

## MOBILIZATION OF YOUTH IN EBONYI STATE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME: IMPLICATIONS FOR PARTICIPATORY AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Youth possess regenerative energies, intelligence and capabilities for sustainable development. Despite the huge resources expended on youth-directed programmes under the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) by successive government administrations towards realizing the foregoing potentials in Nigeria, youth participation in Ebonyi State ADP is minimal. The youth do not seem to be effectively mobilized in such a way that could motivate them to actively participate in agricultural production and rural development process being implemented by the ADP. In this regard, this study investigated mobilization of youth under the ADP in Ebonyi State and highlighted implications for participatory agricultural transformation and rural development process in Nigeria. Two hundred and forty youths were randomly selected constituted the sample size for the study. Structured interview schedule was employed in data collection; frequency counts, percentages, mean scores and factor analysis techniques were adopted for data analysis. The findings show that majority (61.25%) of the youth were males, while 75.0 percent were within the ages of 16 and 25 years. Furthermore, some significant mobilization strategies of the ADPs include, organizing competition between youth organizations ( $x = 4.5$ ) and excursion for the youth ( $x = 4.3$ ). Specific mobilization constraints include, lack of basic infrastructure, poor socio-economic conditions and inadequate leadership. The study highlighted implications on improved extension services, improved youth group efforts and improved budgetary allocation. In conclusion, mobilization of youth under the Ebonyi State ADP for participatory agricultural transformation and rural development in Nigeria depends on the extent issues raised as constraints and implications thereof highlighted can be addressed.*

**Keywords: Youth mobilization, participatory agricultural transformation, rural Development.**

### INTRODUCTION

Youth possess regenerative energies, intelligence and capabilities for sustainable development. Previous studies by Ajayi (1998), Onuekwusi (2005) and Onuekwusi and Nwachukwu (2006), have described the youth as group of people that are of human life between childhood and adulthood within the ages ranging from 12 to 30 years. According to Eremie (2002), the desirable potential energies, knowledge and intelligence of youth constitute inherent characteristics which endear them towards

sustainable development programmes worldwide. The need for youth involvement in development programmes has been greatly realized under various development initiatives in Nigeria. Specific among successive government administration development initiatives with provisions for youth participation include, the Farm Settlement Scheme (1960), School-to-Land Programme (1985), Young Farmers Club, YFC (1973) and Agricultural Development Programme, ADP (1972-1980s). Others include, National Youth Service Corps,

NYSC (1973), and National Directorate of Employment, NDE (1986). The question is, to what extent have these Government supported youth programmes yielded the desired result in terms of stimulating youth for active participation in agricultural production and rural development process in Nigeria?

According to Adedoyin (1996), despite the huge financial, human and material resources investment on youth programmes, the programmes have not achieved the desired objectives in terms of meaningful participation among the youth in agricultural transformation and rural development process in Nigeria. This failure of government supported youth schemes in Nigeria is attributable to inadequate planning, inconsistency in policy implementation, inadequate funding, and attitudinal deficiencies in terms of corruption among government officials (Nwachukwu, 2008). To address this situation requires that the youth be encouraged to participate in infrastructural development and agricultural transformation process. Anyanwu (1992) recommended youth participation in development initiatives to make up for governments inadequacies in such respects. Thus without engaging the activities of youth in agriculture and rural development process there would be probably little success in the programmes since they are action points of any development programmes in rural areas.

In Ebonyi State, the responsibility of encouraging youth participation in agriculture and rural development is that which the Ebonyi State Agricultural Development Programmes (EBADEP) implement. According to Laogun (2001), youth involvement in ADP activities will serve as both sustainability measures to the longevity of ADP and rekindle youth interest in agriculture. The World Bank (2001) reported on the global awareness among donor agencies and civil society organizations of the potential roles of youth in rural and agricultural development. Ajayi (1998), has noted the need to involve youths in ADP activities to avert imminent conditions of hunger basically because of

abandonment of food production process in the hands of aged farmers in Nigeria.

Youth participation under the ADP activities involve basic issues namely, sensitization, encouragement, training, motivation and sustained mobilization. The desirable mobilization of youth will serve as a policy measure to provide a balance between self fulfillment and service and it consists of a range of interactions between adult and youth (Onuekwusi, 2005). Youth mobilization will stimulate participatory agricultural transformation and rural development process necessary in achieving viability in development initiatives in an agricultural based economy such as Nigeria (Akinbile, Ashimolowo and Oladoja, 2006).

