

Agricultural Entrepreneurship Development for Youth Empowerment in Nigeria: Constraints and Initiatives for Improvement

Ugochukwu P.N. Amadi

School of Agriculture and Home Economics,
Federal College of Education (Technical), Umuozu, Anambra State, Nigeria

Doi:10.5901/jesr.2012.v2n10p107

Abstract

The survival of Nigeria's agriculture rests squarely on the youth who are the farmers and leaders of tomorrow. Hitherto, the teaching and learning of agriculture has proceeded in such a manner that graduates of such programmes have failed to make successful launch into the world of agricultural enterprises (entrepreneurship). Major constraints that predisposed this anomalous situation were identified to include poor policy framework, socio-economic pressures, undue parental and peer influences, improper value orientation and of course, the nature of curricula. In response to the situation, some programmes and/or initiatives aimed at inculcating entrepreneurial skills were proposed by this study with identified target beneficiaries. The initiatives bordered on curricular reorientation that integrate entrepreneurship/enterprise education, retraining of graduates, financial support system among others.

Keywords: Agriculture, Entrepreneurship, Programmes, Nigeria

Introduction

That agriculture has lost its pride of place in the economy of the Nigeria nation has sustained its fervor as indicated in the prevalent macroeconomic environment. The macroeconomic indicators of this anomalous development accordingly include: Ever widening food supply – demand gap; Ever rising food import bills; Rapid decline in foreign exchange earnings from agricultural exports; and Rapid decline in agricultural production.

The rapid decline in agricultural production has been attributed to the continuous decline in agricultural labour. This consequently in occasioned by the continued efflux of the youth and school leavers from the rural farming communities in search of employment other than agriculture. Supporting this claim Miri (1996) avers that for the survival of agriculture:

We need to attract the younger generation whose perception of agriculture is just a case of labouring in the field A generation who would rather work in an office than out in the fields getting their hands dirty ...

Miri opines that agriculture must be promoted as a scientific employment with young people seeing it is more than just feeding an animal or digging a hole and planting a crop. The views of Bamaisaiye (1989) cited in Amadi (2001) is consistent with the foregoing expose on the declining performance of the agricultural sector. The following factors were indicated:

- Mass migration of youth into urban centre thus leaving farming in the hands of old, illiterate parent;
- Lack of scientific knowledge of agriculture among the surviving generation of illiterate farmer;
- The sustained use of traditional farming tools and methods; and
- The non-lucrative and energy consuming farm-occupations with the attendant low morale among farmers and youth.

Similarly, Amadi (1996) expressed the need to not only attract, but also retain youth in the agricultural occupations through proper mobilization.

The recognition of education as an important vehicle for agricultural transformation, and the youth as possible agent or target mobilizers necessitated the following policy thrusts initiated at certain times in the past by the government:

1. The evolution of the 6-3-3-4 education system as reflected in the various versions of the National Policy on Education namely; 1978, 1981, 1998, 2002 and 2008 editions. By this arrangement agriculture was classified as pre-vocational and vocational at the primary, junior and secondary levels respectively.
2. Consistent with number (1) above, was the revision of the school curriculum with emphasis on the development of occupational skills (Comparative Education Study and Adaptation Centre (CESAC), 1985).
3. The launching of the agricultural entrepreneurship scheme of the National Directorate for Employment (NDE), in 1986.
4. The launching of school-bound agricultural programmes for example:
 - i) The Rivers State's school-to-Land Programme
 - ii) The Anambra State's Mobilization for Agriculture and Industries (MOSAI) and,
 - iii) The Imo State's School-based Food Basket Programme.

Commenting on these programmes, Amadi and Emeruwa (1989) reported that they were packaged to inculcate in the youth, requisite vocational and entrepreneurial skills and appropriate work habits in preparation for a successful entry into the world of work.

