Assessment of effectiveness and impact of agricultural youth empowerment scheme training programme in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Despite Nigeria's rich agricultural resource endowments, the agricultural sector has been growing at a very low rate. This has led to the gross unemployment and food shortage especially in a denselypopulated state like Lagos. One of the proactive initiatives to salvage this situation is the establishment of the Agric-Youth Empowerment Scheme (Agric-YES) programme which involves training of participants in basic agricultural skills in the state to empower them and increase agricultural produce. However, effort geared towards assessing the effectiveness of government programmes in Lagos State is yet to be extended to the Agric-YES; hence the reason for this study. The study is an expo-facto type with total population of all trainees in Agric-YES programme. Purposive sampling was employed to select 100 trainees of Agric-YES Programme from 2009/2010 -2015/2016 sessions. The data collection instruments are Standard of Living Scale (r=), Farm Training vocational skill Scale (r=). The data collected was analysed using paired t-test and the result reveals a significant improvement in basic knowledge of Agriculture (t(98) = -13.52, p < 0.05), trainee vocational skill (t (98) = 14.17, p < 0.05), and trainees' standard of living (t (98) = -30.81, p < 0.05) when compared with their initial status before the programme. The result reveals that Agric-YES programme has bettered the lives of beneficiaries, It is then necessary for the stakeholders at different levels to focus on sustainability of the programme.

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Key words: Standard of living, Vocational skills, Empowerment, Training

Background to the Problem

Despite Nigeria's rich agricultural resources endowments, the agricultural sector has been growing at a very low rate. Less than 50 percent of the country's cultivable agricultural land is under cultivation (FMARD,2001). Smallholder and peasant farmers, who make use of crude tools and implements and who produce through rudimentary production techniques cultivate these lands and upon their lack of access to modern implements and inputs, experience low yields in their farm enterprise (FMARD, 2012). Nigeria has therefore become heavily dependant on food importation due to low agriculture productivity that is unable to make food available for the teeming population. At Present, the population of Nigeria is about 200 million which is the largest in Africa and it accounts for 47 percent of West Africa's total population (united Nations, 2019). The proportion of

population in the developing world is directly or

indirectly connected with agriculture. The World Bank reported 2.5billion people that depend on agriculture as their main source of livelihood and among them 1.3 billion people are small farmers who do not own land. About 75% of all world poor people live in rural areas and 80% of them are in agricultural sector for their livelihood (Evaluation Cooperation Group, 2011). Unemployment remains a significant problem with an estimated 50 million youths unemployed. There is therefore, threat to hunger, poverty and food insecurity as not less than 70% of Nigerians live on less than #100 or US\$ 0.7 per day (Oni, 2008).

The problem of food shortage is especially critical in Nigeria as about 90% of Nigeria's agricultural output comes from inefficient small number of farmers. Most of these farmers do not even have enough food to feed their own families. This challenge becomes greatest in the developing countries especially in Nigeria where people starve for lack of adequate food and nourishment and where starvation, hunger and poverty go hand in hand. Agriculture is core to every nation's development especially in this

21st century; hence, it becomes imperative to

give agriculture a place of priority in nation building. Okpanachi (2004) shares the same opinion as they state that if agriculture is stagnant, it offers only a stagnant market and inhibits the growth of the rest of the economy. Nigeria should consider Agriculture as the gateway to several desired ends which include poverty reduction, rural transformation, employment, food security, and improved national health profile of the Nigerian citizenry.

Availability of food is a human rights issues and it is fundamental to the development of any nation. Therefore, quest for food availability is a mandatory responsibility of any country. Lucas (2007) claims that in the modern world, no nation can truly be great if it cannot feed her populace and no meaningful progress can be made in other sectors of life if there is scarcity of food for the people. This is one of the main reasons why Nigeria embarks on many of her agricultural initiatives and developmental policies in order to reverse the situation of food shortage. In the past, various efforts and methods have been employed in order to address the problems of food shortage in the country. The appraisal on the past shows that successive administrations in Nigeria had initiated programmes towards ensuring that food is available and accessible for the teeming population. The sustenance of the idea to fulfill her mandate has remained a dream. The first agricultural programme was National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) by Gen. Yakubu Gowon; which was aimed at boosting farmer's productivity, income and living standard (Obasi, 2013). The failure of this programme led to the birth of Agricultural Development Project (ADP) in 1975, which is more comprehensive in nature. Agricultural Development Project focused on the rural areas, while other functional agricultural programmes were also initiated, such as Operation Feed the Nation in 1976 by Muritala/Obasanjo administration and Green Revolution in 1980. These programmes, as a group, were established to improve the capacity of local production and reduce importation of food (Nzechi, 2006).

