

Review paper

YOUTH AND FARM CHILDREN AS INVALUABLE ASSETS IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT.

ABSTRACT

This paper reviewed the capacity and potentials of youth and farm children to sustaining agricultural development. Their knowledge, skills, attitude and behaviour when nurtured and utilized are invaluable assets in the implementation of sustainable agricultural programmes. Findings revealed that majority of agricultural policies/programmes formulated for youth do not consider challenges confronting their participation in agricultural development. Nigerian youth and farm children perceive agriculture as hard, back breaking, dirty jobs with very little self-esteem and a profession of drudgery. Because of this perception, they seek employment in other sectors of the economy in order to empower themselves economically and attain social prestige. The effect has left bulk of agricultural production in the hands of aged farmers who produce at subsistence level that cannot sustain their families. In view of this, Nigerian government has introduced numerous agricultural programmes such as Children in Agriculture Programme (CIAP), Youth Employment in Agricultural Programmes (YEAP), etc. which aimed at reducing poverty and better the standard of living. However, efforts made at reviewing agriculture through youth programmes have not yielded the desired results. The paper therefore recommends need assessment of youths before programme planning and implementation and capacity building through extension education programmes.

Keywords: Youths, Farm Children, Sustainable Agriculture, Development

INTRODUCTION

Globally as the population continues to grow, there is an urgent need to increase agricultural production. Agriculture is an important sector in the economic development and poverty alleviation drive of many developing countries. In West Africa, agricultural sector offers a 'double- dividend' as it supports employment opportunities and food security. According to [1] a strong and effective agricultural sector would enable a country to feed its growing population, generate employment, earn foreign exchange and provide raw materials for industries. Nigeria is a country blessed with good climate conditions that favour agricultural production but it is passing through socioeconomic and technological changes that are separating rural development from agricultural development. According to [2] the nation's progress and growth in a developing economy like Nigeria, depends to some extent, on the growth, modernization and development of their rural areas. This is because a large proportion of the population in many developing countries live in the rural areas at such no development can be possible except the rural communities are also developed. According to [1], many studies have revealed that a large proportion of the population live in the rural areas, and that, farm children and the youth constitute the highest percentage of the rural population.[2].

Generally, youth comprise of young men and women, in-school and out of- school, working and unemployed, married and unmarried, with children or still children themselves. There is no agreed definition of "Youth" but according to Population Reference Bureau (PRB) youths are

45 those in the 10-24 years age group, to them, the youth include pre-teens and teenagers (10-
 46 19years) and young adults (20-24years). [3] defined youth as people within the age group of
 47 15-24 years; "Adolescence" covers the age between 10-19 years while 10-24 years of age are
 48 referred to "Young people". In this context, we consider farm children and youth to belong to
 49 10-24 years of age which is referred to as "Young people" by World Health Organisation.
 50 Population of young people in the world today is becoming vast and varied. About three billion
 51 people in the world are under the age of 25, and in many developing countries these age group
 52 make up nearly one-third of the population. Studies have it that 60% of children within age
 53 brackets of 5 to 17 work in agriculture around the world and this translates to more than 129
 54 million boys and girls, 67.5% of which are unpaid family members [4]. Report from [5] has
 55 estimated 250 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 working in developing countries of
 56 the world. About 75% of these children live in rural areas and 25% in urban areas [6]. This
 57 implies that most working children are located in rural areas that have agriculture as the major
 58 occupation. Report by International Institute of Tropical Agriculture [7], states that farmers
 59 rarely employ children from outside their families to help them in farming activities. Rather they
 60 prefer their children mostly in the age range of 7-15years to operate as labourers in majority of
 61 the farm operations. According to [8], some cultures enforce children working in the farms as a
 62 natural condition for which they are born or raised. This study was affirmed by [9] that children
 63 involvement in farming is a normal process to promote continuity and sustainability of farming
 64 culture in most African countries. In a typical African family, male children are expected to
 65 assist their fathers in farming activities while female children are to assist their mothers in
 66 processing and marketing of farm produce. In south-western Nigeria, study by [10] reveals that
 67 the father gives a small portion of land to the son at the age of 10-12 to practice farming on his
 68 own during his spare time. He further reported that the process lasts between the ages of 15 –
 69 18 years. Several studies have confirmed that majority of the rural children in rural communities
 70 started farming activities at a tender age of four. [11] Submits that children work in various
 71 activities in the agricultural sub-sectors, such as crop and livestock farming, fishing and fish
 72 farming, cattle herding and forestry and these activities have contributed enormously to food
 73 security and rural household survival. In essence, this has translated into improved level of
 74 food sufficiency, survival of agro-based industries and a level of increase in foreign reserves
 75 [12]. Studies by [13], revealed that of all the family resources, labour is the most crucial and it
 76 is a major factor of production that produces capital and entrepreneurship. He further
 77 emphasized that family labour still performs roles in providing manpower for production and
 78 distribution within agriculture and other sectors of the economy despite specialization of
 79 function as the society advances and becomes more complex. Young people are therefore
 80 described as powerhouse for attaining sustainable agricultural and food security in Nigeria [14].

