

# Identifying the Causes of Decline in Youth Participation in Agricultural Empowerment Program Of Youth Integrated Training Farm, Malete, Kwara State

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## Abstract

Federal and state governments in Nigeria have adopted capacity building on agriculture to reduce youth unemployment, restiveness and re-awake agriculture potentials. Despite all effort, there have been reports of decline in youth participation in agriculture empowerment programs. In this qualitative study, purposive sampling technique was used to identify various informants, and data was collected through interviews, focus group discussion, and documents. The findings revealed that there are inherent causes that affect youth participation in agriculture empowerment as indicated in the psychology of the youth, environment, and government induced factor, and other youth empowerment programs.

**Key words:** youth, unemployment, participation, agriculture, empowerment, capacity building

## 1. Introduction

Youth participation in agricultural empowerment can be described as a response to the high rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria which the federal government acknowledged to be at 80% and 20% underemployed (Dike 2009). Agriculture used to be the mainstay of Nigerian economy before discovery of crude oil. The country's economy rested highly on agriculture exports which represented 66% of foreign exchange and later increased to 73.4% in 1968 (Richard 1978). Agricultural potentials gradually went down and gave way to petroleum when oil was discovered in large quantity in 1958, and exploration commenced around 1980 (Babatunde 2010). Petroleum became major revenue source for Nigeria and the country rise to become the 6<sup>th</sup> largest oil exporter, and 8<sup>th</sup> largest deposit of natural gas in the world (Soludo 2006). Under this condition, petroleum business became a new bride to Nigerian populace, including the youth population either as oil firm workers or vendors as the case may be. This is because of the high profit and fast return on investment and fat salary of the sector at the detriment of agriculture, which apart from been the highest employer of labor, it is also the source of food security for the nation.

As the population increases and large population of youth have oversubscribed the employment market at the detriment of agriculture that was the mainstay, unemployment rate increased and became alarming at 67 million out of the 167 million people (NBS 2010). According to the report of United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, (UNECA), unemployment rate in Nigeria has risen from 21.1% in 2010 to 23.9% in 2012. This figure shows that, one out of every four Nigerians is unemployed. The report also claimed that, Nigeria has one of the worst youth unemployment rate in Africa sub-Sahara at 37.7%. By further analysis, it means that, among every five Nigerian youth, two are unemployed. This condition can be traced to over dependent on white collar job, oil boom, rural-urban migration, etc. while 60% to 70% farming population are left in the hands of aged subsistence farmers who are likely to fade out soon on account of age (Cook 1996). The overall effect of this situation is that, Nigerian may face more youth unrest and restiveness as well as engaged in anti-social activities and economic sabotage like armed robbery, oil bunkering, kidnapping, internet syndicate that has caused serious damage to the image of the country as well as hunger due to lack of food production via shortage of generation of commercial farmers.

### *1.1 Government strategy to promote youth participation in agriculture.*

Government has embarked on many agricultural development programs in order to refocus the nation to the potentials of farming, to boost food production and at the same time reduce unemployment rate. These programs were crippled by political instability as each government that came introduced new agriculture program. The first agricultural program was National Accelerated Food Production Program (NAFPP) in 1972 which was aimed to boost farmer's productivity, income and living standard (Obasi 2013). In 1976 Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) was established to improve the capacity of local farmers with modern agriculture equipment, increase food production and reduce importation of food (Nzechi 2006). *Go back to land* was another agricultural program introduced in 1984, but the shortest due to another change of government that swept the administration away in 1985 (Isiaka Badmus and Ogunmola 2010). These entire programs were focused on agriculture and farmers generally without specific attention to the youth among the farmers until 1989 when the federal government specifically initiated National Directorate of Employment which specifically emphasized on youth empowerment.

While NDE program created youth empowerment scheme through vocational training, *better life for rural women*, a pet project of wife of the military head of government was focused on female youth including farming youth at the rural areas (Akpan 2010). As at 2004 under a democratically elected government, more attention were drawn to the youth particularly on agriculture through National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), State Economic Empowerment Strategy (SEEDS), and Local Economy Empowerment Development Strategy (LEEDS) at the federal, state and local government level respectively. It was also at this period that more investments were committed into youth empowerment on agriculture by various states in Nigeria. In the State of Osun, the government introduced Osun State Agricultural Youth Empowerment Program to encourage youth participation in agriculture business (Ogunremi, Ogunremi and Faleyimu 2012). Also Integrated Farm Scheme was introduced in Akwa Ibom State to reduce youth unemployment and boost agriculture in the state (Akpan 2010) and Youth Integrated Training Farm Malete, Kwara state which was the pioneer youth agriculture empowerment program among others. These youth agriculture empowerment programs were targeted to empower the unemployed youth population in order to make them self-dependent, develop the skills and knowledge through capacity building that will make them take control of their lives socially, economically psychologically and by extension, politically (Zimmerman and Rappaport 1988).