Generally, the situation on ground in terms of youth participation in ADP Agricultural production and rural development activities in Ebonyi State is that mobilization in this respect is very minimal. The youth do not seem to be effectively mobilized in such a way that could motivate them to actively participate in agricultural production and rural development process being implemented by the ADP. Desirable mobilization of rural youth implicates roles of ADP's extension to encourage and train the youth to be amenable in terms of their personal characteristics and involves measures as strategies to achieve the commitment among the youth. What are the personal characteristics of rural youth in Ebonyi State Agricultural Development Programme? What strategies are employed by the ADP in mobilizing youth to participate in farm activities and rural development process? What factors constitute constraints to the ADP in mobilizing the youth for agricultural production and rural development in Ebonyi State? What specific lessons can be learned from mobilization of youth under the ADPs that will serve as implications for participatory agricultural transformation and rural development process in Nigeria?

This study therefore, addressed the foregoing investigation into the mobilization of youths under the ADP in Ebonyi State and highlighted implications

for participatory agricultural transformation and rural development process in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to describe the personal characteristics of rural youth in Ebonyi State Agricultural Development Programme, ascertain youth mobilization strategies employed by the ADPs in agricultural production and rural development, identify factors which serve as constraints to the ADP in mobilizing the youth in Ebonyi State, and to highlight implications for participatory agricultural transformation and rural development process in Nigeria.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted in Ebonyi State, Nigeria made up of thirteen Local Government Areas namely, Abakaliki, Afikpo north, Afikpo south, Ebonyi, Ezza north, Ezza south, Ikwo, Ishielu, Ivo, Izzi, Ohoazara, Ohaukwu and Onicha. Over 95 percent of the LGAs in the state have rural farm background, while over 70 percent of the households are engaged in agricultural production and various self-help community development activities. However, fewer members of households including the youth headed households were engaged in trading and civil service, while most of the youth engage in either farming, schooling or other careers. The population for the study was made up of all youth who are within the described periods of childhood and adulthood within the ages of 12 and 30 years. Thus both youth who were engaged in farming and other careers constituted the population for the study. Purposive, multistage and random sampling techniques were employed in data collection. In the first stage, the central agricultural zone made up of four local government areas namely: Ezza north, Ezza South, Ikwo and Ishielu was selected. In the second stage, two LGAs from the zone involved namely, Ezza South and Ikwo were purposively selected basically because of proximity to each other and intensity of agricultural production and rural development process in the LGAs. In the third stage, 4 communities from each of the LGAs were randomly selected. In the fourth stage, 4 villages were randomly

selected from each of the communities involved and 15 youth were randomly selected from each of the villages involved. A total of two hundred and forty (240) selected youths constituted the sample size for the study.

A structured interview schedule for the youth was developed, validated and employed for data collection. The interview schedule reflected issues on personal characteristics of youth, mobilization strategies employed by the ADPs and constraints on mobilization under the ADPs. Analytical tools such as frequency counts, percentages, mean scores and factor analysis techniques were adopted. The exploratory factor analysis techniques using the principal factor model with interactions and varimax rotation was adopted. The factor loading under each constraint (beta weight) represents a correlation of the variables (constraint areas) to the identified constraint factors and has the same interpretation as any correlation coefficient. Kaiser's criterion using factor loading of 0.30 and above in naming and interpreting the factors and constraint variable was adopted (Child, 1978; Ogunfeditimi, 1979).

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Personal characteristics of the respondents**

Data in Table 1 show that majority (61.25%) of the youth were males, while 75.0 percent of them were within the ages of 16 and 25 years and majority (82.08%) were single. This study therefore agrees with Onuekwusi and Nwachukwu (2006) who reported that the number of male youth who avail themselves of youth programmes in a typical rural community in Nigeria outnumber their female counterparts. Majority (77.92%) of the rural youth in the study area were schooling, while 75.83 percent of them were either in boys scout or girls guide clubs and about 59.0 percent had 6 to 10 years of farming experience. The study indicates that rural youth had sufficient farming experience for meaningful participation in agricultural transformation and rural development activities of the ADPs in Ebonyi State.

