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Strategies to Enhance Youths' Involvement in Agricultural Production Enterprises for Employment and Sustainable Development in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract— *This paper determined strategies to enhance youths' involvement in agricultural production enterprises for employment and sustainable development in Benue State. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Survey research design was adopted. The study was carried out in Benue State. The population for the study was 1,691,657 made up of 1,691,515 youths and 142 agricultural extension agents. Multistage sampling technique was employed and 40 respondents made up of 258 youths and 142 extension agents were used for the study. All extension agents were used due to its manageable size. Data was collected using a 30 items questionnaire known as Youths' Involvement in Agricultural Production Enterprise Questionnaire (YIAPEQ). Face validation of the instrument was done by three experts. Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability and a coefficient of 0.82 was obtained. 400 copies of the instrument were distributed to the respondents and 384 copies were retrieved. Mean, standard deviational and t-test statistical tools were employed. The result showed that all the 13 items were factors inhibiting youths' participation in agricultural production enterprises while all 17 items were accepted as strategies to enhance youths' participation in agricultural production enterprises. It was recommended that youths should be mentored and encouraged through provision of loans among others. Also, agricultural production should be linked to social media to communicate innovations in agriculture to youths.*

Keywords— ***Strategies, Youth, Agricultural enterprises, Employment and sustainable development.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the art and science of growing plants and other crops and the raising of animals for food, other human needs, or economic gain (Bareja, 2014). Agriculture also includes horticulture, fruits growing, seed growing, dairy farming and livestock breeding and keeping, the use of land as grazing land (Agricultural Act 1947). It is the only sector that supplies food to both man and livestock. Apart from food, agriculture supplies raw materials to agro-based industries such as leather, textile, rubber, beverage industries, among others. Agriculture is also the largest sector of the economy of Nigeria which several enterprises are embedded into. (United Nations Development Programme 2012).

Importance of agriculture to every developing Nation is seen in its contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and its ability to reduce poverty especially to the rural dwellers (Oyakhilomen and Zibah, 2014). In Nigeria, agriculture contributes over 40% of the GDP and 60% of the population is engaged in agricultural production (Nwafor, Ehor, Chukwu and Amuka, 2011). Though agriculture contributes highly to the socio-economic lives of people in Nigeria, and is also composed of several enterprises, it is continuously relegated by youths and regarded as a hard-on farm work only meant for the aged and the poor.

An enterprise is the activity of starting and running a business (Longman Dictionary of contemporary English 2003). An enterprise can also be described as the actions of someone who shows some initiative by taking a risk, investing in and running a business.

Agricultural production enterprise is the activity or project or undertaking in any of the agricultural production ventures for business purposes. It could be in crop

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production, livestock production, landscaping and so on. According to Egbule, (2004), agricultural enterprises are classified into clusters and they are; soil science, fisheries, farm machinery, horticulture, and food processing and preservation, livestock and crop production. Osinem (2008) again enumerated enterprises in agriculture such as landscaping, horticulture, agribusiness, natural resources management, agricultural mechanization, crop and animal production. Ikeoji (2017) also enumerated agricultural production enterprises as follows; mini-livestock enterprise such as grass cutter farming, snail farming, animal production and crop production.

Crop production enterprises could be yam, cassava, vegetables, rice, maize and cowpea. Estate plantation enterprises, these could be plantain or banana plantations, oil palm, cashew, orange, pineapple, mango and guava plantations. Ikeoji (2017) again gave other enterprises such as animal production which include goat and sheep, piggery enterprise, quail production, poultry production enterprise which could be egg production, meat or broiler production, hatchery and brooding enterprise and aquaculture farming enterprise.

Agricultural farm enterprises have basic features that distinguish them from other enterprises. The soil is the basic input that cannot be relocated, does not run out and cannot be expanded without limits (Varro, 2014). The author further listed other features of agricultural production enterprises such as fertility improvement through rational cultivation. Agricultural production processes being affected by natural conditions (climate, topography, soil quality). These endowments cannot be changed or radically transformed by man. Another essential feature of agricultural production enterprise is that, it is a biological process and production continues until this process is interrupted. A very important feature of agricultural production enterprise is that majority of the products are rapidly perishable and as such requires substantial transportation or processing capacities (Varro, 2014). However, there is poor image of persons involved in agricultural production, non availability of agricultural machines to the rural farmer and non-involvement of youths in agricultural policies are some limiting factors for youths' participation in agricultural production. (Lyocks, Lyocks and Kagbu, 2013).