However, the policy shifted focus from the issuance of various types of subsidies and incentives to farmers and citizenry alike meant to boost food production to non - agricultural programme. The goals of the programmes thus became just a mirage based on the results according to (Shimada, 1999). This was due to the ad-hoc nature of planning and principally bad governance. Green Revolution was to strengthen the self- sufficiency in food production. This plan was to be achieved through partnership with agencies such as ministries of Agriculture, Water Resources; Labour and Commerce; the River Basin and Rural Development Authority and Agricultural Development Project (ADP). The Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) was of more rural roads rehabilitation than food production.

Many of these initiatives were not successful because they were ad-hoc programmes that lacked focus. They were poorly conceived and implemented and were duplicates of already existing programme and organisations (Fasoranti, 2006). In addition, government policy was inconsistent and projects were improperly monitored and implemented (Okafor, 2004). Also, in existence was anu nfriendly macro-economic policy environment characterized by an overvalued exchange rate, a mismanaged subsidy regime and bad export crop pricing schedules (Adewuyi and Okunmedewa, 2001). The environment encouraged imports at the expense of local crops, which led to crowding out of local production (Muhammed-Lawal and Atte 2006). Several food crops (particularly tuber) were also neglected in favour of cash crops, while government invested very little funding in support of agricultural related research. In addition, the Marketing Board, which is exclusively used to handle trade and export of agricultural produce, was abolished. Agriculture has also been constrained by numerous challenges like agricultural policies in Nigeria; low fertilizer use; low access to agricultural credit; land tenure insecurity; land degradation; poverty and gender issues, low and unstable investment in Agricultural research, poor market access and marketing efficiency; staple crops varieties, poor resistance to drought, pest and diseases; high cost of agro chemicals and poor storage facilities.

Other recent works by United States Agency for International Development Report (2007), Joint Field Evaluation Survey conducted by the National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Service (NAERLS), the Federal Department of Agriculture and National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA), (Ihaji, 2004; Ortese, 2004; Abachi and Salamatu, 2004; Okpanachi, 2004; Ukase, 2007; Jabara, 1988; Gokum, 2007) all in Ogiji (2007) have revealed other constraints of agricultural productivity in Nigeria to include poor conceptualisation and inefficient implementation of programmes; cessation of rainfall after several early interruption during the season which causes significant crop losses and reduces yields; poor rural roads and attendant high transportation cost; the increasing unattractiveness of the agriculture and rural sector to the youths who rather flock to cities for white collar' jobs; the continued dependence on subsistence farming; the cultural structure of communal living and inter dependence which causes unwholesome burden to the working populace; ethnic and communal conflicts; farmers misplaced priorities of investable funds to unproductive areas like offsetting debts, building more houses, marrying more wives, the complete disregard of farmers by government in the formulation of agricultural policies, farmers educational low profile; the devastating effect of avian influenza (Bird flu) in poultry industry which led to a drastic fall in demand for poultry products and prompted a decline in the production of maize; and bad governance being at the fulcrum of all.

Available evidence in Africa suggests an ageing farming population ranging for instance, between the ages of 47 and 75 years and a high unemployment rate of youths in Nigeria (Apkan, 2010). Involvement of youths in agricultural activities has the potential of reducing the problems of the ageing farmerp opulation and increasing youth unemployment. This calls for securing the interest and participation of young people in agriculture in form of deliberate shift in policy, training and promotion that specially target the youth. This category of people is not only the productive backbone of every society, but also the major source of ideas and innovation, the main market for food consumption and very often are the leaders and drivers of public opinion, public policy and action. The youthful