Table I also shows that majority (60.42%) of the youth preferred food crop production, while only 13.75 percent of married youth have family size of 5 to 10 members. The study suggests inadequate family labour among the few married youth against the backdrop of enormous labour demands for food crop production. This study therefore, agrees with Alimi (1991) who recommended use of agro-chemicals, relevant machines and hired labour to complement family labour in order to meet the demands of meaningful food production and food security in Nigeria. Furthermore, majority (61.67%) of the youth had at least S S C E / W A E C / G C E O / L qualifications, while 58.34 percent of them reported estimated annual income of N 101,000.00 to N 140,000.00. Estimated annual income of a farmer indicates income earned from his farm which is the excess revenue and value of household consumption output over cost (Alimi, 1991). Examined against the backdrop of this study, the youth in the study area seem to have basic educational attainment for progressive mobilization under the ADP. However, the youth had low reliance on personal savings and associated investment needed for their meaningful participatory agricultural transformation and rural development

process in Nigeria. The study therefore agrees with Jibowo and Sotomi (1991) who noted that the youth knowledge acquisition propensity for participation in rural development increases with their educational attainment.

### **Perception of youth of ADP's mobilization strategies in Ebonyi State.**

Data in Table 2 show that the ADP employed useful strategies in mobilizing the youth for desirable participatory agricultural transformation and rural development process in the study area. A strategy indicates a process of skillful planning and involvement of measures for sustainable development. Some specific mobilization strategies perceived as relevant among the rural youth include organizing competition between youth organizations ( $x = 4.5$ ), excursion of youth to Research Institutes and large farm enterprises ( $x = 4.3$ ) and provision of incentives to youth programmes ( $x = 4.2$ ). Equally perceived by the youth as relevant ADP mobilization strategies include, provision of supports on the part of parents ( $x = 4.1$ ), organizing youth clubs ( $x = 3.8$ ), periodic training of youth ( $x = 3.7$ ), involving youth in groups ( $x = 3.3$ ) and support to intergender activities ( $x = 3.1$ ).

**Table 1 Distribution of the youth by their personal characteristics**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency (N = 240)</b>	<b>Percentages (%)</b>
<b>Gender:</b> Males	147	61.25
Female	93	38.75
<b>Age (years):</b> ≤ 15	20	8.33
16 - 20	95	39.58
21 - 25	85	35.42
26 - 30	38	15.83
<b>Marital Status:</b> Single	197	82.08
Married	43	17.92
<b>Career Status:</b> Farmer	10	4.2
Trading	36	15.0
Schooling	187	77.92
<b>Membership of youth Organisations</b>		
Poultry Club	20	8.33
Livestock Club	24	10.0
Girls Guide	60	25.0
Red Cross	14	5.83
Boys Scout	122	50.83
<b>Farming experience (years):</b> ≤ 5	29	12.08
6 - 10	120	50.0
11 - 15	91	37.92
<b>Type of farming preferred</b>		
Food crop production	145	60.42
Livestock farming	25	10.42
Food crop and livestock production	70	29.17
<b>Household size</b> ≤ 5	33	13.75
6 - 10	10	4.17
<b>Level of formal education</b>		
No formal education	33	13.75
FSLC	28	11.67
SSCE/WASCE/GCE O/L	148	61.67
OND/NCE	13	5.42
HND/BSC/BA/BED	18	7.5
<b>Estimated Annual income</b>		
≤ N100,000.00		
N101,000.00 - N120,000.00	50	20.83
N121,000.00 - N140,000.00	85	35.42
N141,000.00 - N160,000.00	40	16.67
N161,000.00 and above	10	4.17

**Source:** Field survey, 2009

Data in Table 2 also indicate that the ADP was limited in the employment of some mobilization strategies namely, mass media campaign for youth programme ( $\bar{x} = 2.7$ ) and provision of basic rural infrastructure ( $x = 2.6$ ). This study shows limited use of mass

media to sensitize the youth and promote youth programmes. The Study therefore, indicates a major weakness on the part of government to provide the ADP with necessary mass media facilities for mobilization of youth.

**Table 2: Distribution of Youth Perception of ADP Mobilization Strategies by mean.**

<b>Mobilization Strategies</b>	<b>Mean (max =5)</b>
Organizing youth clubs	3.8
Provision of incentives to youth programmes	4.2
Encouragement /support to inter-gender activities	3.1
Organizing Competition among youth organizations	4.5
Periodic training of youth on agric and rural development Projects	3.7
Mass media campaign for youth programmes	2.7
Excursion of youth to research institutes and large farms	4.3
Provision of support on the part of parents	4.1
Involving youth groups in agriculture and rural development	3.3
Provision of basic rural infrastructure	2.6
Involvement of schools in youth oriented programmes on the part of ADP	3.4

Source: Field survey, 2009.

