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**Role of Public Libraries in Promoting Youth Participation in Agriculture in
Nigeria: Information as a Key Driver**

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Abstract

The paper reviewed the integral role of public libraries in promoting youth participation in agriculture, information serving as a key driver. The population of youths in Nigeria estimated to be about 70 million establishes the need for this study, noting their relevance to economic growth and development of the agricultural sector. The major objectives of the study were to examine the perception of youths and their level of participation in agriculture in Nigeria; discuss factors limiting their participation; consider the implication of their participation; and the role of the public library in driving their productive involvement in agriculture. An appraisal of information as a key driver for motivating youths to participate in agricultural practice was done with emphasis on compilation of list of possible markets for agricultural products; engagement of ICT as sources of agricultural information; maintaining databases of organizations that support farmers; creating awareness about value chain in agriculture; creating awareness on various aspects of agricultural practice. The study relied majorly on secondary data, reviewing existing relevant literature as a basis for the discussion of the subject matter. The paper concluded by recommending that professionals in public libraries should collaborate with government at all levels, extension agents, information practitioners as well as other stakeholders to embark on massive and comprehensive education of youths on the importance and the derivable benefits of engaging in agriculture.

Keywords: Youths; Agriculture; Participation; Information; Public Libraries

Introduction

The relevance of youths to the development and advancement of any given society cannot be overemphasized. Their inherent agility, soundness of mind and mobility, if properly guided and utilized could result in high productivity for any given economy. If properly educated and exposed to relevant information as at when due, they could be the most needed human resources to boost the agricultural sector of Nigeria. The youth population in Nigeria, according to National Bureau of Statistics (2012) is estimated at 70 million which suggests that their importance in any sector where they are found cannot be overemphasized.

The pre-independence era in Nigeria witnessed dominance of the agricultural sector, as its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was above all other sectors of the economy. This was still sustained to a level after independence in 1960. Agriculture specifically contributed 55% of GDP and provided employment for 70% of the adult workforce between 1964 and 1965 (Malton, 1981). As reported by Ekundare (1973), exportation thrived in Nigeria, noting that crops like cocoa, groundnut, cotton, rubber, palm oil, palm kernel and many other cash crops contributed an average of between 65-75% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings in 1970.

As stated by several authors, the mainstay of Nigeria's economy was agriculture until the era of oil boom between 1973 and 1988 when over dependence on proceeds coming from the downstream led to the total neglect of other potential and promising avenues for generating income to sustain the economy (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2014; Chukwuemeka & Nzewi, 2011; Izuchukwu, 2011; and Sekumade, 2009). Agriculture is fast becoming the panacea for the myriad of challenges associated with the current oil doom Nigeria is beginning to experience. This is a

sector that cannot be neglected in any economy that is desirous of development and improving the standard of living of its populace (Muhammad-Lawal, Omotesho & Falola, 2009).

Agriculture in Nigeria has been found to thrive at subsistence level among old people and a few middle-aged persons who have no choice but to practice agriculture due to low educational level and lack of jobs (Akpan, 2010). Involvement of youths in the Agricultural sector of Nigeria's economy is very poor. This is attributed to the notion that white-collar jobs depict affluence and sophistication. This notion by Nigerian youths portends a bleak future for agriculture in Nigeria as the practice of agriculture keeps diminishing at an alarming rate (Muhammad-Lawal et al., 2009). Universities that run agriculture-based programmes across the country have continued to suffer low students' subscription both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as youths' interest in agriculture continues to experience a decline (Garwe, 2015). This according to Ayanwale and Laagye (2007) is due to the perception of students that agriculture is not a prestigious profession.

Public libraries are established to serve the information needs of the masses, irrespective of their social, educational, religious and occupational backgrounds. These libraries can be used as avenues to encourage youths in the society to participate in agriculture. One of the major ways this can be achieved is through information dissemination. Information represents a vital force in shaping and reshaping perspectives on various subject matters (Yusuf, 2010). Dissemination of information with respect to gains associated with engaging in agriculture by public libraries may be able to influence youths positively and change their perspective about agriculture. This paper will x-ray the role of public libraries in improving youth participation in agriculture in Nigeria using information as a key driver.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of the paper is to consider the role of information in enhancing youth participation in agriculture. Specifically, the study aims to achieve the following:

1. Examine the perception and level of participation of youths in agriculture in Nigeria;
2. Discuss factors militating against youth participation in agriculture in Nigeria;
3. Consider the implication of low level of participation of youths in agriculture;
4. Identify the role of public libraries in driving youth participation in agriculture in Nigeria through information dissemination; and
5. Recommend ways to improve youth participation in agriculture.