stage of life is very important in determining young people's paths to achieving productivity, employment and decent lifestyle. They are energetic and capable of learning and maintaining skills that can make their communities and the nation to flourish. Youths are risk takers and more likely to have access to extension services and make use of agriculture loans more effectively (Amaze and Tashikalma, 2003). They are capable of developing the attitude, knowledge and skills that make them to undertake active functions in the society and collaborate with adults to tackle serious issues of life (Gobeli, 2004). Gwary, Kwaghe, Jaafar-Fura and Dennis (2011) gave some of the possible agricultural occupations which offer opportunities for entrepreneurial skills for youth in Nigeria. These are food crop production, livestock production, orchard management, aquaculture (fish farming) mechanization, marketing, processing and distribution and forest jobs. Youths' involvement in agriculture provides them with economic benefits and means of self-reliance.

There is a problem of food shortage in Nigeria as a whole and Lagos-State is not exempted. As a measure to mitigate this problem, a number of food production programmes was put in place such as Rice for job at Imota Ikorodu, Vegetable farming at Badagry, Piggery farm at Oke -Aro, Fish farming at Odogunyan in Ikorodu and recently, we have Agriculture Youth Empowerment Scheme at Epe. The Agriculture -based Youth Empowerment Scheme (AGRIC-YES) was conceptualised as a form of social intervention aimed at solving the twin problems of youth unemployment and food production. Agriculture –based Youth Empowerment Schemewas, therefore, introduced as a special intervention scheme for the reduction of unemployment among youths, restore dignity to agriculture, as well as, contribute to food security in Lagos State by engaging youths in modern and advanced agricultural production methods. The policy is to take young people, especially young graduates away from the allurement, clamor and desperation of seeking and looking for jobs that do not exist and to bring them back to the foundation of the earth i.e. to bring them back to land (Babatunde, 2013).

The mission of the scheme is to engage, equip, and empower youths with resources to become world – class agro- entrepreneurs with a view to becoming new generation of agroentrepreneurs, create employment and food production in Lagos State. The project which took off on October 2, 2009 is the actualization of a ten-point agenda to create wealth, ensure food production and alleviate poverty through entrepreneurial training in agriculture and achieve the vision to further key Lagos State into the Millennium Development Goals which is now translated to Sustainable Development Goals and the World Bank Social Protection Strategy. Agriculture Youth Empowerment Scheme has much to offer, but the unskilled youths need to be trained or given some amount of basic skills on how to be better farmers than their ancestors, if youths are to serve themselves and the nation in their fullest capacity.

The Agriculture-Youth Empowerment Scheme training programme is an institution organized by Lagos State government in conjunction with Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, which is designed to offer technical and vocational education. The technical and vocational training is an aspect of education designed to provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, commercial and economic development; and give training and impart the necessary skills to individual for self- reliance economically (FRN, 2013). The specific objectives of Agriculture Training Institute as stated in Agriculture-Youth Empowerment Scheme hand book (2008) are to:

- 1. To equip and empower the beneficiaries of the programme.
- 2. To contribute to food production and, thus, food security.
- 3. To keep the youths off the streets by channelling their abundant energy towards productive agricultural ventures, thereby minimizing the crime rate in the society.
- 4. To improve the standard of living of youths through self- sufficiency in agrobased enterprises, as well as, becoming employers of labour.
- 5. To make agriculture more attractive for

the target youth thereby producing elite farmers in the areas of poultry, aquaculture, piggery, crop (Arable and vegetable) production.

6. To provide employment opportunities for the new generation of young farmers.

Agric-Yes farm is saddled with the following functions;

- 1. Buyer of last resort to Agric-yes farmers' state-wide.
- 2. Training and Human Capacity Development in cutting edge agriculture production these include
 - i. Short Courses in specialized areas of production
 - ii. Refresher programmes for already practicing farmers.
 - iii. Initiation into Commercial Farming for Serving and Retiring Civil Servants.
- 3. Provision of logistic support for proposed Satellite Settlement and Commercial Farmers around Lagos State.
- 4. Research and Development: This unit is to develop locally know-how and Agro- Technology, which will enable profitable and advanced agricultural production both at Training Farm and at Farmer's Level.

There is need to ascertain the effectiveness of Agriculture –Youth Empowerment Scheme with respect to the objectives it was designed to achieved.

