 44-47
- Onuekwusi, G. C. and Effiong, E. O.** (2002). Youth Empowerment in Rural Areas Through Participation in Rabbit Production: The case of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Rural Sociology*, 1 (4), 95-99.
- Osuji, E. E.** (1991). *The Nature of the Community*. Ibadan: Department Adult Education, University of Ibadan.
- World Bank** (1995). World Bank Participation Source-Book. Environment Department Papers; No. 19. Participation Series. Washington, D.C: World Bank.