

Agricultural Education as a Tool for Entrepreneurship and self-employment of Youths in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study investigated Agricultural Education as a tool for entrepreneurship and self-employment among youths in Rivers State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A sample of one hundred (100) respondents was used for the study. The instrument for data collection was researcher's made structured questionnaire built on a 4-point rating scale which was validated and a reliability coefficient of 0.86 obtained. Means and standard deviation were used to analyze the three research questions that guided the study. The findings from the study indicated that, among Agricultural skill areas needed by Youths in the study area, Poultry farming had the highest mean value of 3.90, followed by fish and snail farming with the mean values of 3.85 and 3.82 respectively, while Black soldier fly farming recorded the least mean value of 1.27. Lack of adequate training facilities and equipment, poor funding of Agricultural education and acute shortage of agricultural teachers were the major problems of Agricultural education skill implementation for entrepreneurship and self-employment among youths in Rivers State. Based on the findings, It was recommended among others that government and private sectors should provide adequate financing and training facilities for the acquisition of the skills.

Key words: Skills, entrepreneurship, employment, Agriculture, Youth.

I. INTRODUCTION

Most developing countries have agriculture as their primary (traditional) pursuit and it's the gateway to sustained growth of the economies. Before discovery oil in commercial quantities, the economic system of Nigeria was agro based with the sector accounting for about two third of the gross domestic product (GDP) and during pre independence, it had been the main stay of the nation.

According to Aigbokhan, B. E (2001) Agriculture is the main strong of households in Nigeria and is a significant sector in Nigeria's economy. This explains that a strong agricultural sector has a multiplier effect on any nation's socio-economic and industrial fabric due to its multi-dimensional nature. Until the 1970's the sector provided the basic food of the population, was a major earner of foreign exchange for Nigeria and supplied raw materials required by manufacturing sector to provide adequate employment. The agricultural sector still remains the principal supplier of raw materials for

industries. Efforts have been geared towards accelerating economic development with the ultimate goal of transforming the economic into an industrialized one, raising the welfare of the population with agriculture acting as the catalyst for the realization of the goals. The traditional role of agriculture in economic development provides the foundation for this position. (Obiechina, 2007).

No nation can improve technologically, industrially and economically without developing a strong partner initiative in the creation of wealth, poverty reduction and employment generation required skills (Akpomi, 2009). Vocational education and training with its relevant practical training component is widely recognized as the key to any nation becoming technologically relevant and internationally competitive in the world market. It is also regarded as the most effective means of empowering the citizenry to stimulate sustainable national development, enhance employment, improve quality of life, reduce poverty, limit the incidence of social vices due to joblessness and promote a culture of peace, freedom and democracy (FME, 2000). Notable among such vocational education and training is agricultural education.

Agricultural education is a systemic program of instruction available to students desiring to learn about the science, business, and technology of plant, fungi and animal production and/or about the environmental and natural resources systems. Activities areas include supervised agricultural experienced program, Agricultural Mechanization and Engineering, Animal Husbandry, Crop Production, Agricultural Ecology and Systems/Soil Conservation, Agricultural Processing, Ornamental Agriculture/Horticulture and Forest Management. Agricultural education is designed to provide students with competencies to make them aware of and prepare them for the world of work.

Agriculture is a dynamic rapidly changing industry that has an exciting future. The "New Agriculture" is made up of the intriguing new frontiers of biotechnology. Agricultural education has a long tradition of preparing students who continue their education in agriculture at the post-secondary level. The program concentrates on the development of essential skills that are vital to the success of people entering a

career in agriculture. Just as important as the technician skills, are the skills developed in leadership through the comprehensive nature of the program. Since its inception, agricultural education has trained youths in the skills necessary to assume leadership positions in agriculture. As agriculture addresses controversial issues such as genetic engineering, leadership training takes an increasing importance among our youths (Oke and Fabamise, 2018). Youths are referred to as young people. (Ibeneme, 2011). It is a bridge between the adolescent and the adults or old age (Akande), 2011. Jejenewa (2006) summarized the role of youth in the society to include leadership, stewardship and followership. Therefore, the level of attainment of any industrialized and developed nation depends on the extent to which the youths have been trained with skills particularly in agriculture and applying such skills in meeting societal demands. In this paper, entrepreneurship is seen as creativity, innovation and the ability to plan and manage agricultural projects in order to achieve objective, which translates into economic growth. Hence the need to encourage and promote agriculture entrepreneurial skills among the youths.