Statement of the Problem

The greatest problem confronting the world today is how to eliminate hunger and overcome poverty in our society. This challenge becomes the greatest in the developing countries where people experience starvation for lack of adequate food sufficient for nourishment. People in Nigeria, like others in Sub-Sahara Africa and South-Asia remain the poorest in the world. Poverty related problems in Nigeria dated back to the country's independence in 1960. The most disturbing fact is that instead of decreasing, the problem has become complex in the last few decades. One of such scheme to ameliorate such deplorable situation is the introduction of Agricultural Youth Empowerment Scheme.

Agric-YES was implemented to reduce unemployment, restore dignity to agriculture, empower youths socially for a sustainable livelihood and at the same time, boost food production through entrepreneurship education in Lagos State. Several studies on Agric-YES programme concentrated on the contribution of Agric-Yes to youth involvement in Agriculture, job creation, innovation and resource allocation, but there is a little attention on the evaluation of entrepreneurship training and education towards food production and reduction in poverty in Agric-Yes immediate environment. Hence, this study assessed the effectiveness of training aspect of Agric-YES programme in Lagos State with respect to acquisition of basic knowledge of agricultural and vocational skills and corresponding change in standard of living of the trainees.

Research Questions

- 1. To what extent has the Agriculture youth empowerment scheme equipped their beneficiaries with basic knowledge on Agriculture?
- 2. To what extent has the Agriculture youth empowerment scheme equipped their beneficiaries with vocational skills?
- 3. To what extent has Agriculture youth empowerment scheme contributed to improve the standard of living of the beneficiaries?

Methodology

Research design

This study adopted non- experimental survey research type of quantitative method of data collection.

Population

The population for this study was made up of current and graduate trainees of the Agricultural Training institute for Agriculture Youth Empowerment Scheme, in (ATI) Aragapoka, Lagos, Nigeria.

Sampling Technique and Sample

Purposive was employed to select trainees of Agriculture Youth Empowerment Scheme from 2009/2010 - 2015/2016 sessions. Total enumeration approach was adopted to obtain one hundred trainees that are current participants and two hundred (200) graduates of the training programme for the study.

Research Instrument

Three instruments were used for data collection activities in the study Agricultural Science Achievement Test (ASAT, r=0.81), Vocational Skill Test (VST, r=0.81) and standard of living questionnaire (SLQ, r=0.89). The Agricultural Science Achievement Test (ASAT) and Vocational Science Test (VST) were drawn from the West African Examination Council (WAEC) past questions using table of specification to draw the questions under consideration. The vocational Science Test was inform of Agricultural Science Practical test which was used to ascertain the level of Vocational skill acquired by each trainees. The questions were given to trainees and responses scored. The score was transformed using transformation formular T=10Z+50 in order to make room for comparison before and after the training programme. Standard questionnaire was given to graduates to assess their level of income so basically to compare their standard of living before and after the training programme.

Validation of Instruments

All the instruments were validated by seeking the opinion of experts and reliability of the items was established using Kr-20 formula.

Data Analysis

Data collected were subjected to multiple regression analysis using (SPSS) at 0.05 level of significant.

Result and Discussions Research Question 1

To what extent has the Agriculture - youth empowerment scheme equipped their beneficiaries with basic knowledge on Agriculture?

Variables	Ν	Mean	Std.		t	Sig	Р	Remark
			deviation	df				
Before the								
Training	100	55.95	0.719					significant
				99	-13.52	0.00	0.05	
After the				-				
	100	57.24	1.24					
Training								

Table 1: Difference in Trainees' Basic Knowledge of Agriculture before and After the Training

Paired t-test was used to compare difference in mean improvement basic knowledge of agriculture before and after the trainees' engagement. Significant mean improvement was found t(df=98)=-13.52, p>0.05). The result revealed that mean basic knowledge of agriculture after the engagement (mean =57.24, S.D=55.95) was significantly higher than their basic knowledge before the engagement (mean

=55.95, S.D=1.24) .Therefore, from the result of the analysis there is no statistical reason why Agric-YES programmes do not equip participants with basic agricultural knowledge.

Research Question 2

To what extent has the Agriculture - youth empowerment scheme equipped their beneficiaries with vocational skills?

