

## An Appraisal of Governments Youth Empowerment Programme through Agriculture: The Need for a New Approach

Kator P E\*<sup>1</sup> and Adaigho. P<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Agricultural Technology, Delta State Polytechnic, P.M. B. 005, Ozoro, Delta State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Agricultural Extension Management, Nigeria

### Abstract

This paper appraised governments youth empowerment programme through agriculture with respect to the selection process and training programme. The multi-stage random sampling technique was used in selecting two hindered and seventy five trained youths (11 per local government area of the state), two hundred and fifty youths not trained (10 per local government), sixteen coordinators and two hundred and fifty other interested persons (10 per local government). Questionnaires and personal interview were used in collecting data. The findings show that age and personal interest constitutes the major criteria for selection of youths which is regarded as fair and equitable. The training programme for youths is perceived to have more practical content (60-90%) than theoretical content, but the 4-week period of training was considered inadequate and also not in line with the National Board for Technical Education provisions contained in the curriculum for technical and vocational Education. The study recommends that additional criteria in selection of youths such as good physical strength and good health as well as selection from the wards in each local government areas of the state should be embraced. The target group (youths) should be involved in the design and introduction of a youth empowerment programme through agriculture and more youths should be accommodated for a more intensive training programme lasting for longer period and going through different tiers amongst others.

**Keywords:** Agriculture; Appraisal; Approach; Government; Youth empowerment

### Introduction

Vavrus and Elecher [1] define youth empowerment as an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people including youths and adult. Oluwasanjo [2] enumerated that youth empowerment simply means all positive efforts taken deliberately towards improving the lives of young people; efforts channeled towards developing the capacities of young ones to draw out the best out of them bearing in mind that they are truly leaders of tomorrow. Youth empowerment may involve five types [3]: (i) financial empowerment may involve offering cash to youths to start up or solve problems; (ii) academic empowerment entailing giving academic support to youths through scholarships; (iii) moral empowerment that entails empowering youths morally in families, schools and community gatherings to behave well; (iv) skill acquisition empowerment which encompasses training youths on skill development to support them in earning a living through acquisition of skills in areas such as plumbing, welding, mechanics and writing skills amongst others and (v) agricultural empowerment which empowers youths to be engaged in agriculture to feed the nation, earn income and make agriculture a major driver in the economy.

Youth empowerment constitutes a central tenet of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which every country in the world has signed into law [4]. Hence government youth empowerment programmes is in vogue globally to create and support the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others. Uzochukwu [5] likened youth empowerment to saving in the bank that cannot be affected by any theft of any kind and further outlined some of the benefits to include, crime reduction, poverty eradication, national growth, security, technological development, employment creation, good education standard and good governance. Ali [6] also elucidated that youth empowerment leads to nations prosperity for its next

generations, innovation, transparent social and political systems, less dependability on government by youth communities, opportunity for voice on youth issues as well as advocate them at local and international level effectively.

Amongst the essence of governments youth empowerment programme through agriculture has been to battle unemployment through agriculture; remodel the agricultural sector and correct the problem of ageing farming population. One of the prominent programmes put in place by the Delta State government is the Youth Empowerment through Agriculture [7] (YETA). Ogbogu [8] noted that the programme was an initiative of the Uduaghan-led administration (2007-2015) that was introduced as part of the human capital development agenda to; (i) encourage youths to embrace farming (ii) make youths enjoy a good life devoid of poverty, ignorance, violence and other vices that reduce the capacity to complement governments efforts (iii) build around active and result oriented participation to secure their future and turn them into owners of their own businesses. The programme which was inaugurated on 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2008 commenced with the selection of eighteen youths from each of the twenty five local government areas of the state. The selection process was based on interest and devoid of any political interference. The youths were made to go through a 4-week intensive training at the Songhai-Delta Integrated Agricultural centre Amukpe-Sapele in Delta

\*Corresponding author: Kator P E, Department of Agricultural Technology, Delta State Polytechnic, P.M. B. 005, Ozoro, Delta State, Nigeria, Tel: 08063870021; 08050313072; E-mail: [Katorpe@yahoo.com](mailto:Katorpe@yahoo.com)

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State with a promise of start-up capital, implements and input materials. Several youth empowerment schemes have been in place, but much of them if not all have failed to achieve it desired objectives. Hence an appraisal is necessary to ascertain how the programme was operated with a view to addressing identified “grey areas” in any subsequent government youth empowerment programme. This paper therefore examines the Delta State governments youth empowerment through Agriculture programme with respect to; (i) the selection process (ii) the training programme and (iii) the strategies needed to address the shortcomings in future programmes.

### Hypothesis

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the perception of the trained youths and other interested persons on the extent of fairness and equity in the selection process of the YETA programme.

