APPRAISAL OF THE FIRST PHASE OF THE SCHOOL FARM PROGAMME IN OYO STATE

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ABSTRACT

Youth's interest in agriculture is crucial to the sustainability of the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA). The attempt to renew this crucial but dying interest through the School Farm Programme in Oyo state is currently moving towards its second phase. Therefore, an enquiry into the operations of the programme in its first phase becomes imperative for better programme delivery. In-depth Interview (IDI) with key informants was used to elicit information from principals, agricultural science teachers and participating students from three out of the eleven schools that participated in the programme based on enterprise being managed. Data on programme characteristics, achievements of the programme, inhibiting factors and areas of further improvement were collected and analysed qualitatively. Schools benefitting from the programme participated in one of the enterprise (arable, poultry or fishery) promoted under the programme while participating students felt that agriculture was worth being pursued as a future career. Inadequate manpower was a major inhibiting factor in the programme while capacity building of supervising officers and provision of incentives to participating students were advocated for enhanced project delivery. The programme was successful at enhancing the interests of the students in pursuing career in agriculture. The next phase of the project should be supported by a detailed implementation manual while incentives are provided for the implementers for more effective delivery.

Keywords: *School farm, Career in agriculture, Youth-in-agriculture*

INTRODUCTION

The National Planning Commission (2013) stated that about 40 million youths in Nigeria are unemployed. This situates youth unemployment rate at 23.9%, although it could reach as far as 37.7% according to Nweke (2012). This situation is alarming as it predisposes the youth to various soci*et al* ills like prostitution, internet fraud, armed robbery and terrorism etc. Tackling the situation therefore, calls for urgent attention. Considering the fact that Oyo state ranks as the fifth most populous state in the federation with a population of 5,580,894 (NPC, 2006), the impact of youth employment is bound to be greatly felt by its residents. Thus, an attempt to curb the wave of unemployment in the state through agricultural enterprises skill acquisition right from the secondary school level is a step in the right direction.

Agriculture is a viable source of employment for the teeming youth population due to its labour intensive nature. It provides the nation essentially with food and raw materials for the agro allied industries. Apart from these, agriculture is the largest contributor to the GDP of Nigeria apart from oil and, is in fact a major hope of divesting the Nigerian economy from over dependence on oil. For instance, the sector contributed a total of N3,033,970.43 (i.e. 19.65%) to the real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the first quarter of the year 2014 alone and was mainly responsible for the growth in the trade sector in the same period (NBS, 2014). Its importance is well highlighted in the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) of the Federal Government of Nigeria, with its goal of contributing an additional 20 million metric tonnes of food to the domestic food supply by 2015 and stimulating the creation of 3.5 million jobs along

the agricultural value chain (NPC, 2014). In realisation of the importance of agriculture over time, the Federal government made the study of agricultural science compulsory at both the junior and secondary school levels. Emeya and Ojimba (2012) stated that the agricultural science curriculum in Nigeria's secondary schools is aimed at suitable skill acquisition for a successful transition to the world of work in agri-business endeavours. This underscores the belief of the secondary school curriculum designers in the role of agriculture in job creation for Nigerian youths.

In spite of this obvious advantage, agriculture as a vocation appears unattractive to the youths due to the drudgery attached to it among other reasons. One other important reason is the manner of presentation of agriculture to the youths. Public school offenders are often asked to serve on the school farm as a punishment. This has a psychological effect on the students (offenders and non-offenders alike). It confers a "job of last resort" status on the field from the bright student's perspective.

Considering the role of agriculture in national food security and job creation among others, the task of finding a way to make agriculture attractive to the youths becomes imperative. A way of doing this is to formulate a programme targeted at the formative period of life, such that a positive attitude towards agriculture can be developed to eventually lead to the taking up of a career in agriculture at a later stage in life.

The School Farm Programme Concept

School Farm Network (2010) stated that the school farm concept in the United Kingdom dated as far back as the 19th century and that it had a rapid growth in 1940s as part of the war effort to boost production before declining dramatically. It was also reported that there is currently, a growing awareness of the importance of educating children about food and healthier lifestyles, and school farms as a valuable teaching resource in the country. According to School Farm Network (2011), the resurgence is due to a worldwide interest in sustainable futures in food production on one hand and an increasing understanding and interest in the way in which working in 'practice clusters' associated with wider communities (farming, food producers, other working environments) enrich and embed learning effectively in comparison with solely 'text based' or 'decontextualised' learning in classrooms. There is also an interest in healthy eating as part of a brief to encourage broadly, more healthy lifestyles and the emerging practices of integrating or embedding social and personal development within 'general learning' processes rather than as a separate category of study which is in line with the support for emotional and social development gains often associated with working and learning with plants and animals. An equally important reason is the introduction and development of a cadre of young knowledge workers associated with relevant disciplines.