Agricultural production enterprises, if efficiently and effectively engaged into by youths can be good source of employment to the large number of youths in Benue and Nigeria at large, and will ameliorate the socio-economic problems of unemployment.

Employment is a condition of having a paid job (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2003). A person is employed if he/she is engaged in the production of goods or services thus, he/she contributes to the GDP in a legitimate manner and receives some form of compensation for the activity.

Employment in this study refers to any person who is engaged in any agricultural production enterprise to produce goods and services and in turn get compensation for it. Agricultural sector comprises of different sub-sectors that if youths engage into them will reduce unemployment rate in the country.

Different countries and authors have various opinions about who youths are depending on their differences in culture, sociological and political ideologies. In the opinion of Agbulu, Asogwa and Ekele, (2013) youths refer to the young adults between the age of 12-25 that have energy and vigor for work. According to National Youth Development Policy (2001) youths are people aged 18-35. United Nations Youth Agenda (2004) submitted that youths are individuals between ages of 15-24 years. However, Benue is a state in Nigeria, so youth period in this case extends to 35 years. This period is marked by exuberance, energetic, zeal and vigor (Ajoegbu, 2012). The author further stressed that the energy, zeal and vigor if not meaningfully and properly channeled, the youths tend to be restive, drug addicts, oil bunkers, kidnappers, terrorist.

The youths are projected to constitute a large percentage of people in Benue State. National Population Commission (2016) projected a population of people of Benue State to be 5,741.800 out of which the youths constitute a total of 1,691515. Benue state is an agrarian state that has a large expanse of land suitable for the production of a variety of crops (Mbah, Ezeano and Odiaka 2016), the conditions also favour the production of animals.

The climatic and soil conditions are favourable for the production of both arable and permanent crops, livestock and ornamental plants. Due to the favourable environmental conditions crops like yam, cassava, maize, sorghum, rice, groundnuts, and soya beans are produced on a large scale. Others include guava, mango, and citrus among others, (Agbulu, Asogwa and Ekele 2013).

Livestock production is also not left out in Benue State. Livestock such as pigs, goats and sheep, poultry birds (turkey, chicken, and quail) are reared on a relatively large scale, thus giving Benue State the name food basket of the

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nation. Other agricultural businesses such as transportation, processing, packaging and marketing also thrive well in the state. Agricultural extension agents in conjunction with farmers enable the production of these agricultural products.

Agricultural extension agents according to Nagel (1997) refers to individuals who are professionals who educate farmers in the use of improved farming methods and techniques, increased productivity and income, thereby improving their levels of living and uplift their social and educational standard. According to Davis, (2008) agricultural extension agents are trained persons who assist farmers to solve problems and communicate agricultural information, develop skills and technologies in agriculture. Agricultural extension agents in this context refers to trained individuals who are professionals, possess skills and knowledge in agricultural production enterprises and work with youths and farmers.

Despite all the favourable conditions for agricultural production enterprises to thrive well in Benue State, most youths migrate from rural areas to the state capital or other cities in search of employment from other sectors of the economy that are already limited compared to the population of youths. The youths possess the energy and vigour that when effectively channeled to meaningful production in agricultural enterprises will provide a source of employment for the unemployed youths. (Olukundun, Falola and Ibidunni, 2014).

Unemployment is a condition of being without a job or a vocation. (Olukundun, Falola and Ibidunni, 2014). International Labour Organization reported (1998/1999) unemployment to be a statistic of the population who are active, willing and are available but without a job. A report by Education Development Centre (2002) shows a high rate of youth unemployment compared to adult unemployment especially the underdeveloped countries like Nigeria. Though a wide range of agricultural production enterprises exist in Benue State coupled with the favourable climatic and soil conditions, very few youths are engaged in these enterprises. The consequence of this is increased poverty, low productivity or output, restiveness and several other social vices in and around towns in Benue State. All these hinder the development of any state or nation (Eriba 2011).

Development is viewed in terms of a nations ability to meet the indices on the Human Development Index which are; longevity of life expectancy, gender equality and empowerment, security, peace and stability, communications and environmental protection (Agba, in Eriba, 2011). Therefore, considering the high level of unemployment in Benue State, the state fall short of the indices of development.