Variables	Ν	Mean	Std.		t	Sig	Р	Remark
			deviation	df				
Before the								
Training	100	56.30	0.85					significant
				99	14.17	0.00	0.05	
After the				-				
	100	58.24	1.24					
Training								

Table 2: Difference in Trainees' Vocational Skills before and After the Training

Difference in trainees' vocational skill before and after Youth Empowerment scheme was examined using paired t-test, The result reveals a significant difference in mean (t(100)=-14.17, p>0.05) which implies that mean vocational skills of the trainees after the empowerment scheme (Mean= 58.24, p<0.05) was significantly higher than mean vocational skills before empowerment scheme (Mean=56.30, SD=0.85). Hence, it could be said that Youth Empowerment scheme equipped beneficiaries with vocational skills.

Research Question 3

To what extent has Agriculture - youth empowerment scheme contributed to improve the standard of living of the beneficiaries?

Variables	Ν	Mean	Std.		t	Sig	Р	Remark
			deviation	df				
Before								
Empowerment	200	25177.66	7395.11	100	20.91	0.00	0.05	significant
				199	-30.81	0.00	0.05	
After the	200	43604.06	7673.54					
Empowerment								

Table 3: Change in Beneficiaries Standard of Living of Agric-YES Due to Empowerment Scheme

Table 3 show the Paired t-test result for the different between beneficiaries' standard of living before and after the empowerment scheme. The result reveals a significant improvement in their standard of living (t(df=195)=-30.81). This implies that mean income of beneficiaries after the empowerment (Mean=43,604.06, SD=7673.54) was significantly higher than mean income (Mean=23,177, SD=7395.11) before the empowerment. Hence, inference could be made that there is increased standard of living of the beneficiaries.

Discussion

Table 3 presents the result of the analysis on change in trainees' basic knowledge of Agriculture due to participation in training aspect of Agric-YES programme. The result reveals that there was significant increase in trainees' basic knowledge of Agriculture after the end of the programme. This is an indication that the training received by the participants was effective and made impact on participants. This result is in alliance with other findings in literature such as that reported by Bassey and Inyang (2001) who observed that training facilitates and improves trainees' skill acquisition which will bring about expertise and versatility in future engagement. Nwobasi (2011) was also of the opinion that Agriculture training programme should equip participants with entrepreneurial skill such as ability to identify a particular disease, construct ridges, building of poultry house or maintaining the existing ones. The establishment skill is the ability of a trainee to identify a good site, select best soil and procure the necessary input for

farming activities.

Table 2 also presents the result on change in trainee vocational skills due to participation in the training aspect of Agric-YES programme. The result reveals significant change in trainees' vocational skills which is ample evidence that the training had impacted the vocational skills of the participants and also proved effective among the beneficiaries. This acquired skills is important especially at this period when the wide spread realisation among stakeholders in Agriculture is the need to encourage entrepreneurship development, especially among the growing population, as a way of tackling the unemployment problem. (Obinna Chima 2017) and the skills acquisition that will lead to reduction of crime rate, unemployment and poverty in the society.

Results from Table 3 shows the change in trainees' standard of living with respect to participation in the training aspect of Agric-YES programme. From the result, a significant increase in standard of living of participants was observed. This is an indication that participants in the programme have their economic status improved with the corresponding improvement in their standard of living. The result also served as a pointer that the beneficiary communities must have been impacted by the programme. The result also confirms the fulfilment of one the objectives of Agric-YES programme at the state and national level as it was documented that Agricultural education should lead to development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live and contribute

positively to the society (FRN, 2013).

Conclusion

Based on the result of the analysis and the discussion of findings, it could be concluded that training aspect of Agric-YES have enriched the knowledge of the participant with respect to basic agricultural concept, improved their entrepreneurial skills as well as their social status in the community. Thus, it could be inferred that training aspect of Agric-YES programmes have proved effective in the study area.

Recommendation

Based on the conclusion of the study, it was recommended that;

- stakeholders in Agric-YES programme in both federal and state level should replicate the programme all over the state in the federation.
- Again, the resources that will enhance the training on the side of the trainers and the trainees should be supplied to enhance the sustainability as well as effectiveness in the subsequent training session.

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