In Nigeria, school farm is one of the prerequisites for effective implementation of agricultural science curriculum in secondary schools (Emeya and Ojimba, 2012). This is quite reasonable because an honest assessment of the food security situation in Nigeria and the role of the youth in the sustainability of the gains of the ATA compels one to readily agree that the country requires the school farm programme more than the United Kingdom. It is therefore not surprising that Oyo state government of Nigeria has decided to resuscitate the school farm programme as part of the school curriculum in the teaching of Agricultural Science.

Ladele and Agbebaku (2006) stated that school farms assist students to be able to appreciate the

practice of farming within the provision of available technology; better motivated toward making a career in agriculture; appreciative of the profitability of farming as a venture and able to have experiences of different aspects of farming activities. These were corroborated by West African Examinations Council (2006) which reported that the objectives of the Agricultural Science curriculum are to; stimulate and sustain students' interest in agriculture, enable students acquire basic knowledge and skills in agriculture, prepare students for further studies is agriculture, and prepare students for occupation in agriculture.

In Oyo state, a total of 11 secondary schools participated in the pilot phase of the programme which commenced in 2011 (Personal communication with Mr. Tunde Aderonmu, Special Adviser (SA) to the Governor on Agriculture on 26th August, 2013). The breakdown of the schools, their location and allocated enterprises are stated in Table 1.

Table 1: Participating schools in the first phase of the School Farm Programme in Oyo state

SN	Name of school	Location	Enterprise
1	Wesley College	Ibadan	Poultry
2	St. Bernadine's Girls' Grammar School	Oyo	Poultry
3	Iseyin District Grammar School	Iseyin	Poultry
4	Community High School	Iwo, Ogo Oluwa LGA	Arable
5	Muslim Grammar School	Ago Amodu	Arable
6	AUD Comprehensive High School	Ilero	Arable
7	Aiyelogun Grammar school	Idere	Arable
8	Oba Adeyemi High School	Oyo	Arable
9	Baptist Grammar School	Idi-Ishin Ibadan	Fishery
10	Community Grammar School	Army Barracks, Saki	Fishery
11	Fiditi Grammar School	Fiditi	Fishery

Since the inception of the programme, information about its success and otherwise have been scanty. Meanwhile, efforts are on to scale up the programme to 23 other schools in the state. Hence, there is the need to appraise the first phase of the programme with a view to guide government's decision in order to forestall the repetition of earlier mistakes and as well promote best practices gathered from the first phase.

This study is thus designed with the following specific objectives;

1. describe the characteristics of the programme,
2. examine the nature of stakeholders' involvement in the programme,
3. assess the achievements of the programme,
4. investigate the implementation challenges faced by the beneficiaries and,
5. explore ways of improving the design of the second phase of the programme.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Oyo state, southwestern Nigeria. The enterprises managed formed the basis on which the schools were sampled for the study. Each participating school had access to one of the three agricultural enterprises managed (i.e. arable, poultry and fishery). Thus, about 30 percent of the schools that participated in each enterprise were randomly selected. Hence, three (Iseyin District Grammar School, Baptist Grammar School and Aiyelogun Grammar School) out of the 11 schools that

participated in the first phase of the project constituted the sample for the study. In each of the selected schools, In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted with the principal, agricultural science teacher/School Farm Programme coordinator and two participants (male and female students). Interviewees were allowed to talk freely on the programme with special emphasis on the aims and unique characteristics of the programme in each school (such as type and size of enterprise), the level and nature of involvement of the students, school authority and the state government in the programme. Respondents were also asked to list and explain the achievements recorded by the programme in their own perspectives, highlight the challenges faced in implementing the programme and proffer the way forward to improving the programme in the state.

The consensus reached was documented while unique responses were also recorded to add value to the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of the programme

IDI with the principal and agricultural science teachers revealed that the aim of the programme as explained by the implementers was the same but no implementation manual/government blueprint/document stating the aims and objectives of the programme was found to guide the implementation, monitoring and subsequent evaluation of the programme in the schools. Thus, measurement of success or otherwise, objectively without recourse to memory recall was made difficult.