For several decades now, the Nigerian government, the private sector and several other concerned citizens are not novices of the serious challenge of unemployment among the youth (Weor and Akonga, 2016). Experience shows that youths in Niger Delta particularly Rivers State are the worse hit which many believe has led to crimes and other social vices in the area. Both the private and public sectors seem to be saturated and are no longer willing to absorb the large number of graduates produced on a yearly basis. This challenge has drawn the attention of many scholars who attributed the problem to several factors including poor educational programs which produce job seekers instead of job creators.

Yakubu, (2012) had identified lack of productive and marketable skills as the major causes of unemployment as many youths are not adequately prepared to fit into the productive sector of the economy. However, the agricultural sector is endowed with several opportunities that will provide skills for business enterprises as well as production of goods and services if well harnessed. An efficient agricultural sector would in no doubt enable a country to generate employment opportunities that will stimulate economic growth and development. The dynamism of the agricultural sector is undoubtedly a springboard for youth empowerment towards a sustainable socio-economic development. Currently, the contribution of agriculture to the aggregate gross domestic product (GDP) of Nigeria is still very low, this may be attributed partly to the few number of youths that actively participate in agriculture. It is against this backdrop, this study was carried out; to ascertain how the acquisition of entrepreneurial skill through agricultural education could enhance employment among youths in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Specifically the study intends to;

1. Identify the agricultural skill areas needed by Rivers State youth for entrepreneurship and self-employment.
2. Identify the challenges for the implementation of agricultural education skill programs.
3. Determine the strategies that will improve agricultural skill implementation in the study area

Research Questions

1. What are the agricultural education areas needed by Rivers State youth for entrepreneurship.
2. What are the challenges confronting the implementation of agricultural skill programs in the study area
3. What are the strategies for improving agricultural skill implementation for youth entrepreneurship and self-employment in Rivers State?

II. METHOD

Descriptive survey design was used to carry out the study. The design was adopted based on the recommendation of Nworgu (2015) that is appropriate for those studies which aim at collecting data on and describing a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population or its representative sample on existing phenomena. The study was carried out in Rivers State, Nigeria. The State is one of the thirty six (36) states of the federal republic of Nigeria located in the South; the Niger Delta Zone of the country. It comprises of twenty three local government areas. The choice of the area was informed by the presence of tertiary institutions offering agricultural sciences and agricultural education programs and the record of high unemployment youths in the area. The population of the study comprised all students of agricultural sciences in five tertiary institutions offering agricultural science and vocational technology education programs in Rivers State. These include University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University Port Harcourt, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnics, Port Harcourt, Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku. The sample size was 100 students constituted through purposive sampling. The instruments for data collection were structured rating scale questionnaire designed in the pattern of 4-point likert scale and schedule interview duly validated and reliability coefficient of 0.86 established, using test-retest method, data collected were analyzed descriptive using mean and standard deviation, with a criterion mean value of 2.50 as the benchmark for decision taking.

III. RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the agricultural skill areas needed by Rivers State youths for entrepreneurship and self-employment.

Table 1: Mean Responses on Agricultural Skills Areas

| S/N | Item Statement | \bar{X} | SD | Remark |
|-----|---------------------------------------|-----------|------|-----------------|
| 1 | Poultry farming | 3.90 | 0.40 | Strongly agreed |
| 2 | Fish farming | 3.85 | 0.42 | Strongly agreed |
| 3 | Snail farming | 3.82 | 0.49 | Strongly agreed |
| 4 | Livestock farming | 3.63 | 0.56 | Strongly agreed |
| 5 | Crop production | 3.50 | 0.60 | Agreed |
| 6 | Grass cutter farming | 3.48 | 0.60 | Agreed |
| 7 | Bee farming/Horney production | 3.46 | 0.55 | Agreed |
| 8 | Mushroom farming | 3.20 | 0.53 | Agreed |
| 9 | Agricultural processing and packaging | 3.15 | 0.45 | Agreed |
| 10. | Agricultural sales and services | 2.80 | 0.40 | Agreed |
| 11. | Black fly farming | 1.27 | 0.32 | Disagreed |

Source: 2020 survey

Table 1 revealed the respondents opinions on the needed agricultural education skills. The respondents “strongly agreed” with items 1-4, “agreed” with item 5-10, while disagree with item 11. The respondents were very close in their opinion as shown in the range of standard deviation (SD) of items in the table (0.40-0.60).

