

ENHANCEMENT OF YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION ADVISORY SERVICES THROUGH CAPACITY BUILDING: A SOLUTION TO UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

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Received: July 31, 2021 Accepted: August 29, 2021 Online Published: September 15, 2021

DOI: 10.46545/aijas.v5i1.201

URL: <https://doi.org/10.46545/aijas.v5i1.201>

ABSTRACT

The unemployment rate in Nigeria and other Sub Saharan African countries keep surging year after year despite the need for human resources in several sectors. Nigeria records a large number of young graduates from tertiary institutions most of whom find it difficult to get white collar jobs. Despite this ongoing, human resource which is needed for economic development remains under exploited. Young people have a sense of responsibility which makes it easy for them to take up opportunities that will lead to individual and societal development. Unemployed youths who have interest in agriculture and the extension system can be recruited into this sector to achieve sustainable agricultural and rural development in these areas. Capacity development is essential in this scenario to absorb these group of people into the agricultural sector, thus, reducing employment rate. Unqualified young persons can carry out the functions or duties of agricultural extension advisory services if their technical and knowledge skills in line with the subject matter is developed.

Keywords: Youth, Unemployment, Agriculture, Extension Advisory Services, Capacity Development.

INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment is a serious economic challenge (Ogundele & Akingbade, Akinlabi, 2012; Akande, 2014; Chidiebere et al., 2014; Muogbo & John-Akamelu, 2018, 2021) and its consistent high rates over the last two to three decades has indicated the need for urgent policy programme-level interventions (Adeyanju et al., 2021). There have been endless calls on youths by the Government requesting they venture into agriculture as a means of livelihood. Regardless of this great potential for youths, access to land, finance, education and adequate skills are few of the problems halting initiation of this step. One of the initiatives taken by the Federal Government of

Nigeria to curb youth unemployment and its accordant undesirable outcomes is the inclusion of entrepreneurship studies in the curriculum of tertiary institutions (Olorundare & Kayode, 2014; Ogunmodede et al., 2020) a strategy which aims to promote a shift from the conventional formal government provision of employment towards entrepreneurship (Adeyanju et al., 2021). One of many innovations by the Federal Government is the introduction of YouWin in 2013. The aim of this innovation is to curb the effect of youth unemployment by creating job opportunities for the unemployed youths. Additionally, climate change, rural to urban migration trends and increasing population pressures on land will make agriculture even more challenging in the future (Djamen, 2019).

Furthermore, in addition to Government interventions and innovations to curb unemployment and its effects on the society, creating opportunities for youths in agricultural extension and advisory services (EAS) through capacity development will bring sustainable solution to youth unemployment. Djamen (2019) reiterated that agricultural extension and advisory services offer a sustainable opportunities for youths to serve as both recipients and providers of these services. Youths can be trained as community extension workers who will always be responsible for providing solutions to agricultural challenges in their immediate environment. This can be achieved by adopting the “training the trainer” approach of extension training whereby extension knowledge and ideas are introduced to interested, passionate and committed youth in order to bring about desirable change in their livelihoods and immediate environment. Training youths to do the job of agricultural extension advisory services will lead to independence of rural farm communities and expertise of youths over time.

Unemployed youths are potential change agents. Graduates and non-literates have capacity to be developed in knowledge and technical skills. In order to cope with declining per capital of agriculture and related resources as well as population growth of youths; human capital development including literacy and skill upgrade is unavoidable. Despite the vast area of land available for agricultural activities in Nigeria, most of the GDP is generated from crude oil export. Most youths today take up different kind of jobs just to earn a living. The nature of subsistence agriculture mostly carried out by rural farmers limit the wealth that can be generated from this under-exploited sector. It is also projected that crude oil will become non-existent for exploitation and export in the nearest future. This calls for an attention shift from crude oil and other natural resources to agriculture. Therefore, the generation and diffusion of technology and management capabilities for more intensive and modernized agriculture and supporting services become imperative. This can only be achieved by upgrading the quality of human resources employed in agriculture (Chikaire et al., 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this review is to incorporate youths in agricultural extension advisory services so as to stimulate their interest to participate in agriculture. This way, sustainable rural development is achieved and unemployment rate is reduced. Secondary data collected from journals, internet and books, were collated and repeatedly reviewed for the purpose of this study. Data is often generated as a result of conducting projects in the form of reports or publications and used by researchers and extension workers in government and NGO organisations (Photakoun, 2010).