The ideals of the agriculture curriculum notwithstanding, Ivowi (1983), Zahradeen (1990), and Ochu and Umannagbu (1993) variously observed that agricultural education programmes at the secondary level are not as practically oriented as was originally intended in the curriculum. Ochu and Umannagbu (1993) further cited the views of Wheeler (1990) and Ebun (1990) who independently reported that a good proportion of students of agriculture graduate in excellent grades without adequate exposure to the practical training that would ensure skills development. Ochu's work which sought information on the degree of relevance of the Senior Secondary agricultural education practical content reveals that with a percentage rating of 56%, the curriculum was deemed relevant to intermediate manpower development but that notwithstanding, Igbokwe (1994) wondered why school leavers and graduates of such programmes have continued to find themselves ill-equipped to move into adult life productively. Going by these developments, Amadi (2001) in a study reported the existence of a wide generation gap between the school (agricultural education programmes,) and the world of work. This picture becomes clearer when we compare the performance of graduates of agriculture with that of their counter parts in other vocational areas such as woodwork (carpentry), electrical work, Home economics, to mention a few. The agricultural occupation skills that are indicated in the curriculum are for convenience classified into three broad categories namely;

- 1) Vocational skills
- 2) Entrepreneurship skills and

3) Psycho production skills

These categories are not mutually exclusive as there can be some overlaps. Vocational skills are specific behaviours, habits or attitudes which are concerned with the abilities of a person to secure gainful employment (self, or paid). Entrepreneurship skills are viewed as those specific behaviours or habits that are required by an individual to make a successful launch into agricultural business (Okorie, 1997). Entrepreneurship emphasizes self reliance and relative economic independence (Iwuanyanwu, 1997) and rather creates a favourable atmosphere for economic interdependence and synergy within the society (Amadi, 2004).

The Psycho production skills (Olaitan & Ali 1997) are acquired abilities for performing tasks adequately with the hands in response to sensory stimuli. It may suffice to emphasize that the performance of psych production skills requires proper coordination of the senses.

In summary therefore, it important to restate that Nigeria's economy can only regain its pride of place if agriculture is given the necessary the necessary support to sustain its contributory quota to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and if youths are fully mobilized and motivated to form the core agents of the needed change.

Problem Statement

The problem focus of this study is the show of indifference of the youth to agriculture which has sustained, despite government efforts through her numerous agencies such as the school. It is therefore intended that, the results and recommendations of this study will provide the needed thrust.

Statement of Purpose

The youth Agriculture Entrepreneurship Development Initiative (YAEDI) aims to facilitate the development of programmes that will induce in the Nigerian youth a receptive mindset, that capture their interest and engender commitment to agriculture and agriculture-related opportunities that abound in the sector. It is also intended that this initiative will develop support structures and incentive opportunities that will consolidate any possible progress likely to be made. The initiatives proposed in this study aims to not only create interest in youths in pursuing agriculture as a career but also to encourage everyone (old and young, men and women) who demonstrates the interest to engage in agribusiness ventures. A statement of fact imperative at this juncture is that "one must not necessarily own a farm to be involved in agriculture as an entrepreneur". As a matter of fact, there are series of agro-allied activities people can get involved in with or without any agricultural training or educational background experiences. For instance, youth can engage in the marketing of farm produce or supplies which presently is not considered integral part of agriculture by youths. The study is therefore aimed to achieve the following specific objectives:

- Identifying entrepreneurial qualities or skills which youth should acquire to be successful in agricultural businesses.
- Identifying the processes of imparting such qualities.
- Identifying agricultural enterprise opportunities in which youth can participate.
- Identifying the target-classes of youth or groups who would profit by the initiatives.
- Designing assistance packages that would benefit "special youth" and,
- Creating Financial Assistance Programme (FAP) for youth studying agriculture or related courses at the post-secondary level (Didiza, 1998).

There is a felt need to redress the imbalances of the past and to create a National Youth Policy (NYP) that will aim to empower the youth and allow them optimal access to opportunities so as to realize their full potentials". Most critical of problems of youth employment are, that:

- 1) High percentage of youth lacked access to further their education beyond primary and consequently were denied access to the job market.
- 2) High percentages of youth remain unemployed upon completion of their educational programmes at secondary and/or tertiary level.