Sustainable Development is conceptualized as paths of human progress which meets the needs and aspirations of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their social, political, economic and cultural needs in an environment that can meet the needs of future generations (United Nations General Assembly, 1987). All these cannot be met where there is high rate of unemployed youths who are unable to satisfy their basic needs of food, shelter and clothing as is the case with youths in Benue State. For sustainable Development to be achieved in the state, youths should be gainfully employed in the numerous agricultural production enterprises available in the state in order to meet their social, economic, political and cultural needs in a conserved and protected environment to meet the needs of future generation.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.

Benue State is endowed with a suitable climatic and soil conditions favourable for agricultural production enterprises, but still, a high population of the youths are unemployed. National Population Commission (2016) projected a population of people in Benue State to be 5,741.800, out of which the youth constitute a total of 1, 691,515. Benue State is an agrarian state that has a large expanse of land suitable for the production of a variety of crops and animals. The climatic and soil conditions also favour the production of both arable crops, permanent crops, livestock and ornamental plants. Due to favourable conditions, crops like yam, cassava, maize, sorghum, rice, groundnuts, soyabeans are produced on a large scale. Others such as guava, mango, citrus among others also yield high. Livestock production is also not left out in Benue State. Livestock such as pigs, goats and sheep, poultry birds (turkey, chicken, quail) are reared on a relatively large scale, thus giving Benue State the name food basket of the nation. Other agricultural businesses such as transportation, processing, packaging and marketing also thrive well in the state. Despite all the favourable conditions for agricultural production enterprises to thrive well in Benue State, most youths migrate from rural areas to the state capital or other cities in search of formal employment from other sectors of the economy. The work of agricultural production is left in the hands of the aged who are no longer strong, mostly illiterates and are unaware of agricultural innovations. This triggered the researcher to research into strategies to

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enhance the youth involvement in agricultural production enterprises for employment and sustainable development.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the study was to determine strategies to enhance youths' involvement in agricultural production enterprises for employment and sustainable development. The following objectives were posed to guide the study.

1. Identify factors inhibiting youths' participation in agricultural production enterprises.
2. Determine strategies for enhancing youths' participation in agricultural production enterprises for employment and sustainable development.

Research questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What are the factors inhibiting youths' participation in agricultural production enterprises?
2. What are the strategies for enhancing youths' participation in agricultural production enterprises for employment and sustainable development?

Research hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of responses of youths and agricultural extension agents on factors inhibiting youths' participation in agricultural production enterprises in Benue State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of responses of youths and agricultural extension agents on strategies for enhancing youths' participation in agricultural production enterprises in Benue State.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted survey research design because the researcher collected data from a sample of youths, teachers and extension agents considered to be representative of the entire population, analyzed the data and generalized the findings to the entire population.

The area of study was Benue State. The state has 23 local government areas. Benue state has a tropical climate and a fertile arable land suitable for agricultural production. Benue State lies in the middle belt region of Nigeria. The state is divided into three agricultural zones namely; zone A, B, and C respectively. Benue State accommodates Tiv, Idoma and Igede.

The population for the study was 1,691,517 composed of 1.691.515 youths and 142 extension agents in Benue State. The sample for the study was 400 respondents made of 258 youths and 142 extension agents. The sample was obtained through the use of Taro Yamen formula. To arrive at the individual respondents, two local governments were purposively selected from each zone, and then stratified random sampling technique was employed to select the number of youths that responded to the questionnaire while the entire numbers of extension agents were used because the number could be effectively managed.

The instrument for the study was a structured questionnaire titled "Youths' Involvement in Agricultural Production Enterprises Questionnaire" (YIAPEQ) made up of 30 items constructed by the researcher through literature review. The instrument was divided into two parts. Part A and part B.

Part A sought information on demographic characteristics of the respondents. Part B was divided into two sections. Section 1 sought information about factors that inhibit youths' participation in agricultural production enterprises while section 2 solicited information on strategies for enhancing youths' participation in agricultural production enterprises.

All the items had a 4 point response options of strongly agree (SA4), Agree (S3) Strongly Disagree (SD2) Disagree (D1). The instrument was face validated by three experts, two from Agricultural Education and one from Crop Production, all from the Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi. Their comments gave rise to the present questionnaire. Reliability of the items of the questionnaire was ascertained through Cronbach Alpha and a coefficient of 0.82 was obtained. The statistics used for data analysis was mean, standard deviation for research questions and t-test statistics for testing the hypotheses.

The researcher and six other research assistants familiar with the study areas assisted in the collection of data. 400 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents but 384 copies only were retrieved. The benchmark for accepting any of the items was 2.50 and items whose mean was below 2.50 were not accepted.

The null hypotheses formulated were tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test statistics. Null hypothesis whose calculated level of significance was greater than 0.05 was upheld and rejected when otherwise.