Methodology

Documentary evidences were used as methodology. The paper relied majorly on secondary data as a number of existing literature relevant to the study were reviewed and used as a basis for the discussion of the subject matter.

Perception and Level of participation of Youths in Agriculture in Nigeria

Youths have stereotyped perception of agriculture. Lucky (2013) citing Blackburn (1999) and Holz-Clause & Jost (1995) observed that youths have a very narrow perspective of agriculture to include a farmer, a cow and or a tractor and a farmer seen as an old man that wears bib overalls and chews on straw. This perception represents a far cry to what agriculture means and who a farmer truly is. The wrong perception has affected youth participation across the globe and especially in Nigeria. Majority of youths in Nigeria, especially those that live in urban areas

perceive agriculture as a career for citizens at the lowest rung of the economic ladder. They do not have adequate information on value chain distribution in agriculture. It is generally believed that farmers are the downtrodden of the society. Even though it is becoming increasingly obvious that agriculture has employment opportunities for youths, their perception of and disposition towards agriculture seems negative (Jeffrey *et al.*, 2012 cited by Abdullah, 2012).

This trend if not addressed, will constitute a threat to the existence of the agricultural sector in the near future. Muhammad-Lawal *et al.* (2009) expressed their concern in this regard when they averred that with fewer youths involved in agriculture, the long-term future of the agricultural sector is in question noting that the development of the Nigerian economy depends on the young people more especially the rural youths.

Similarly, Manga (2010) cited in Naamwintome and Bagson (2013) also decried the insufficient participation of youths in the agricultural sector. Youths are characterized by high level of enthusiasm and energy which make them to be critical to agricultural prosperity, but their low participation in agriculture portends a bleak future for agricultural business in Nigeria. Aphunu and Atoma (2010) also established that they are perceived to be the most active segment of the population capable of producing at optimum level.

Factors militating against Youth Participation in Agriculture in Nigeria

Several factors have been found in literature to militate against youth participation in agriculture in Nigeria. In order to secure the interest of youths in agriculture and to engender their participation, these factors have to be addressed so as to preserve the future of agriculture in Nigeria. Some of the factors affecting youth participation in agriculture in Abia state, as enumerated by Nwankwo (2014) include non-availability of capital, land tenure system, poor

storage facilities, lack of social amenities, non-functional extension services to discharge the improved seeds and seedlings to youths and drudgery in farming which is as a result of outdated implements. Similarly, in Kwara State, Adekunle, Adefalu, Oladipo, Adisa and Fatoye (2009) reported inadequate credit facility, lack of agricultural insurance, poor returns to agricultural investment, lack of farming knowledge, lack of access to tractors and other farming inputs as major bane to maximum participation of youths in agriculture.

Muthee (2010) cited in Kising'u (2016), pointed out that youths are not excited to take agriculture as a career of their choice due to the misconceptions they have about the profession, resulting from lack of proper information and awareness. Students do not have proper career guidance and they are not well intimated about the enormous benefits embedded in agriculture. Much more, due to primitive approach adopted in the practice, most professionals in agriculture are not well remunerated despite their physical exertion on the farm. These could be the basis for agitation found to be expressed by youths on their career prospects after graduation from school (Dube, 2013).

The issues raised by these authors are fundamental which government as well as other stakeholders are expected to take on board with all the urgency they deserve, if our desire as a nation is to become self-sustaining, less dependent on imported food items and ensure food security.