BACKGROUND

Young people in Africa are faced with a major socioeconomic problem of unemployment (Ogunmodede et al., 2020), despite being home to the youngest and most quickly growing population in the world (Usman, 2016). There are over 330 million people aged between 15 and 30 years, with about 195 million currently living in the rural areas (Brooks et al., 2013), and

60%–70% of the population below 30 years (UNDP, 2017). According to the United Nations, the youth are individuals within the age group of 15 to 24 years (Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010). In sub Saharan Africa the rate of youth unemployment is a major problem yet to be overcome (World Bank, 2020). Dimelu et al. (2020) observed that as the youth population grows, so does the unemployment rate. The unemployment rate of adults in developing countries is less when compared to that of youth (ILO, 2020). Nevertheless, they have unexploited potentials to transform the agricultural sector through their youthfulness, innovation, and entrepreneurship (Betcherman & Khan, 2015).

Nigeria is largely a youthful country with over 60 percent of the 200 million population between 18 and 35 years old (Ogunmodede et al., 2020). National Bureau of Statistics for Nigeria, (2018), put unemployment rate at 23.10% in third quarter of 2018, with youth unemployment at 36.5%. It is somewhat difficult to absorb the youth population into the formal employment sector (Abimbola, 2008; Bakare, 2011; ILO, 2020), not because they lack education/skills to work or idleness by choice but by lack of opportunities (Institute of Development Studies, 2019). While this could be an economic asset (Omoju & Abraham, 2014), majority of people (70 percent) in this age category live in the rural areas, where they are faced with high poverty levels, food insecurity, critical cases of unemployment, and underemployment (FAO, 2107). These constant occurrence have placed young people at the centre of a critical economic crisis which limits them in changing their social and economic status as well as their future prospect (Allen et al., 2016).

MEANING OF CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND THE NEED FOR YOUTH CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Capacity development refers to the skills of staff and strength of specific organizations; thus, training staff and creating or strengthening single organizations is equated with capacity development (Chikaire et al., 2015). Capacity development means strengthening of new and former skills of individuals, communities and organizations, some of which are inherent and unknown to the carrier. Exposing and strengthening such skills will increase the likelihood of a person or organization to achieve their goals/objectives and to perform more effectively. UNESCO, (2006) reports that capacity building focuses on increasing an individual and organization's abilities to perform core functions, solve problems, and objectively deal with developmental needs.

Despite the fast growing rate of civilization, many countries and communities remain poor and underdeveloped. Many rural communities remain dependent on private donors and government sectors for support. Sadly, most development projects have little to do with building or developing capacities of the poor beneficiaries to develop their immediate communities. Young people have the ability to contribute to national economic growth if they have access to the necessary opportunities. Developing the capacity building of individuals, groups, organizations and communities is sacrosanct for rural development and poverty alleviation. Dependence on donors alone cannot yield the desired result of sustainable development. Therefore, investment and donation to rural communities need to be reduced and more focus placed on building the capacity of local people, groups and organizations. Building the capacity of youths is the role that all organisations should consider. An attempt to employ younger people in extension advisory services who have the strength and energy instead of older people who lack drive will propel fast and lasting solution to unemployment.

THE NEED FOR YOUTH CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE FIELD OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION

Rural youth need to be considered as potential agricultural extension staff because they have the ability and need to resolve problems and develop their communities. However, the ability to function as an agricultural extension advisory service provider depends on existing knowledge and experience of extension work which an average youth may lack, thus, the need for capacity building in the field of extension. Building the capacity of youths to serve as rural extension staff is vital to making extension services effective in helping poor farmers. Public and private agricultural extension are responsible for this development task. They instil change in farmers' attitude such as their learning and decision making process. Younger people have a sense of responsibility and passion for solving problems and correcting all wrongs in their communities. Extension specialists should leverage on these strength to assist them to develop their capacity to stand as extension agents when the need arises. This approach should be extended to passionate and committed young graduates of agricultural extension and related courses. Although diffusion of information about a new innovation is important in extension, people prefer to be equipped and independent enough to provide solution to their issues.

Basically, agricultural extension help farmers solve agricultural problems by linking farmers to research institutes. Further, extension is concerned with developing capacity for change through improved communication and information flow between industry, agency and community stakeholders, (Chikaire et al., 2015). In agriculture, extension staff work closely with farmers in the fields to strengthen farmers' abilities and empower them to solve their problems. The extension workers are not just meant to introduce relevant technologies to farmers but to understand farmers' problems and available opportunities to help them find the most efficient way to make decisions for their future and lasting solutions to their problems. Dwarakinath (2006) explained that extension is a major vehicle for rural development because it transfers new technical knowledge to farmers and then farmers can feedback problems from the field to extension staff and researchers to consider. There is a need for a capacity building role for extension that includes farmer training but that also includes strengthening the innovation process and building linkages between farmers and other agencies to support the bargaining position of farmers (Sulaiman & Hall, 2006).