**Constraints of youth mobilization under the ADP in Ebonyi State.**

Data in Table 3 show the varimax rotated factors perceived by the youth as constraints of mobilization under the ADP in the study area. Based on specific issues and items loading three major factors were extracted namely; factor 1, (lack of basic infrastructure); factor 2, (poor socio-economic conditions); and factor 3,( inadequate leadership). Specific issues which loaded high under lack of basic infrastructure include inadequate markets and transport facilities (0.37), inaccessibility of credit to youth associations (0.49) and irregular visits of extension agents (0.35).Others include, difficulty in understanding extension techniques (0.52), poor network of roads (0.55) and rural-urban migration (0.33). Inadequate markets and lack of transport facilities are related infrastructural problems which are blamable on government inefficiencies to provide good network of roads. Moreover, the absence of good roads coupled with the poor state of market and transport facilities as

revealed by this study cause rural-urban drift of youth in the study area. This study therefore, agrees with Nwachukwu (2008) who identified lack of infrastructure as a contributory factor to rural-urban drift of youth in Nigeria. Similarly, irregular visit of extension agents could be attributable to lack of basic infrastructural facilities such as roads and transport which could limit extension in providing effective training for the youth. The perceived ineffectiveness of extension training no doubt, amplify lack of basic infrastructure as constraints to the ADPs in mobilizing the youth for participatory agricultural transformation and rural development process in the study area. This study therefore agrees with Eze (2000) who identified inadequate infrastructure as a constraint factor on extension contacts to farmers in southeastern Nigeria. Thus, the more adequate the infrastructure, the more effective the ADP extension in providing necessary information on agricultural production and rural development and encouraging participation among the youth in Nigeria.

**Table 3: Varimax rotated youth perceived factors on mobilization under the ADPs**

<b>Constraint variables</b>	<b>Factor 1: Lack of Basic infra- structure</b>	<b>Factor 2: poor socio- economic conditions</b>	<b>Factor 3: inadequate leadership</b>
Lack of traditional leadership	-0.49	-0.16	0.61
Inadequate markets and transport facilities	0.37	0.14	-0.28
Inaccessibility of credit to youth associations	0.49	0.21	0.15
Lack of participation in rural dev projects	-0.42	0.36	0.24
Fear of risks and uncertainties involved in agriculture	0.02	0.38	-0.29
Non perception of agric as a profession	0.21	0.44	0.08
Inadequate education among the youth	0.25	0.41	-0.03
Irregular visits of the extension agents	0.35	-0.28	-0.18
Difficulty in understanding ext techniques	0.52	-0.20	-0.16
Land tenure / inaccessibility to land	-0.13	0.42	-0.09
Intra/inter community conflicts	0.04	-0.34	0.47
Poor network of roads	0.55	-0.11	0.03
Rural-urban migration	0.33	-0.22	-0.04
Difficulty in linking youth prog to donor agencies	-0.02	0.11	0.46
Inadequate relationship between youth associations and traditional rulers	-0.12	0.03	0.43

**Source:** Field survey, 2009

Poor socio-economic conditions of youth depict poor state of the youth in terms of their social and economic status. Some specific poor socio-economic conditions of the youth include, lack of participation in rural development projects (0.36), fear of risks and uncertainties in agricultural production (0.38) and non-perception of agriculture as a profession (0.44). Others include, inadequate education among the youth (0.41) and land tenure / inaccessibility to land on the part of youth (0.42). Fear of risks and uncertainties in agricultural production among the youth is blamable on their inadequate education all of which limit mobilization of youth for participation in agricultural and rural development projects. Earlier studies by Blum (1991) and Madukwe (1996) have identified education as a facilitating factor in any extension programme including mobilization of youth under the ADP. Thus the more educated the youth the more equipped they would be to understand

extension techniques and embrace risk prevention strategies in agricultural production and rural development in the study area. This will also stimulate the youth to appreciate agriculture as a profitable profession and their overall participation in rural development in Ebonyi state, Nigeria.