Youth Participation in Agriculture: Implications for the Nigerian Economy

Low level of participation of youths in agriculture holds great implications for the Nigerian economy. Underscoring the important role of youths in agriculture, Kising'u (2016) noted that food production and food security at domestic, regional and global levels is solely dependent on the youth production force. Following this assertion by Kising'u, youth participation in

agriculture is the major driver of sustainable food production in Nigeria and food security is largely dependent on this. It is however scaring to observe that participation of youths in agriculture has continued to suffer a decline as most of them see agriculture merely as a venture to embark upon on a part-time basis (Garwe, 2015; Naamwintome & Bagson, 2013; Muhammad-Lawal et al., 2009; Akwiwu & Nnadi, 2005). Agriculture has been left in the hands of peasant farmers who employ traditional implements for most of their farm operations. People tend to ascribe poverty, drudgery and so on to farming and prefer other white collar jobs that will provide steady flow of income. This perception often turns-off men and women away from this noble profession, and especially youths. Yet youths are the most economically productive group that should supply continuous flow of labour and add sustainable value to food production chain that can ensure food security. This trend, if not quickly checked and addressed, holds serious implication for the Nigerian Economy.

Nigeria has been known to be a country over dependent on oil as a major source of foreign exchange, however, considering the fluctuations in the price of crude oil in the international market, the need to diversify the economy in order to ensure sustainability becomes vital. Agriculture is one the sectors that can be revamped in order to sustain the current major source of foreign exchange. However, the prevalence of middle aged and old people in agriculture in Nigeria portends a great danger for the Nigerian economy, thus the need to get more youths involved in agriculture.

Low participation of youths in agriculture also undermines government's efforts towards driving economic growth through agriculture. The rate of unemployment will continue to soar higher as long as youths refuse to engage in agricultural endeavors, and this portends a threat to the economy noting that unemployment constitutes a social menace to any given country as it breeds

several vices and delinquencies especially among youths. This has implication for national security and peace, which if not well managed, has the tendency to discourage prospective industrialists and investors from coming to Nigeria.

Role of Public Libraries in driving Youth Participation in Agriculture using Information Dissemination

Information plays a major role in mobilization, change communication and establishment of a new order. As observed by Nwalo (2012), information is an indispensable instrument of planning, decision-making and control in all spheres of life. Information made available to youths, acts as a great determinant of their perception, reaction and decision on agriculture as a career to embark upon. As asserted by Aiyepoku (1992) information is a phenomenon that reduces uncertainty in decision making. If reliable, complete and timely information on agriculture as a viable investment are made available and accessible to Nigerian youths by public libraries, there is the probability that greater percentage of them may consider building a career in agriculture.

It has however been observed that majority of rural dwellers in Nigeria do not have access to relevant information (Nwalo, 2012). If constant information is made available to youths on agricultural developments and innovations by public libraries, majority of them may be mobilized to participate more in agriculture and build a career in same. The following are some specific ways public libraries can use information to encourage greater youth participation in agriculture:

Compilation of List of Possible Markets for Agricultural Products

It has been observed that most youths who engage in agriculture hit a brick wall when it comes to the distribution and sales of their agricultural products. Librarians in public libraries can engage their professional expertise in sourcing and compiling list of possible markets for various agricultural products. This can be packaged as a directory and updated on a regular basis. Repackaging of such documents into various local dialects in Nigeria, especially for youths in the rural areas will also serve as a booster to participation. When youths are sure of where to dispose their products to recover any investment they may have made into such ventures, their participation will most likely be enhanced.

Engagement of ICT as Sources of Agricultural Information

Youths, whether in the rural or urban areas, have been observed to have likeness for information and communication technology gadgets. This attraction may be due to the interactive nature of these gadgets. These gadgets appear in several forms and types covering the well-known media such as radio, television, video, tape recorder to new media like the Facebook, Linked-In, WhatsApp, Wikipedia, Twitter, computers, smart phones, e-mails, World Wide Web (www), interactive multimedia system and digital telecommunications. These technologies can be engaged by public libraries to convey information on the various aspects of agriculture, analyze gains associated with investing in agriculture as well as expose them to modern techniques in driving agriculture.

Also, through the deployment of ICT, youths can be engaged in sale and distribution of agricultural produce by creating an Online Agri-Mall, where orders for agric products can be placed online and delivered to the doorsteps of customers.

Maintaining Databases of Organizations that provide Support to Farmers

From observation, youth participation in agriculture in Nigeria has been hampered by lack of capital and where to get high yielding seedlings among others. Public libraries can create a database of organizations that support agriculture and farmers with soft loans making such information available and accessible to youths both in the rural and urban areas. Librarians and extension workers may collaborate to provide Mobile library services to the rural areas. These organizations may assist youth farmers to go into agriculture on a large scale, and also enable them to be able to take-on all the processes involved from the first to the last stage of production.