Research Question 2: What are the challenges confronting the implementation of agricultural education skill programs in the study area.

Table 2: Mean Responses on Challenges Confronting the Implementation of Agricultural Education Skill Programs

| S/N | Item Statement | \bar{X} | SD | Remark |
|-----|---|-----------|------|-----------------|
| 1 | Shortage of agricultural instructors | 3.80 | 0.70 | Agreed |
| 2 | Negative perception of the public about agriculture | 3.68 | 0.69 | Strongly agreed |
| 3 | Lack of public interest to enroll in agriculture program skill | 3.70 | 0.75 | Strongly agreed |
| 4 | Lack of adequate training facilities and equipment | 3.85 | 0.60 | Strongly agreed |
| 5 | Poor funding of agricultural education | 3.82 | 0.80 | Strongly agreed |
| 6 | Political instability/interest | 3.00 | 0.84 | Agreed |
| 7 | Poor remuneration of agricultural teachers | 3.50 | 0.80 | Strongly agreed |
| 8 | Poor orientation about agricultural education | 3.76 | 0.72 | Strongly agreed |
| 9 | Nature of agricultural skill available | 3.10 | 0.88 | Agreed |
| 10 | Non availability/Epileptic power supply to enhance processing of agricultural produce | 3.60 | 0.85 | Strongly agreed |
| 11 | Government policy | 3.50 | 0.70 | Agreed |
| 12 | There are no textual and instructional materials | 3.20 | 0.82 | Agreed |

| | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|------|------|--------|
| 13 | Lazy attitude of learners | 3.55 | 0.69 | Agreed |
| | | | | |

Source: 2020 survey

Table 2 showed the respondents strongly agreed with items 2,3,4,5,7,8 and 10, while ‘agreed’ with items 1,6,9,11,12 and 13. The grand mean of 3.54 and the standard deviation range of 0.69 to 0.88 suggests that the respondents are not vary in their opinions.

Research Question 3: What are the strategies for improving agricultural education implementation in the study area.

Table 3: Strategies for Improving Agricultural Skills Implementation

| S/N | Item Statement | \bar{X} | SD | Remark |
|-----|--|-----------|------|-----------------|
| 1 | Adequate recruitment of agricultural instructors | 3.70 | 0.83 | Strongly agreed |
| 2 | There should be adequate financing | 3.90 | 0.65 | Strongly agreed |
| 3 | There should be adequate awareness of agricultural skill programs | 3.95 | 0.60 | Strongly agreed |
| 4 | Readiness of youth to enroll in agricultural skills | 3.85 | 0.90 | Strongly agreed |
| 5 | Agricultural skill programs should be free of political influences | 3.50 | 3.50 | Agreed |
| 6 | Agricultural textual and instructional materials should be provided. | 3.06 | 0.95 | Agreed |
| 7 | There should be adequate training facilities | 3.80 | 0.87 | Strongly agreed |
| 8 | Agricultural education teachers should be highly remunerated | 3.86 | 0.88 | Strongly agreed |
| 9 | Agriculture should be made attractive to learners | 3.95 | 0.50 | Strongly agreed |
| 10 | Processing and packaging of agricultural produce should be encouraged by the provision adequate power supply | 3.30 | 0.97 | Agreed |
| 11 | Rebranding of agriculture as an enterprise should be encouraged | 3.65 | 0.82 | Strongly agreed |