However, despite all the acclaimed successes of these youth agriculture empowerment programs, there are indications of decline in youth participation on agriculture as indicated in the continuous emphasis on youth unemployment. This is why a study of this nature is necessitated to answer the questions; what are the causes of decline in youth participation in agriculture empowerment program, using Youth Integrated Training Farm Malete.

## **2. Aim of the study**

The aim of this study is to identify the causes of decline in youth participation in agriculture empowerment programs, using Youth Integrated Training Farm Malete, Kwara State as case study.

## **3. Methodology**

This study used qualitative case study to obtain direct and in-depth information regarding the experiences and views of the selected informants because the method is naturalistic in nature and practical (Wolcott 1982). In this regard and as required by the process of this type of research methodology, a list of criteria was developed to ensure that selected samples are qualified and have deep knowledge of the problem under study. In order to ensure more credible result, three categories of informants were identified. The first category is the youth participants in the Youth Integrated Training Farm, malete, and seven youth were purposively selected. One represents each batch of five batches that have been trained from inception of the program while remaining two

were those that absconded from the program during and after completion of the one year capacity building training on agriculture. The reason for involving this category was to get reliable responses from the real beneficiary and to know why those absconded did so. The second category is the implementer of the program. These are the instructors who are professionals on various field of agriculture, employed by the government to train the youth participants. Four of them were interviewed; among them were the farm manager, extension officer, and two others. This category deal directly with the youth participants both in the classroom and in the farm during practical work. So, they understand the behavior of youth in regard to their attitude to the program, this informed their inclusion in the sample. The third category was government representative from the supervising ministry of agriculture and natural resources and other political appointee that were overseers of the Youth Integrated Farm at one time or the other. As policy makers regarding the farm center, they will have information about enlistment process.

In order to improve dependability of result of this study, focus group discussions were conducted among the youth participants in the program. Two session of FGD was organized to accommodate those with higher educational qualification and for those below. This was to create confidence and peer freedom among the groups. Some documents were also obtained to make triangulation process easier by cross examining information obtained from different sources.

#### 4. Findings and discussion

The summaries of findings of the study were categorized and themed under the main headings presented in the Table 1 below.

**Table 1 causes of decline in youth participation in agriculture empowerment program.**

S/N	Themes	Sub-themes	Remarks
1.	Psychological factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of passion / interest in farming</li> <li>- Quick money syndrom;</li> <li>- Stigmatization</li> </ul>	This is as a result of disconnect with farming and preference for quick income economic activities, as well as perception of farming as aged and downtrodden's job.
2.	Government induced factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inconsistent empowerment package</li> <li>- Administrative deficiency</li> </ul>	Failiure of the government to sustain the empowerment package as done at the beginning, selective participation, dual reporting, and poor communication
3.	Environmental factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proximity</li> <li>- Duration of program</li> <li>- Infrastructure decay</li> </ul>	These are facotrs that mostly concern those youth that bare willing to participate but could not because of distance, period of program (one year), and poor or lack of infrastructures like power, internet / recreation facilities etc.
4.	Other empowerment programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- KWABES, QUICKWIN</li> <li>- Youth City Project</li> <li>- Startimes Dealership</li> <li>- Vocational Trades Training (Batik, Tye &amp; Dye, Cane Chair making, Beads, &amp; wire works)</li> </ul>	These are programs that are located in the city and attract quicker income and assumed less demanding like farming.

*Source: Author's construct.*

##### 4.1 Psychological factor:

This factor concerns those in-built belief, perception or imagination about agriculture and the circumstances surrounding the introduction of the program. Psychological state of minds of the youth is a very important factor in this sense because of the circumstances that informed the program and the long time preference for white

collar job. One of the youth participant said during the interview; 'I used to think that farming is the most degrading job one can do because of the hard labor it requires'. Some of the sub-themes under this factor are; passion / interest for farming; quick money mentality and; stigmatization.