Entrepreneurship Qualities/Skills

Entrepreneurship can be viewed in the light of a wide social, cultural and economic context as being innovative at home work, school or leisure. It involves life attitudes, including the readiness and the courage to act within the prevailing social, cultural and economic contexts. These qualities which Nelson (1979) referred to as "Occupational Survival Skills" include special attitudes, knowledge and skills relating to decision making, problem-solving, trouble shooting, human relations and business communications to mention a few. Hodgett (1982) added to list the following; sound mental ability, high achievement drive, technical competence, resourcefulness and creativity. Steinhoff and Burgess (1993) further the following to this list: high vision for business, ability to plan, organize and follow through. This list though inexhaustible, further includes the following entrepreneurial behavior (Haftendorn & Salzano, 2005): Creativity and curiosity, Motivation by success, Willingness to take or bear intelligent business risks, Ability to cooperate with others, Ability to identify business opportunities, and Ability to tolerate uncertainties.

Agricultural Entrepreneurship Initiative for the Youth

As indicated earlier, there are specific issues of serious concern affecting agriculture which inadvertently call for a critical assessment of roles youth can play as potential future leaders. The Worrisome revelation that the youth have continued to migrate out of the rural farming communities is exacerbated by the concurrent ageing of the peasants. The youth have shown little concern, and only a few initiatives are in place for replacing the declining and ageing farmer population in the rural farm holds (Amadi 2001).

Target Initiatives and Beneficiaries

The youth agricultural entrepreneurship initiatives can take any form and be targeted at a specific youth-group which may be primary level leavers, secondary school leavers, graduates of agriculture or non agriculture programmes at tertiary level. The proposed groups are as shown below:

Target Group 1: Primary School Leavers/pupils

We need to appreciate the fact that it is at the primary level that awareness about careers is inadvertently created; it therefore becomes necessary that agriculture is positively presented as one of the career options they could consider. Schools (Teachers and administrators) should mount awareness programmes aimed at conscientizing children about agriculture as a profitable career option, (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, (OECD, 1999). The primary school curriculum should be reviewed to make agriculture a core programme of study. In addition,

awareness campaigns should be mounted through the production and circulation of attractive brochures, posters and pamphlets bearing career and vocational messages typical of agriculture.

Target Group 2: Secondary School Students

Noteworthy is the fact that students at this stage of secondary level are faced with two important choices that can programme their future. First is the choice of subjects and secondly, they make career choices. Choice of career more often is a function of subject choice yet; some make parallel choices which run in conflicts with intended careers. The present Policy on Education which classifies secondary agriculture as pre- and vocational is a commendable development.

There is however, the need for attitudinal change toward agriculture in order to correct the wrong perceptions of the youth who see working on farmlands as signs of social and economic poverty. The curriculum should stress enterprise education even at the fundamental level.

Action Proposed: The attitudinal change is possible through awareness education so as to expose the youth to the multiplicity of career options that agriculture can offer. Secondly, students of agriculture should be supported financially through tertiary level agricultural programmes. Entrepreneurship and business concepts can be taught through team-based experiential / work-based learning. Entrepreneurship and enterprise development can be integrated throughout the curriculum as an optional subject or an after-school activity.

Target Group 3: Tertiary School Students (Undergrads)

The Unified University Curriculum in Nigeria is another commendable landmark in the educational development of the country that can tap into for developing entrepreneurial skills in the youth.

Action Proposed: It is imperative therefore, those tertiary students of agriculture are supported financially via bursary awards; internships, industrial works experience scheme, etc. The one-year National Youth Service could be used to achieve internship with graduates farmed out to reputable agricultural establishments. The curriculum should emphasize entrepreneurship education through Cooperative Occupational Experience Programme (COEP).

Target Group 4: Post Tertiary Youth

Graduates of agricultural programmes have suffered from unemployment as a result of low or non mobilization of investment resources thereby ending up in endless search of nonexistent jobs.

Action Proposed: Unemployment census should be undertaken to identify such graduates for the purpose of retraining them for entrepreneurship development and business start-ups. Again, the federal Government's initiative through the agricultural skills programmes of the NDE is highly commendable.

Target Group 5: Deschoolers

Some young people by omission or commission find themselves out of school pre-maturely; at a stage they would not have acquired the "occupational survival skills".