Table 3 also reveals inadequate leadership in the study area which depicts inadequacy in the traditional rulership institutions and leadership structure in rural youth organizations. Some specific inadequate leadership issues include, lack of traditional leadership (0.61), intra/inter community conflicts (0.47), difficulty in linking youth programmes to donor agencies (0.46) and inadequate relationship between traditional rulers and youth associations (0.43). Lack of traditional leadership contributes to inadequacy in relationship between traditional rulers and youth associations basically because of possible weakness in

leadership structures of the traditional rulership institutions. The perceived weak leadership structures contribute to possible incessant intra/inter community conflicts. Situations of intra/inter community conflicts aggravate difficulties in linking youth programmes to donor agencies possibly because of uncertainties and insecurity these could cause in the study area. Previous report by Jeiyifo (2008) attributed high risk of youth restiveness to impatience due to prevalent insecurity in rural communities and inability of government to provide economic resources to empower the youth.

#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PARTICIPATORY AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN NIGERIA**

Youth possess regenerative energies, potential intelligence and skills which can motivate them to participate in development initiatives and make them sustainable in any economy. This study shows that rural youth in the study area have remarkable difference in their personal characteristics. These differences in personal characteristics of the youth constitute baseline information to the ADP for strategic planning and implementation of participatory agricultural transformation and rural development process in Nigeria. Thus, the differences in terms of age, gender, household size, farming experience, preferred agricultural production, marital status, career status, levels of formal education and estimated income can be employed by ADPs in categorizing the youth for mobilization. However, the diverse educational attainment among the youth informed the role of ADPs in categorizing them along the lines of their preferred clubs and groups for purposes of providing group training on agricultural production and rural development. This situation constitutes a critical issue to improve ADP extension services by overhauling structural arrangement within the relevant LGAs as viable extension blocks in implementing participatory extension programmes. This arrangement would impinge on the ADPs to employ mobilization strategies such as organizing youth clubs, provision of incentives/award to inter-youth

competitions and support to the youth on the part of parents.

Moreover, the envisaged improvements in ADPs extension services and mobilization strategies implicate ADPs on issues related to extension staff training on youth club dynamics in order to achieve meaningful motivation and mobilization of the youth. This situation could be facilitated by issues related to regular extension staff training and contacts with the youth on relevant extension activities. The envisaged regularity in extension contacts with youth has implications to government support to the ADPs through provision of necessary extension facilities, logistics and basic rural infrastructure. These issues of regular support to ADPs extension and development of rural areas implicate improved budgetary allocation on the part of Government and financial as well as other resources support on the part of benefiting LGAs. The situation could involve increasing number of extension staff of the ADPs, re-orientation and retraining of relevant community development staff of the LGAs to complement agricultural production and rural development efforts of the ADPs. This will assist the ADPs as rural-oriented organization to meaningfully mobilize the youth for participatory agricultural transformation and rural development process.

Furthermore, for the ADPs to contend with emerging improvements and challenges in mobilizing youth and overall agricultural transformation and rural development requires that the Ebonyi State government, in conjunction with LGAs would employ a democratic philosophy as a strategy under the ADPs. This measure will assist the ADPs towards stimulating existing and emerging youth associations. This will overtly streamline their activities and mobilize them to work with the existing local leadership and traditional institutions under the ADP. The foregoing measures resulted in the harmonization and organizational overhaul between youth associations and traditional institutions necessary in facilitating ADPs

extension activities to the youth as a formidable group. The envisaged harmonization would be appropriate to the extent that it would include re-orientation and improve group cohesion to enable ADPs focus contacts on potential groups of youth for participatory agricultural transformation and rural development process in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated mobilization of youth under the ADPs in Ebonyi State and highlighted implications for participatory agricultural transformation and rural development process in Nigeria. This study was based on the prevalent situation of inadequate utilization of regenerative energies, potential intelligence, and skills among the youth in agricultural production and development initiatives under the ADPs in an agrarian economy such as Nigeria. Results of this study indicate that low performance of the ADPs on youth mobilization and limited participatory agricultural transformation and rural development process are attributable to critical constraints. The constraints include, lack of basic infrastructure, poor socio-economic conditions among the youth and inadequate leadership. Based on the foregoing, the study recommends improved extension services and staff training, budgetary provisions and resource support on the part of Ebonyi State Government and relevant LGAs. Other recommendations include, overhaul and improved cohesion on the part of rural leadership institutions and youth associations, streamline in the structure and improvements in operations of existing youth clubs and ADP's focus of extension contacts on harmonized and mobilized groups of youth. In conclusion, mobilization of youth under the ADPs in Ebonyi State for participatory agricultural transformation and rural development processes in Nigeria depend on the extent the issues raised as constraints and implications thereof highlighted can be addressed.

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