#### 4.1.1 Passion / interest for farming

Passion and interest are two interrelated conditions of having concern, emotion and feelings for something. The minds of youth on these two are strong determinant in what they engaged in, particularly voluntarily. As expressed in the introduction, agriculture has been abandoned for petroleum for about 50 years, and this make those categorized as youth to have less or no interest or emotions for agriculture. Findings from interviews and FGD indicated that, most of the youth have no passion for farming or agriculture business or farming. One of the third category informant said; *'Interest in farming is not very high among youths, primarily because we have a lot of decadence in the society. Also people see farming as hard work (informant C4)*. Also, one of the youth participants in the agriculture training that left after the training explained during FGD that;

*Truly speaking, I left the training center when I collected the money because I never had interest in farming. But when they said they will give us money I went there for the money and I used it for another business.....i may still go back to farming later.*

#### 4.1.2 Quick money mentality

This mentality is as a result of the fast return on investment made on petroleum business and fat remunerations in oil and gas sector of the economy which inject impatient for long time investment like agriculture business. Psyche of the youth has comfort with regular income (like monthly salary), rather than to wait for about three to four months return on investment as applicable to agriculture business. This mentality is not unconnected with attitude of political leaders who have infected the mind of the youth to believe that the shortest way to success and economic empowerment is through petroleum (Chinweizu 2006). One of the participants that absconded from the farm made the statement below during the FGD;

*I have my entire life dreaming to become a big time business man but not in agriculture business. I wanted a business that will yield constant profit like oil or buying and selling of goods. My going to malete, farm is not my real dream. I can't do such business as to wait for six months before counting the profit. That is why I resulted back to the depot.*

#### 4.1.3 Stigmatization

Findings under psychological factor also revealed that, farming or agriculture activities were perceived as a job for the low class, illiterates, aged, rural people and therefore belittling. Therefore, despite some incentives attached to the empowerment program to attract youth, a number of them still belief that, participation in such program is belittling and not appropriate for an enlightened youth thereby affecting the rate of participation in agriculture empowerment and at the same way cause withdrawal among those earlier enrolled for the program. One of the former coordinator of the program said on the cause of decline on participation that;

*Yes what the government did was that, you should know farming generally, unfortunately it is been seen as the profession of the aged and the illiterates. Government now has to make it attractive for them to be there (informant C1)*

This perception may not be unconnected with the over dependent on white collar job and failure of the leaders to make farming attractive over a long period of time before those within youthful age now were born. The present youth grew to know and see mostly aged people as farmers.

#### 4.2 Government induced factors

The second factor that cause decline in youth participation was found to be some actions and inactions of the government which came to the notice of the public and resulted to lack of trust in the program. the lack of trust resulted to withdrawal from the program by some youth that have already enlisted and refusal to join the program by those expected to benefit through participation. These induced factors are sub-themed into; inconsistent empowerment package and administrative deficiency.

#### *4.2.1 Inconsistent empowerment package*

These are package designed by the government to assist all youth that complete the agriculture capacity building program for one year to enable such youth to be self-dependent and sufficient in farming activities. The findings indicate that there was no uniform package in the program since the inception of the program in 2006. The first batch of ninety three (93) youth had the best package of 5 hectares of land each, about ₦850, 000 in cash, farm inputs and to purchase motor bike to ease transportation to the farm sites. Although, some youth absconded after taking all these packages as a result of factors mentioned earlier (lack of passion or interest, and stigma) in one hand and poor management of the facilities in other hand. The second and third batches (2009 & 2010) that were made of 64 and 74 youth respectively got only ₦300, 000 loans which was also poorly managed and resulted to indebtedness by some of the youth. While some youth could not cope and withdraw, few others continued with alternative personal means. The fourth and fifth batches (90 and 97 youth) that completed the capacity building training in 2012 and 2013 were yet to be given empowerment package as at the time of this study. This inconsistency in government disbursement of empowerment package as done to the first set became known to the public and the youth feel uncomfortable with the program and this result to decline in participation.

Under this sub-theme also is mismanagement of loan facilities by those responsible for the disbursement of fund to the youth. The findings revealed that the money was managed on behalf of the youth by the facilitating banks through representative of the government. All farm inputs and monthly stipends given to the youth during the one year capacity building were deducted from the sum for the first batch. Along the line, the youth were informed that the money is exhausted without prior notice or warning. One of the first batch participant in the program lamented as below when he was asked about success of his batch considering the huge package that the government gave them;

*To be sincere, that year we were not successful because the money is managed by the government and we used to have problem with government work. We plant about 400 hectares of soya beans and about 100 hectares of cassava that year. I know that we sell cassava but we don't even know how much amount we are selling but those people that sell cassava just paid direct into the bank account. I can say that that first loan, we were not successful (Informant A3).*

Similar circumstance happened for the second and third who were to benefit from an intervention loan from the federal government tagged; 'FGN/CBN Commercial Agricultural and Credit Scheme, (CACs) loan'. According to findings, the loan was originally designed for seven years repayment at 7% interest. It was revealed that the loan was rescheduled by the state official responsible for disbursement for monthly repayment and payable in two years only, which is not a farmer friendly structure. Further revelations also indicated that 70% of beneficiaries were not farmers but political associates. These sharp practices were exposed to the public and were identified as one of the causes of decline in participation in youth agriculture empowerment program.