Action Proposed: Assembling of the dropouts at community/local and state levels for the purpose of imparting necessary occupational and entrepreneurial skills is imperatives. Farm-skill centres need to be established at local levels. Graduates of farm-skills programmes should also be provided with financial support to float businesses.

Target Group 6: Holiday Makers Agricultural Programme

This programme targets all categories of students who are studying agriculture at various levels so as to expose them meaningfully to practical farming skills and competencies. It is believed that such hands-on experiences will further stimulate their interest, consolidate their knowledge and capitalize their potentials and capabilities. The programme currently run as Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) as well as other work-based experience programmes at the tertiary level needs to be revised, planned, coordinated and monitored by specialists in agriculture.

Constraints to Effective Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurship Development and Empowerment

Constraints to effective youth agricultural entrepreneurship development and empowerment are multidimensional and have been identified to include the following: Curricular constraints, Societal value disorientation, Government priority emphasis on nonagricultural components of the economy, Socio-economic pressure, Parental influence, Low aptitude disposition, Difficulty in accessing resources such as land, finance and market information, Natural hazards that cast doubt on economic viability farming.

Curricular Constraints

This takes various forms and shapes ranging from poor curriculum orientation to poor implementation of school-based agricultural programmes. The poor curriculum orientation gave rise to:

- Poor awareness about the scope of opportunities in the field of agriculture.
- Lack of awareness of the economic diversity of agricultural enterprises.
- Agriculture is presently offered as an alternative to science subject streams including Home Economics rather than as part thereof, as a result of which some interested students do not follow through to the tertiary level.
- Agricultural awareness, training and education are not adequately addressed in the primary and secondary school curricula due to poor implementation.

Poor Societal Value Orientation

It is believed that the poor image of agriculture is caused by the poor value orientation of the Nigerian society. While premium is placed over such vocational callings as medicine, engineering and law, agriculture was relegated, a condition that worsened over the dominant influence of the emergent petro-economy. Youth thus look down upon agriculture.

Government Policy Frameworks

These have not made the case better since policies are not matched with commensurate actions and economic defaulters have not been appropriately sanctioned by the various government agencies. Policy emphasis is always on petroleum and more of lip service on agriculture. Even at that, youth are not properly involved when they should normally occupy a central position youth programmes are not properly mobilized financially.

Parental Influence

This borders on the undue influence of most parents over their wards' career choice, most of who would vow not to allow their wards to take to agriculture as a course of study. This wanton pressure misdirects even the enthusiastic ones to career choices not consistent with their dispositions (Okorie & Ezeji, 1988).

Peer Influence

A sort of bandwagon effect rules children of school age. The youth, *ipso facto* tend to follow a monotypic pattern in career choice as there is a tendency for the opinion of one influencing those of the others.

Difficulty in Accessing

Production resources such as land, finance and market intelligence are a serious constraint considering the fact that agriculture is capital intensive. Funds mobilization is still a major setback and of course, returns to investment (RTI) are still low due largely to low input value for those who eventually take up the adventure.

Summary of Strategies for Effective Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurship Development

Although some suggestions have been proffered alongside target initiatives, it would be proper to once more articulate an assemblage of the strategies. These include initiating:

- 1) Awareness-raising programmes at primary, secondary and tertiary levels designed to familiarize pupils with the philosophy of entrepreneurship which would exert positive influence on enterprise culture (Hayton et al, 2002).
- 2) Programmes which aim at immediate enterprise creation to be run in schools.
- 3) Teachers and vocational instructors' programmes should emphasize enterprise education. Entrepreneurship should also form integral part of both primary and secondary school curricular.
- 4) Resource materials and training packages relevant for entrepreneurship development should be made accessible to institutions of learning running agricultural programmes.
- 5) The government (local, state and national) should form genuine alliances with agencies that possess comparative advantage in various aspects of training provisions with special interest in agriculture entrepreneurship.
- 6) Establishment of farm schools aimed at production intermediate school-based community Partnership – could help to strengthen curriculum areas through the engagement of mentors from the local business community.
- 7) Skilled farm manpower development scheme akin to the farm settlement scheme of the old whose curriculum will emphasize both vocational and entrepreneurial skills acquisition should be introduced.
- 8) Establishment of Pilot farms (at local and state levels) with commercial orientation for the training and induction of youths through excursion and fieldtrips.
- 9) Institution of Youth Revolving Loans Scheme which will target the financing of youth agricultural enterprises at a highly subsidized interest rate.