Source: 2020 survey

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study in table 1 revealed that the youths of rivers state could be trained in various agricultural skill areas, which if effectively utilized will enhance entrepreneurship and help to reduce unemployment among Rivers State youths. The result agrees with the findings of Ogundele, Oluwalara and Adegbelemi (2011) that skills acquire by the youths would aid job creation, youth empowerment and poverty alleviation, which in turn has the capacity to solve various social problems. The result also confirms the assertion of Oke and Fabamise (2018) that agricultural education provides employable skills, agribusiness, life knowledge and instruction that will engage students in the globalization of agriculture as the solution for environmental demands. The

result in table 2 revealed that there are challenges hindering the implementation of agricultural education skill programs in Rivers State. These observations are in agreement with the findings of Mbaba (2006) who emphasized that agricultural education at various levels of education is not being given the desired status and priority as a vocational based subject. According to him, some people still consider agricultural education as an area of drop-out and the never do-wells. According to him, the curriculum are grossly, underfunded by stakeholders, lack of modern and innovative facilities such as equipment and materials for practical work, among other factors. His findings agree with item 2, 3 and 4 of this study.

The challenge posed by poor shortage and poor remuneration of agricultural instructors, lack of textual and instructional materials agrees with the findings of Zendra (2013) who noted that the challenge of lack of teachers and further buttressed that the nature of vocational subject is such that those teachers who teach them should have undergone rigorous training to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to impart to the (learner) and not just the theoretical aspects of the areas. Similarly Oyediran *et al* (2016) asserted that agricultural education subjects are taught as art subject on account of inadequate resource personnel, consequently the few available lecturers are over stretched with too much load of work which is seriously affecting the efficiency of agricultural education delivery in the institutions. Inadequate instructional materials have been attributed to the problem of low quality training among vocational students in Nigeria as noted by Yusuf and Soyemi (2012). The challenge of non-availability or epileptic-power supply to enhance processing of agricultural produce as observed in this study is in agreement with the findings of Oyediran *et al.*, (2016.)

Analysis of item 5 in table 2 pinpoints that poor funding of agricultural education program hinders the practice of agricultural skills in Rivers State. In affirmation of this assertion, Okeke and Eze (2010) posited that sufficient fund has not been channeled to vocational education which is a major problem plaguing the system. Also the poor funding status is in consonance with the findings of Mbaba (2006) who reported that sufficient fund for agricultural education in the country are not provided by either by the government or the private sector. Item 8 result revealed poor orientation of agricultural education skills. This is not unexpected, given the fact practitioners in agriculture are treated as poor citizens in the society, hence agriculture is viewed as vocation of the poor.

This is in the line with the report of Amor (2008) that most parents (the public) do not encourage or guide their wards (the youths) to take a course in vocational disciplines because the society does not place any sufficient value or dignity on the program. Item 13 revealed lazy attitude of learners. This is attributed to the fact that agriculture is perceived as a vocation that is tedious and laborious by the youth.

From the results in table 3, it is the opinion of the respondents that if some proactive measures are taken, agricultural education implementation could yield the expected result in Rivers State empowerment drive. In line with the findings from this study, Puyate (2008) is of the view that teachers must be well remunerated for them to effectively impart the needed knowledge on learners. Modebelu and Nwakpadolu (2013) posited that only professional and qualified teacher, relevant instructional materials among others must be provided. Egbule (2014) also opined that teaching and learning of agricultural science must be competence based and production – oriented. Egun (2009) suggested that there is the need for a total overhauling of agricultural administration in Nigeria.

V. CONCLUSION

From the findings, it could be deduced that agricultural education is a vital tool through which any nation can experience growth and development. Empowering youths through skills in agriculture will definitely go a long way in reducing unemployment and other social vices that are prevalent in Rivers State of Nigeria. Based on the foregoing, the paper recommends the following;

- i. There should be massive and effective public awareness campaign to sensitize the public on the benefits of agricultural skills to create employment and that Agriculture is not for school drop outs.
- ii. There should be massive recruitment of young viable and adequate Agricultural instructors with new innovative to replace the old retiring teachers. Agricultural educators should be treated well and should be highly remunerated and motivated. Employment should not be tailored on paper and pen qualification only but also on skills acquired related to the job area.
- iii. Both government and private sectors should collectively provide training facilities, agricultural training centers for acquisition of skills in agriculture.

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