Creating Awareness about Value Chain in Agriculture

Considering the quest to have reliable and constant sources of income by majority of Nigerians, if youths in urban areas, irrespective of their social status have good knowledge about the value chain in agriculture, they are most likely going to participate in agriculture. Those who do not directly farm may be involved in processing and packaging of agricultural produce. Public libraries can make information about the value chain in agriculture readily available to youths both in the urban and rural areas through provision of relevant information resources. Public libraries could engage the use of multimedia projectors to show processes involved in agricultural value chain to youths, thereby showing them areas they could contribute to agriculture apart from planting and harvesting. Public lectures could be delivered at the public libraries to encourage youths in engaging in some aspects of the value chain. According to Knudson and Peterson (2012), value chain as explored in Michigan, made food and agriculture system to emerge as the predominant sector for job creation and high income earning in the state. As reported, food and agriculture system accounts for approximately \$91.4 billion in direct,

indirect and induced economic activity. This sector also accounts for an excess of 923,000 jobs both directly, indirectly and through induced activity.

The onus therefore lies on information professionals especially those in public libraries, corporate organizations, government and eminent Nigerians to change the perspective of Nigerian youths on agriculture by making relevant information available and accessible to them.

Creating Awareness on Various Aspects of Agricultural Practice

Once agriculture is mentioned, what readily comes to mind is a picture of a farmer carrying a hoe and painstakingly tilling the ground. However, there are other very lucrative aspects of agriculture youths can venture into, such as animal production, processing, packaging etc. Youths can be availed this information in order to change their stereotyped perception of agriculture, thereby enhancing their participation. It should be noted that agriculture has evolved over the years to and many developed countries have focused on it as a major economic pivot for sustainability of their citizenry. Nigerian youths need to be aware of various aspects of agriculture in order to appreciate it. If properly informed, youths will soon realize that agriculture is an accommodating profession that can effectively and efficiently engage all disciplines ranging from medicine to law, economics, mathematics and others. For instance, biofuel is currently being campaigned for green environments, chemical engineers and petroleum engineers can collaborate with farmers and other scientists to ensure its realization.

Compilation of Indigenous Methods of Preservation

There are several indigenous methods used to preserve farm products from decay. These methods may not be properly documented or readily available to young farmers. Such indigenous methods can be produced in a book format to highlight the step-by-step procedures for preserving all farm produce. Having a full knowledge of the fact that left-over produce from

the farm can be preserved in order to forestall waste, as well as increase the chances of making profits have the tendency to encourage youths to participate more in agriculture.

Re-orientation

For youths to embrace agriculture as a lifetime career, it is pertinent to change the perception held by them that persons in the oil and gas, banking industries and other non-agricultural commercial sectors have higher tendencies to succeed better than their counterparts in agricultural sector. Public libraries can partner with governments at all levels in projecting agricultural breakthroughs through the media by government agencies, commercial agricultural practitioners and academics; this will go a long way to give youths a better orientation on the importance of agriculture. Government participation in large scale farming which will ensure employment and better remuneration for agricultural professionals is another way of changing the orientation of youths. When youths see farmers with economic capability like their counterparts in other sectors, it is easy for them to embrace agriculture. Easily accessible loan facilities for youths willing to participate in agriculture could be a major boost in reorientation of youths about farming.

Conclusion/Recommendation

The importance of sustaining youth participation in agriculture in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. More than ever before, agriculture is needed considering the population of Nigeria, dwindling proceeds from oil and high rate of unemployment. The earlier the majority of Nigerian youths are informed, conscripted and empowered to engage in the practice of agriculture, the better for the economy of the country. Making available and accessible, relevant information capable of attracting the attention of youths to agriculture by public libraries therefore becomes germane. A deliberate effort by public library information professionals to

work in collaboration with government at all levels, extension agents, information practitioners as well as other stakeholders, to embark on massive and comprehensive education of youths on the importance and derivable benefits of engaging in agriculture may serve to change the mindset of youths about agriculture and engender greater participation.

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