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the perception of trained youths and the other youths on the adequacy of the period of training needed to acquire practical hand-on skills under the YETA programme.

### Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in Delta State, Nigeria. The state covers an area of 16,842 square kilometers. It lies in between Longitude 5°00’ and 6°45’ East and Latitude 5°00’ and 6°30’ North. The state is bounded in the North and West by Edo state the east by Anambra, Imo and Rivers states, South east by Bayelsa state and on the Southern flanks is Bight of Benin. The state comprises of twenty five local government areas contained in the three senatorial zones of Delta North, Delta South and Delta Central. The state has an average annual rainfall of 266 cm coastal area and 190.5 cm northern fringes running between March and November. Agriculture constitutes a dominant occupation in the state with crop production, poultry production, fisheries and animal husbandry being the specialized areas. The population of the study comprised of two categories (i) direct beneficiaries made up of youths trained as part of the YETA programme and (ii) indirect beneficiaries made up of other youths, co-ordinators/officers of the programme and other interested persons. The multi-stage random sampling technique was adopted by identifying the category of the beneficiaries, determining their total number/ number of interest and choosing convenient sample population. Two hundred and seventy five youths trained (eleven from each local government area), 16 co-ordinators, 250 other youths not trained and 250 interested persons were chosen for the study. Primary and secondary data were used. Primary data were generated using questionnaires and personal interview (structured). Secondary data were sourced from internet materials, journals, books, newspaper and periodicals amongst others. Data was analyzed using frequency, percentage and mean. The hypothesis was analysed using Z-statistics at 5% level of significance.

### Results (Tables 1-7)

#### Discussion

The selection process for youths in an empowerment programme requires defined criteria and a logical process to guarantee transparency, equity and to avoid bias. The YETA programme in this regard is perceived to be based on the criteria of age and interest in agriculture. This does not fall below the expectation of all the categories of respondents, hence it is considered fair and equitable.

Transmission of more practical hand on practical skills with lesser

Criteria	Categories/Frequency/Percentage			
	TY	OY	CO	IP
* Age	-	04 (1.66%)	-	-
* Edu. Qual	-	04 (1.66%)	-	10 (4.00%)
* Interest	-	-	-	-
Political Affiliation	-	63 (125.20%)	-	-
Social Class	-	08 (3.02%)	-	-
Parental Background	-	-	-	-
Institutions Attended	-	-	-	-
Age and Interest	209 (76.00%)	123 (49.20%)	16 (100%)	63 (25.20%)
i, iii & iv	66 (24.00%)	48 (19.20%)	-	148 (59.20%)

**Table 1:** Perception of Criteria for Selection of Beneficiaries of the YETA Programme.

Extent	Category/Frequency			
	TY	OY	CO	IP
To large extent (5)	243 (1215)	160 (800)	14 (70)	133 (665)
To considerate extent(4)	07 (28)	41 (164)	02 (08)	48 (192)
To middle extent (3)	-	30 (90)	-	10 (30)
To small extent (2)	-	17 (34)	-	50 (100)
To no extent (1)	-	02 (02)	-	09 (09)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1243</b>	<b>1090</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>996</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>250</b>
<b>X</b>	<b>4.58</b>	<b>4.36</b>	<b>4.88</b>	<b>3.98</b>

**Table 2:** Perception of Extent of Fairness and Equity In the Selection Process of Beneficiaries of the YETA Programme.

%	Categories/Frequency/Percentage							
	TY		OY		CO		IP	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
0-29	-	-	08	3.20	-	-	10	4.00
>30-59	46	16.73	142	56.80	-	-	131	52.40
>60-90	229	83.27	100	40.00	16	100.00	109	43.60
> 90	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

**Table 3:** Perception of Practical Content of Training Programme for Beneficiaries.

%	Categories/Frequency/Percentage							
	TY		OY		CO		IP	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
0-30	208	75.64	64	25.60	16	100.00	106	42.40
>30-59	67	24.36	186	74.40	-	-	143	57.20
>60-90	-	-	-	-	-	-	01	0.40
> 90	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

**Table 4:** Perception of Theoretical Content of Training Programme for Beneficiaries.

theoretical skills is the focus of any youths empowerment programme. Hence, the perceived greater practical content over the theoretical is capable of producing youths that can practice agriculture. As indicated in the National Board for Technical Education Curriculum, practical hand on skills on an area of specialization should be rendered over a period of 16 weeks involving theory and practicals [9]. Thus, the 4 week