#### *4.2.2 Administrative deficiency*

This sub-theme under government induced factor was used to encompass all administrative related issues that directly and indirectly impact the range of participation in the agricultural capacity building for the youth in youth integrated farm malete. The findings informed that, all administrative work at the training farm is concentrated in the hands of farm manager who is a contract staff while other instructor, who are the implementer were seconded from other ministries and local government. While each instructor earns salary based on his mother ministry, the farm manager earns consolidated salary. Apart from this, it was also found out

that, there is dual reporting on the activities of the farm. The farm manager report to the commissioner of agriculture as the mother ministry of the youth training farm center in one hand, he also reports to the Senior Special Assistant (SSA) to the Governor on agriculture who is the coordinator of the farm and report directly to the governor just like the commissioner too. As a result of this faulty structural system, the administrative activities becomes haphazard both in the recruitment of Instructor and enlistment of participating youth via selective participation of youth base on political patronage, poor communication and information management, conflicting directive etc. All these affect and discourage willing youth, as they feel it is only politically connected youth that can be favored in the agricultural youth empowerment program.

#### *4.3 Environmental factor*

Environmental factor as one of the causes of decline in youth participation in Youth Integrated Training Farm Malete was found to be issues surrounding the localization of the program. According to findings, environmental factor affect those youth who are unable to participate because of the proximity of the training farm to the city as they could not afford to stay permanently at the farm as required by the program design. These categories of youth include married ones and nursing mothers. The duration of one year as capacity building period is too much for another group of youth as observed by many of the informants, particularly those that were willing to combine their income earning work with the program. The third issue is the infrastructural decay at the malete farm center. As at the period of the study, there was no frère access to the internet, serious epileptic power supply, and poor recreation facilities. It was however, mentioned by the early youth participants (batches 1 and 2) that those facilities were there and functional and made most of them stay behind even during holidays.

#### *4.4 other empowerment programs*

According to findings, the state government has many other youth empowerment programs that are located in the state capital, with low duration of capacity building schedule and with financial motivation in terms of stipend as applicable to malete youth farm. Other youth empowerment programs include 'QUICK WIN', 'KWABES', which attract almost immediate financial reward and subsequent employment in the government service. Also there are other federal government empowerment program that are seen to be more 'juicy' and 'prestigious' than farming which are facilitated by the state government. These are other empowerment program that attract youth as preference against one year integrated agricultural training at malete farm.

### **5. Discussion**

Base on the findings above, it can be asserted that, there are more inherent factors in the design, structure, operations and management of youth empowerment on agriculture program, which include; psychological, administrative, structural, financial, environmental and general planning as causes of decline in youth participation in Youth Integrated Farm Malete, than the surface problems like lack of agriculture loan facilities, family influence, agriculture insurance, etc.as found in similar studies (Adekunle et al. 2009; Akpan 2010; Echebiri 2005; Olayiwola 2005). These findings expose the degree of effectiveness and efficiency of the existing operational instrument and facilities of youth agriculture empowerment program base on the real life situation and experiences of the stakeholders as factors responsible for decline in participation rather than outside the boundaries factors.

It is important to mention that, political influence has more effects on the program as it reflects in the findings on administrative issues and inconsistent financial package. This can be related to the attitude in government initiated development programs where emphasis will be more on the number of output rather than outcome. In a similar view, the program does not have a legal support for its establishment. This created room for inconsistent implementation of the benefit to the youth and also resulted to loss of trust and confidence in the ability of the government to fulfil its promises of empowerment package and differences in the packages for different batches. Above all, corruption and lack of transparency appears to bedrock of the government induced factors. The



supposed stakeholder on the financial issue seems to be interested only in the interest and recovery of its commitment of the program. The study revealed that, some of the beneficiaries of the financial supports were not the youth participants but the cronies of the government who are independent private farmers. These poses more threat to the sustainability of the program and discourage participation from the majority of the youth.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that the causes of the decline in youth participation in agricultural empowerment program are inherent in the ineffective motivational strategies that will attract the youth to agriculture business. The inconsistent empowerment packages since inception of the program create doubts in the minds of the youth over commitment of the government to facilitate start-up capital after the training. Finally, other youth empowerment program that that seems to be more attractive as a result immediate financial benefits and don't require residency for one year contributed to the decline.

## 7. Recommendation

It hereby recommended that the empowerment program be institutionalized by an act so that necessary structures will be put in place and sustainability guaranteed. Community development experts should be involved so that some technical and structural challenges will be handled professionally and relevant stakeholders attracted. Transparency and accountability should also be encouraged through adequate supervision and monitoring.

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