For effective training of youth participants/clientele, the change agent must possess sufficient skills in the following areas:

- Communication skills sufficient to persuade participants to adopt technologies.
- Ability to demonstrate new technologies as farmers are moved to change based on what they see
- Sufficient knowledge of economics to analyse cost-benefit ratios, interest, understand prevailing market situations etc.
- Norms, values and customs of the host community to facilitate a smooth learning experience and avoid socio-cultural conflict.
- Credible and relevant knowledge of the subject matter.
- Proper decision making regarding the choice of extension teaching methods relevant to the audience and subject matter, as well as available communication aids.

PROCESS OF YOUTH CAPACITY BUILDING

To conduct capacity building and training some few steps need to be taken as described below:

- Application: Adverts need to be placed at target local governments and communities. Requirements for eligibility should be centred on age of which should be between 16-39 years with at least secondary school leaving certificate.
- Recruitment: After application both written tests and oral interviews should be conducted to select eligible candidates who are passionate about agricultural extension.
- Residency: At this stage, provision of accommodation should be ensured for all admitted participants and trainees. Both parties will need to reside on the farm for the duration of the training. Also, recreation facilities should be provided for leisure and to make the experience less monotonous.
- Election of officials: Participants will need to conduct elections within themselves to appoint their officials or leaders to fill in posts of president, secretary general, welfare secretary and any other needed positions. This process will be supervised by the facilitators.
- Training: The duration of training of youths for capacity development as extension workers will take as long as necessary for the goal to be met. Subject matter should be formulated in ways that will bring about desired change of the trainees and community at large. The best teaching method should be selected based on prevailing factors. Most importantly, constant evaluation should be carried out to ensure youth participating are still motivated and passionate enough to continue with the programme.

LEVELS OF CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT, METHODS/RESOURCES AND OUTCOMES

Table 1. Types and levels of capacity development. Adapted from Enemark (2003); VicHealth (n.d); Phatokoun (2010)

Level	Methods and Resources	Outcomes
Individual	Formal workshops, educational training, personal skills and qualified staff.	Changed awareness and perceptions, increased motivation, increased solidarity, cohesion and beliefs.
Community	Function, infrastructure and resources (human, financial and information).	Demands of material, cultural or social nature,
Organisation	Mission and strategy, function, competencies, processes, structure, infrastructure and resources (human, financial and information).	Ability to collaborate, Ability to manage change, Innovation and learning.
Systems	Policies legal/regulatory framework, management and accountability, perspective and resources.	Ability to collaborate, Ability to manage change, Innovation and learning.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT METHODS AND TOOLS USED FOR STAFF INVOLVED IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND EXTENSION

Table 2. Methods and tools used for capacity development in rural extension. Adapted from Crowder (1996); Stephen et al., (2006); Phatokoun, (2006).

Methods	Tools
Mentoring/coaching	Meeting and field visits.
Training programs	On-the-job training, in-service-training, in-site-training.
Cross visits/Study tours	Local, regional, national and international, with individuals, groups, teams.
Workshops /Meetings/Conferences	Group discussion, presentation of results, sharing ideas and exchanging experiences.
Networking	E-mails, telephone and face to face.
Participatory approach	Participatory research and extension.
Partnerships	Exchanging of know-how between stakeholders, NGOs, private and government sectors.
Research	Demonstration plots, experiential learning, Village Learning Activities.
Equipment, infrastructure, connectivity, benchmarking and new technologies	Computers, using Internet, telephone/mobile phone.
Publications	Journals, newsletters, fact sheets, online publications, pamphlet/leaflets, books and manuals.
Monitoring/evaluation	Middle and the end of the project: own work and partners' activities.

CONCLUSION

Rural extension and advisory services refer to various actions and actors that provide the information, services as well capacity development (management, organizational and technical) needed by farmers with the aim to their livelihood. Human resource development is essential for the development of any economy. In Nigeria and other developing countries, unemployed youths with passion and interest in agriculture and extension advisory roles should be absorbed into the extension system and trained to develop capacity to discharge the duties of an extension worker. Youths in the extension profession will ensure sustainability in the system and reduce overall unemployment rate. Cognisance of the processes involved in capacity development, its levels as well as methods and tools needed should be taken to achieve a desirable success rate.

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