- 10) Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) of Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurship Scheme to align the youth activities with intended objectives.

References

- Amadi, U.P.N. & Emeruwa, B.C. (1989). *Appraisal of Instructional Materials Needed for Implementing Senior Secondary Agriculture Curriculum*. Postgraduate Seminar Presented in the Dept. of Vocational Teacher Education. University of Nigeria, Nsukka 24th August.
- Amadi, U.P.N. & Obodo, G.E. (1996). *Youth Organization as a Strategy for Entrepreneurial Skills Development in Agriculture*. In Esomonu N.P.M. (ed.). *The Essential of Entrepreneurship Education in Technology, Science & Art*, Umuoze: research & Publication Unit, FCE(T), Umuoze.
- Amadi, U.P.N. (2001). *Availability and Utilization of Instructional Resources in Teaching and Learning Agricultural Occupation Skills in Imo State Secondary Schools*. Unpublished PhD Thesis of the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
- Bamaisay, E.A. (1989). *Agricultural Education and Economic Development Policy Implementation for the Higher Education*. In Nwagwu N.S. et al (eds.). *Education for Self-Reliance and National Development*. A publication of the Nigerian Association for Educational Administration and Planning.
- Comparative Education Studies and Adaptation Centre (CESAC) (1986). *Agricultural Science Curriculum for Senior Secondary Schools*. Lagos: CESAC.
- Didiza, A.T. (1991). *The Agriculture Youth Development Initiative for South Africa in South Africa Agricultural Youth Development Initiative*. Johannesburg: The Agricultural Youth Development Initiatives.
- Haftendon, K & Salzano C. (2005). *Facilitating Youth entrepreneurship Participation: an Analysis of Awareness & Promotion Programmes in Formal and Non-formal Education Geneva: International Labour Organization (ILO)*.
- Hayton, J et al (2002). *National Culture and Entrepreneurship: A Review of Behavioural Research in Entrepreneurship*. *Theory & Practices* 26 (4).
- Hodgett B. (1992). *Effective Small business Management*. New York: Academic Press.
- Igbokwe, E.N. (1994). *Identification of Tasks for Senior Secondary Agriculture Curriculum*. A survey of Poultry Production. *Review of Education* 14. Institute of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Ivowi, U.M.O. (1983). *Resources Management in Technical Education*. In Eyibe, S.c. (ed) *Administration, Planning and Supervision. Focus on Technology Education*. Oko : Oko Polytechnic press.
- Miri, S. (1996). *What Future for Agriculture in the Pacific*. Spore No. 56. A Publication of the Centre for Agriculture & Rural Development (CTI). Netherlands.
- Nelson, R.E. & Leach, J.A. (1981). *Increasing Opportunities for Entrepreneurship*. In Greenwood L. (ed.). *Contemporary Challenges*.
- Ochu, A.O. & Umannagbu, M.I. (1993). *An Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Senior Secondary School Agricultural Education Programme in Manpower Development in Nigeria*. *Journal of Teacher Education* 1(2).
- Okorie, J.U. (1997). *Instructional Facilities for the Growing Vocational & Technical Institutions in Nigeria*. Lead Paper at the 5th Annual National Conference on Vocational & Technical Education held at FCE(T), Umuoze.
- Okorie, J.U. & Ezeji, S.C.O.A. (1988). *Element of Guidance, Vocational and Career Education*. Onitsha Summer Educational Publishers.
- Organization for economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (1999). *Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development in Transition economies: Policy Guidelines and Recommendations*. Paris International Labour Organization (ILO).
- Steinhoff, D & Burgess, J.F. (1993): *Small Business Management Fundamentals* 6th edition New York: Mc GrawHill Inc.
- Zahraadeen, U.A. (1990). *Integrating Productive Work into Vocational Technical Education in Nigeria*. *Technical Education Today* 2(1).