81 Consequently, [15] confirmed that young people are naturally endowed to take over farm
 82 responsibilities from the present ageing farmers. Apart from these responsibilities, young
 83 people have special characteristics such as capacity and ability to produce, they are excellent
 84 source of ideas and innovation, they are skilful and can withstand high risk thus will have ability
 85 to adopt new technology faster as compared to old farmers and adults. In essence Nigerian
 86 young people are industrious, adventurous, and quick to learn at such representing both the
 87 present and future farmers and food processors of tomorrow's rural sustainability. With these
 88 characteristics and the natural endowments of replacing the ageing farmers they are thereby
 89 considered as invaluable assets in sustainable agricultural development. The paper reviews the
 90 reasons for focusing on young people for agricultural development, challenges of young people
 91 to participate in agriculture and strategies to effective participation of young people in
 92 sustainable agriculture development.

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95 **WHY FOCUS ON YOUTH FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

96 Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without
 97 compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Implicit in this definition
 98 is the idea that in order to meet the social and economic needs of people today and in the
 99 future, there must be continued efforts towards poverty eradication, human rights, and equity,
 100 as well as sustainable consumption and protection of our natural resources [16]. Young people
 101 are important to our sustainable future not just because of their unprecedented numbers but
 102 because globally, fertility rates are falling. This means that the current generation of young
 103 people will have smaller cohorts of young people to support them as they themselves age.
 104 That means they must be able to support themselves and thrive as they age. There are more
 105 young people between the ages of 10 and 24 today in developing countries than at any other
 106 time in human history. Even the more developed countries as a region are projected to be
 107 home to growing numbers of people in this age group from 2021 until the early 2030s [17].

108 Presently, the population of this age group is slightly less than 1.8 billion in a world population
 109 of 7.3 billion [17]. To affirm this, the Population Division of the United Nations Department of
 110 Economic and Social Affairs [18] report has revealed a great increase from 721 million people
 111 aged 10 to 24 in 1950, when the world's total population was 2.5 billion and projects under its
 112 "medium fertility" scenario (often considered the "most likely" demographic outcome) to 2 billion
 113 by the middle of this century.

114 Nigeria, like most developing countries, has a youthful population structure in which more than
 115 40 percent of about 150 million people are under the age of 20 years [19]. One out of every five
 116 people in the country today is between the ages of 10 and 19 [20]. By 2050, ageing is

117 projected to proceed at various rates in all countries of the world. This demographic reality, tied
 118 to the ongoing shift in the balance of world population from younger to older people, creates
 119 risks as a cursory look at the global farming system depicts an ageing agricultural system. The
 120 average age today of a farmer in Nigeria is between 55 and 60 years (except for those involved
 121 in agribusiness) and by 2050, it is expected to rise to between 85 and 90 years. It is doubtful if
 122 the present ageing farmers can adopt the new technologies needed to sustainably increase
 123 agricultural productivity, and ultimately feed the projected population of 9 billion come 2050
 124 while protecting the environment. As such there is an urgent need for targeting younger
 125 generation into sustainable agricultural development since a young person aged 10 today will
 126 have become more than 30 years in 2050, the target year for achieving the sustainable
 127 development goals. Today's youth will also shoulder the responsibility for supporting the
 128 existing and growing population of elderly persons. Their aspirations will influence our
 129 sustainable future. They have higher expectations than the generations before them for self-
 130 direction, freedom and opportunity. The information age has taught them their human rights
 131 and given them a broader vision of what their lives could be [21].

132 Ultimately, young people in all countries today are tomorrow's parents, workers, investors,
 133 active citizens and leaders. They have the potential to be agents for social change, economic
 134 development and technological innovation. The ways in which young people are able to
 135 address their aspirations and challenges and fulfil their potential will influence current social
 136 and economic conditions and the well-being and livelihood of future generations [22]. When
 137 fully engaged, educated, healthy, productive and empowered to realize their full potential and
 138 enjoy their rights, young people can help stop multigenerational poverty and can contribute
 139 effectively to the preservation and strengthening of their communities and national resources.