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V. RESULTS

The results of the study were presented according to research questions answered and hypothesis tested as follows:

Research Question 1

What are the factors inhibiting youths' participation in Agricultural production enterprises Benue state?

Table1: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Factors Inhibiting Youth Participation in Agricultural Production Enterprises in Benue State (N= 400)

S/N	Inhibiting Factors	$\bar{X}$	Std	Remark
1	Lack of funds to establish agricultural enterprises by youths	3.77	.56	Agreed
	Inadequate land for meaningful establishment of an agricultural enterprise	3.74	.59	Agreed
3	Lack of technical know- how by youths on agricultural production enterprises	3.73	.61	Agreed
4	Migration of youths to cities due to lack of social amenities such as electricity, school, health centres in rural areas.	3.72	.64	Agreed
5	Lack of collaterals to obtain loans from banks to establish agricultural production enterprises	3.69	.63	Agreed
6	Drudgery in agriculture discourage youths from engaging in agricultural production enterprises.	3.69	.66	Agreed
7	Poor knowledge on agricultural innovations by youths	3.63	.71	Agreed
8	Market glut of agricultural products during harvest season discourages youth from taking to agricultural production enterprises	3.67	.67	Agreed
9	Low prices of agricultural products discourages youths	3.63	.61	Agreed
10	Inadequate extension services available to the youths	3.68	.66	Agreed
11	Demeaning attitude of the public to agricultural production enterprises	3.66	.67	Agreed
12	Non-availability of processing and packaging of products leads to decay thus discouraging youths	3.57	.71	Agreed
13	No encouragement (poor incentives) from government	3.01	.82	Agreed

N= number of respondents, $\bar{X}$= mean of respondents Std = Standard deviation of respondents.

Data presented in Table 1 revealed that all the 13 items had their mean values ranged from 3.01 to 3.77, indicating that their mean values were above the cut-off point of 2.50. This showed that all the 13 items were agreed by the respondents as the factors inhibiting youths' participation in Agricultural production enterprises Benue state. The Table also showed that the standard deviation of the items ranged from .56 to .82, indicating that the respondents were not too far from the mean and from the opinion of one another in their responses on the factors inhibiting youths' participation in Agricultural production enterprises Benue state.

Research Question 2

What are the strategies for enhancing youths' participation in Agricultural production enterprises?

Table2: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Strategies for Enhancing Youths' Participation in Agricultural production enterprises (N= 400)

S/N	Strategies	$\bar{X}$	Std	Remark
1	Provide vocational guidance to students			
2	Use innovative techniques in teaching agricultural science such as use of multimedia and ICT.	3.40	.69	Agreed
3	Organizing seminars/conferences for youth where experts give talks on the value of agriculture	3.58	.73	Agreed
4	Introduce agricultural shows where reward is used to motivate youths with good agricultural products. This encourages competitiveness among youths	3.61	.60	Agreed

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5	Provide social amenities in the rural areas, this will discourage rural-urban drift.	3.44	.69	Agreed
6	Availability of agricultural machinery will remove drudgery from agricultural production.			Agreed
7	Create awareness on agricultural technologies such as genetic engineering to produce high quality and yields of crops and animals.	3.11	.67	Agreed
8	Mentoring young farmers by successful agricultural entrepreneurs to develop their skills, attitude and knowledge in agricultural production.	3.13	.65	Agreed
9	Government should provide special financial packages for youths who are in agricultural production.	3.30	.66	Agreed
10	Land management system should be improved to make land available to the youths wishing to take to agricultural production.	3.40	.62	Agreed
11	Loans should be provided to youths without collateral	3.49	.65	Agreed
12	Agricultural science should be made compulsory for all students at the secondary school level.	3.55	.78	Agreed
13	Establish agro tourism centres	2.99	.88	Agreed
14	Government and non-governmental agencies can reduce glut of agricultural products by buying and storing agricultural products and releasing them to the market during shortage.	3.02	.79	Agreed
15	Commodity price control commission should be introduce to regulate the price of agricultural products and prevent the activities of middlemen who are always cheating producers at the selling point.	3.47	.89	Agreed
16	Link agriculture to social media	2.88	.81	Agreed
17	Increase awareness creation about the social status of the farmers, agriculture is not a vocation for the poor and illiterate only.	3.01	.72	Agreed

N= number of respondents, $\bar{x}$= mean of respondents Std = Standard deviation of respondents.