Item Statement	Response Options	Categories /Frequencies			
		TY	OY	CO	IP
* The 4-week training Programme was inadequate to acquire the needed hand on practical skills.	Strongly Agree (5)	186(930)	214 (1070)	16 (80)	211 (1055)
	Agree (4)	73(292)	29 (116)	- -	28 (112)
	Undecided (3)	01 (03)	07(21)	- -	11(33)
	Disagree (2)	10(20)	- -	- -	- -
	Strongly Disagree(1)	- -	- -	- -	- -
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1245</b>	<b>1207</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>1200</b>
	<b>N</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>250</b>
<b>X</b>	<b>4.53</b>	<b>4.83</b>	<b>5.00</b>	<b>4.80</b>	
* The training was carried out in line with specified curriculum by the National Business and technical Education Provisions	Strongly Agree (5)	- -	- -	- -	- -
	Agree (4)	- -	- -	- -	- -
	Undecided (3)	09(27)	10(30)	- -	28(84)
	Disagree (2)	50(150)	80(160)	06(12)	83(166)
	Strongly Disagree(1)	216(2160)	160(160)	10(10)	139(139)
	<b>Total</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>389</b>
	<b>N</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>250</b>
<b>X</b>	<b>1.43</b>	<b>1.40</b>	<b>1.38</b>	<b>1.56</b>	

Table 5: Perception of Period of Training and Use of Specified Curriculum.

Category	X	Standard Deviation (SD)	Variance (S <sup>2</sup> )	n	df	Zcal	Zcrit
Trained Youths	4.88	0.1032	0.3212	275	523	10.82	1.645
Other Interested Persons	3.96	1.7031	1.3050	250			

Level of Significance=0.05

Since Zcal (10.52) is greater than critical Zcrit (1.645) the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis which states that there is significant relationship between the perception of trained youths and other interested persons on the extent of fairness and equity in the selection process under YETA is validated

Table 6: Z – test of difference between the mean scores of Trained Youths and other Interested Persons on the extent of Fairness and Equity in the Selection process of YETA.

Category	X	Standard Deviation (SD)	Variance (S <sup>2</sup> )	n	df	Zcal	Zcrit
Trained Youths	4.53	0.69	0.47	275	523	-6.52	1.645
Other Interested Persons	4.83	0.45	0.20	250			

Level of Significance=0.05

Since Zcal (-6.52) is greater than critical Zcrit (1.645) the alternative hypothesis Ha is rejected and the null hypothesis which states that there is significant relationship between the perception of trained youths and other youths on the adequacy of the period of training needed to acquire practical on skills under the YETA programme is validated

Table 7: Z- test of Difference between mean scores of trained Youths and other youths on the adequacy of Period of training needed to Acquire Practical Hand-on Skills under YETA.

training programme embarked upon by the YETA programme was grossly inadequate and may have resulted in skipping certain relevant aspects of the training that could make it less effective. It is therefore, imperative that the training was carried out using an ad-hoc curriculum as against the specified curriculum in the area of specialization in agriculture as against the specified curriculum by the National Board for Technical Education provision. However, this does not imply that the youths that were engaged in the YETA programme would have not acquired the needed skills as attitude towards the training programme as well as instructors ability to disseminate the needed information and exposure amongst others could be ultimate determinants of the end resultant skills.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the selection process of youths under the YETA programme was largely adjudged to be adequate in terms of being equitable and fair. The practical content of the training dominated the theoretical content, but the 4-week training period and non-adherence to the NBTE provisions for technical and vocational training was considered inadequate. The following recommendations are proffered.

1. The selection of youths for agricultural empowerment programmes should include the criteria of satisfactory physical and health conditions. This is because agricultural activities require some amount of good physical strength and good health status. In addition the selection should start from the wards in each local government area to avoid selection of youths from only a few wards in each local government.

2. The target group (youths) and others should be consulted. Local youth associations should be involved in setting up the youth empowerment programme. This is because the programme is meant for them and they will benefit from it such that they are in a better position to stipulate how the programme should be run to provide the needed impact.

3. The training programme should be put up in batches to accommodate more youths. One set should be made to go through training for a 5-months period. This training programme should be put up to comprise three tiers;

- \* Attitude re-orientation to be embarked upon for a one week period to prepare the minds of the trainees to expose them to leadership skills needed, discipline and direction of expectations.

- \* Vocational/Technical training where each of them will be required to select an area of specialization in agriculture that is available and undergo an 16-week training in line with the NBTE provisions Technical and Vocational. Education curriculum should be used as it structure training leading to the acquisition of applied skills and well as scientific knowledge (National Policy on Education, 2004). The length of training is important as it makes the training more intensive covering best practices and other essentials. Kalu [10] in describing the length of training of youths under the Lagos state government Agric.

Yes Scheme noted that a six-month intensive training would expose the participants to the rigours and varying aspects of the specialized area making them more skillful and ready to practice on their own.

\* Business and Development training which should last for one week. Each of the participants would in the course of the period be taught how to set up and run an agricultural venture to achieve success.

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