140 Another factor why young people are important in sustainable agricultural development is
 141 unemployment situation amongst this group. The rate of youth unemployment worldwide
 142 remains at very high levels, both in developed and developing countries [23]. In a global report
 143 of unemployment trend of 2013, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) stated that 73.4
 144 million youth between the ages of 15 and 24 were unemployed (about 36 per cent of the
 145 world's 202 million unemployed people). In the world's least developed countries, every year
 146 about 15 million young people enter a labour force in which the large majority of workers suffer
 147 from unemployment, underemployment, or vulnerable employment [24; 25]. In addition, an
 148 estimated 6.4 million young people have given up hope of finding a job and have dropped out
 149 of labour market altogether [26]. The [27] reported that youth unemployment is a symptom of
 150 lack of employment opportunities in underdeveloped and low income countries. Given the lack
 151 of employment opportunities and consequent uncertain future, young Nigerians are forced to
 152 engage in unorthodox forms of livelihood such as indulging in criminal activities or joining

153 armed conflict, kidnapping, prostitution, illicit drug trade, boko haram menace and others [26].
 154 In line with this study, [28] identified youth unemployment and underemployment as a major
 155 cause of social instability and recommends job creation for youth as a precondition for poverty
 156 eradication and sustainable development in Africa.

157 As long as many of the youths remain unemployed, in abject poverty, they will remain
 158 vulnerable to many social vices. As the adage says, “an idle mind is a devils workshop”. In
 159 order not to devastate the lives and future ambitions of our youth it is therefore necessary to
 160 embrace agricultural programme as the bulwark for job creation. Agricultural development in
 161 West Africa offers a “double-dividend” as it creates employment opportunities and food
 162 security. Agriculture also contributes to sustainable development and growth in West Africa
 163 and it's the only way to end poverty.

164 Today's youth (girls, boys, young adolescents and young adult) are important to the future
 165 because the majority of them are growing up in poor countries where they are facing
 166 challenges of education and weak health systems, lack of jobs or income-earning
 167 opportunities.

168 Investments in human development targeting young people, including adolescents, are most
 169 critical to ensure that they have the capabilities and opportunities to define their futures, and to
 170 spur the innovations needed for a sustainable future.

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172 **CHALLENGES TO RURAL YOUTHS' PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE**

173 The major challenges of youth participation in agriculture in Nigeria include the following:

- 174 • Agriculture is viewed as a peasant occupation for the poor, illiterate and entails
 175 backwardness.
- 176 • Lack of access and control over land
- 177 • Lack of start –up capital
- 178 • Lack of financial support due to their lack of collateral and financial literacy
- 179 • Lack of vocational training and extension services
- 180 • Limited access to market and limited purchasing power which leads to lower prices
 181 on products
- 182 • Lack of storage systems
- 183 • Poor educational system
- 184 • Limited extension services
- 185 • Lack of modern farm machines / techniques
- 186 • Poor infrastructural facilities

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OTHER CHALLENGES

Other factors that militate against youth involvement in agriculture activities includes; access to inputs which is fundamental to agricultural performance even though high rate of inflation causes high prices which may constrain the performance, inadequate processing and storage facilities, unsafe environments, social discrimination, homelessness and inadequate housing and socio-economic pressure.

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF YOUTHS AND CHILDREN IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Many government regimes have initiated programmes aimed at involving youths in agriculture such as Young Farmers Club, Children in Agriculture Programme (CIAP), Youth Employment in Agriculture Programme (YEAP) and Agricultural Development Programmes among others. Despite these efforts and past interventions in Nigeria, young people still have strong apathy toward agriculture. It is on this note that the following strategies are proposed to captivate youth interest in agricultural activities.

- First strategy is to emphasize the need to integrate agricultural science into primary, secondary and tertiary education curricula. Agricultural science should be made a compulsory subject both as an examination subject in secondary school level and a general study (GST) course in tertiary institutions in schools across the country.
- Both private and government schools should embark on “Rebrand Operation Feed the Nation” where schools will produce food for the communities surrounding them.
- There should be policy for school to own at least 5-7 hectares of land before such schools are approved by government.
- All the school should collaborate with ADPs located in their various states. Also, all agricultural teachers should be trained on modern agriculture by ADPs officials.
- Practical agriculture should carry 70 marks while theory takes 30 in continuous assessment of students.
- Pupils should be taught how to produce food from farm to table in their school gardens.
- Students should be taught to preserve seeds for the next season and set up a seed bank.
- School gardens should be established to teach techniques such as organic fertilizer use, harvesting and food processing among others.
- Produce grown by schoolchildren should be sold to restaurants, hotels and the local stores around their communities.
- In secondary schools, students should be exposed to opportunities in agronomy, maintenance of farming equipment, marketing and packaging.