Data in Table 2 revealed that all the items had their mean values ranged from 2.88 to 3.61, indicating that their mean values were above the cut-off point of 2.50. This showed that the respondents agreed that they were the strategies for enhancing youths' participation in Agricultural production enterprises in Benue state. The Table also showed that the standard deviation of the items ranged from .60 to .89, indicating that there was less variability in the opinion of the respondents on strategies for enhancing youths' participation in Agricultural production enterprises in Benue state.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of responses of youths and agricultural extension agents on factors inhibiting youth participation in Agricultural production enterprises Benue state.

Table 3: t-test Analysis of Mean Ratings of Responses of Youths and Agricultural Extension Agents on Factors Inhibiting Youths' Participation in Agricultural Production Enterprises in Benue State

Status	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error Mean	df	Sig.	Alpha Value	Remark
Youths	258	3.6741	.67225	.06605				
					398	.582	.05	NS, NR
Ext Agents	142	3.7175	.52483	.057740				

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N= Number of respondents, Std = Standard deviation, df = degree of freedom, Sig. = P-value; P > 0.05, NS = Not significant, NR = Not rejected.

Table 3 shows a p-value of .582 which is greater than the alpha value of .05. This indicates that there was no statistical significant difference in the mean ratings of responses of youths and agricultural extension agents on factors inhibiting youth participation in Agricultural production enterprises Benue state. Therefore, the hypothesis of no significant difference for the two groups of respondents (youths and agricultural extension agents) on factors inhibiting youths' participation in Agricultural production enterprises Benue state was not rejected.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of responses of youths and agricultural extension agents on strategies for enhancing youth participation in Agricultural production enterprises in Benue state.

Table 4: t-test Analysis of Mean Ratings of Responses of Youths and Agricultural Extension Agents on Strategies for Enhancing Youths' Participation in Agricultural Production Enterprises

Status	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error Mean	df	Sig.	Alpha Value	Remark
Youths	258	3.2488	.71922	.035840				
					398	.730	.05	NS, NR
Ext Agents	142	3.2010	.70822	.052423				

N= Number of respondents, Std = Standard deviation, df = degree of freedom, Sig. = P-value; P > 0.05, NS = Not significant, NR = Not rejected.

Table 4 shows a p-value of .730 which is greater than the alpha value of .05. This indicates that there was no statistical significant difference in the mean ratings of responses of youths and agricultural extension agents on strategies for enhancing youth participation in Agricultural production enterprises in Benue state. Therefore, the hypothesis of no significant difference for the two groups of respondents (youths and agricultural extension agents) on strategies for enhancing youths' participation in Agricultural production enterprises in Benue state was not rejected.

The result of the study revealed that all the 13 factors inhibited youths' participation in agricultural production enterprises as their mean values were above 2.50. The result agrees with Lyocks, Lyocks and Kagbu (2013) in their study on mobilizing youth for participation in Nigerian agricultural transformation agenda. A grassroots' approach who asserted that poor image of persons involved in agricultural production, non-involvement of youths in agricultural policies among others as limiting factors for youth participation in agricultural production. The study is also in consonance with Nwankwo (2014) in his work on major factors militating against youth participation in agricultural production in Ohafia Local Government Area of Abia State where it was discovered that lack of modern technology, finance and other factors inhibit youths' participation in agricultural production enterprises. Hypothesis of no significant difference between mean ratings of responses of youths and agricultural extension agents on factors inhibiting youth participation in agricultural production enterprises was also upheld.

The result again showed that all the 17 strategies can enhance youths' participation in agricultural production enterprises. This is because all their mean values were above 2.50. The result is consistent with Latopa and Rashid (2015) in their study on identifying the causes of decline in youth participation in agricultural empowerment programme of youth integrated training farm mandate. They discovered that youths can be encouraged through provision of funds, guidance, and counseling among others to participate in agricultural production. The study further aligns with Egbule, (2004) who enunciated that vocational guidance and use of innovative technologies are strategies that can encourage youth participation in agricultural production enterprises.

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VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the result of the study, it was observed that several factors inhibit youths from taking to agricultural production enterprises in Benue State. However, the study also identified 17 strategies that can encourage youth participation in agricultural production enterprises. This will create employment opportunities for the youth, reduce social vices and encourage food security in the State and Nigeria as a whole. It was therefore recommended that

1. Youths should be mentored and encouraged through provision of loans with less stringent repayment conditions.
2. Agricultural production should be linked to the social media to broadcast the communication of innovations in agriculture to youths.

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