- 226 • In higher education, connecting universities with farming communities is essential in
227 order to broaden knowledge, increase research and development dissemination and
228 enhancing local problem-solving.
- 229 • It is equally important to connect educational institutions with labour market
230 opportunities and to build strong partnerships with employers to ensure that the skills of
231 agricultural professionals respond to labour market needs so that young graduates are
232 employable [29].
- 233 • Similarly, Youth Resource Centre (NRC), should be established in all LGAs in the
234 country. The centres should have computers, printers and photocopiers, as well as
235 telephones, television, radios and a small library which offers a selection of books,
236 newspapers and magazines. In each centre, Information Management System should
237 be installed to enable young farmers have access to information that will help them
238 improve their production and marketing performance. Each centre should be staffed by
239 personnel in business and agriculture including NYSC members (who have been
240 trained in ICT) to provide training, guidance, advice and information to young farmers.
241 NYSC is known due to its wide coverage of rural areas in Nigeria, and their primary
242 assignment is to teach in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. They can provide a
243 linkage between schools and resource centres. Also, they can provide the man-power
244 and high level competence required in the management of Youth Resource Centres
245 (YRC) and in training in-school and out-of school rural youths on ICT use for agricultural
246 development.
- 247 • To succeed in this, concrete feasibility studies should be carried out for the labour
248 market on the basis of which agricultural skills and products are needed most. Then,
249 training session should commence with theme on modern farming techniques and value
250 chain processes. Each participant should be trained on how to manage agriculture as a
251 successful enterprise with emphasis on important aspects such as product selection,
252 marketing and bookkeeping.
- 253 • The centre should link young farmers by e-mail, mobile phone text messages and radio
254 to local partners such as the National Agricultural and Information service, the Nigeria
255 Agriculture Research Institute and the Organic Producers and Processors of Nigeria.
256 The IMS system should link young farmers to a range of agricultural services that can
257 provide information on weather, pests and pest control, seeds, inputs, soil testing and
258 other issues. These linkages will enable young farmers to interact with each other and
259 share experiences, challenges and solutions.

- Youth Resource Centre (YRC) would also collaborate with ADPs to assist youth's access to credit, providing assistance in business planning and proposal development, so that young farmers can apply for youth loans and credit.

Finally, making farming more rewarding and life in agricultural environment more attractive requires access to functional infrastructures such as good feeder roads, electricity, pipe borne water, well equipped health centres with drugs and facilities, credit institutions, small-scale agro processing technologies, agro processing etc. with all these put in place youth's migration to urban centres would be reduced and sustainable agricultural development would be enhanced.

CONCLUSION

Young people in remote areas migrate to cities because they do not find enough incentives, profitable economic opportunities and attractive environment to live in and work. Productive infrastructure are very necessary to reduce rural-urban drifts and transform the rural landscape and in the process bring a new picture of agriculture that is attractive and lucrative for rural youths.

Youths are the group who use ICT tools (mobile phones, computers, internets etc) extensively and the fact that these are presently being used in agriculture may help to attract youth to this sector. Education and capacity building programmes for rural youths should be redefined in a more participating way and focus on agricultural business and knowledge sharing.

From the early years of infancy and primary school, the nobility of agriculture needs to be instilled in our children by incorporating agricultural science into the curriculum and making it a compulsory science subject. Also, it should be included as general study (GST) course for all undergraduate students in the universities all over the nation.

Agriculture in Nigeria needs youth to be able to face the challenge of feeding a growing population and, at the same time, find a range of opportunities for employment that can be sustainable and profitable if some support is provided. Therefore, efforts should be made to integrate the views of youths in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes related to agriculture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is need to review the curriculum of both formal education and vocational education to reflect the dynamics of agricultural sector.

- Youth opinion should be engaged in decision making processes related to the information society as students and as citizens.
- Providing targeted marketing opportunities for primary and value-added agricultural products produced by young entrepreneurs through special arrangements with schools, hotels, supermarkets etc.
- Youth's needs should be assessed before targeting them for capacity building.
- There should be policy for both private and public schools to showcase their agricultural products yearly in form of workshops, field day and agricultural show.
- Competitions between schools on "who produces best" can promote agriculture if incorporated into educational policy.
- Government should provide land grants for young people who are interested in agriculture, supported by financial technical assistance and training.
- Experimental farming programmes directed towards young people should be initiated and extension services expanded to maintain improvements in agricultural production and marketing.
- States, local government and private sectors should be involved in developing the agricultural sector to enhance its sustainability.

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