Each of the sampled school engaged in the management of one enterprise out of arable, fishery and livestock. The sizes of the planting/foundation stock given to the schools as well as the outputs of the enterprises are as stated in Table 2.

Table 2: Description of the enterprise sizes (input and output)

SN	School	Enterprise type	Input	Output
1.	Ayelogun Grammar School, Idere.	Arable (cassava and maize	N5,500 (for procuring 50 stem cuttings of cassava), 25kg of yellow maize, 4 bags of NPK fertilizer, 3 bags of urea fertilizer, 1 spraying pump, 2 sachets of seed plus, 3kg of Atraziline and 1 litre of Paraeforce. N 12,000 for ploughing.	About N 90,000 in the programme's account.
2.	Baptist Grammar School, Idi-Ishin, Ibadan	Fishery	3,000 juveniles, 4 concrete ponds, borehole with 2 (1000 l) Storex tanks,	Could not be provided because the school was not involved in the sale of the fish.
3.	Iseyin District Grammar school, Iseyin	Poultry (layers)	125 6-week old birds supplied worth about N 60,000	Present value of enterprise worth about N 120,000

Record keeping by the schools on the programme was found to be below average. Some basic farm records were not properly kept and filed. In a case, the implementers were not aware of the cost implication of the programme and the returns made from it due to the fact that all procurements and marketing activities were carried out by government officials. This kind of development may hinder the effectiveness of the programme as students would not be able to fully appreciate the

profitability or otherwise of the venture, considering the fact that learning in the programme was expected to be practical.

The programme was run as part of the curriculum of the school while participants were drawn from the senior secondary section of the schools (SSS I – III), and each participating school managed a single enterprise (one of arable, fishery or poultry) while the programme lasted. The single enterprise nature of the programme allows for concentration of efforts in the area but reduces the exposure of the students to other areas thus, preventing full comparison of costs and benefits of the managed enterprises as well as the full appreciation of the potential of such enterprise as a source of future career.

Stakeholders' involvement in the programme

The involvements of the students in the programme varied from one school to the other. Generally, all the participating students were involved in production activities. However, some schools involved their students in other activities ranging from input sourcing, production to marketing. For instance, students managing poultry enterprise were involved in feeding the birds, cleaning of the poultry house and equipment as well as marketing of eggs whereas, those managing fish enterprises were involved in cleaning the ponds, weeding the surroundings, feeding, sorting and harvesting the fish. Meanwhile, students managing arable crop enterprise were involved right from input sourcing to marketing. This variation would definitely impact on the amount of knowledge imbibed at the end of the programme, as the knowledge transferred at the end of the day to the two groups cannot be said to be the same.

The school administrators (principals and teachers) were involved in the coordination and facilitation of the programme at the school level. In a few cases, they were involved in the management of the funds for procurement as well as income generated from the sales of the produce of the programme.

The government was either directly responsible for the provision of inputs used in the programme or in some cases, provided the funds for the procurement of the inputs. Provision of funds for procurement of inputs however, predisposed the school and the students to understand a vital aspect of production which is input sourcing. Hence, they have a better appreciation of the cost and benefit of the enterprise.

Achievements of the programme

Apart from improving the status of the teaching facilities for practical agriculture and thus enhancing the students' chances in both internal and external examinations, participating students claimed to have benefited in terms of knowledge from the programme and felt agriculture was worthy of investing on as a career in the future. They also declared having interests in pursuing agriculture as a career in the future. These are corroborated by their teachers who stated that many of the students displayed the knowledge of the enterprise allocated to their school by the government. These findings agree with the stated aims and objectives of the project as conceptualised by the Ministry (Personal communication with the Special Adviser Agriculture). The findings were in line with Emeya and Ojimba (2012) and Ladele and Agbebaku (2006) assertion that utilisation of the school farm in the teaching of agricultural science promotes interest in agriculture as a career.

Implementation challenges

The implementation challenges were enterprise specific. However, there was a general challenge of coordination due to lack of implementation manual as stated earlier, to guide the implementation of the programme without unnecessarily waiting for the

Ministry of Agriculture officials to take vital decisions.

Manpower shortage was also a challenge and the inadequacy of handlers during the holiday period was a common challenge. Although, there are agricultural science teachers in the affected schools, the teaching and administrative work-loads made it difficult to run the farms effectively. In some cases, the drive and passion for the programme was low among the handlers. An interesting case was however, found at Aiyelogun Grammar School, Idere where a Yoruba teacher was found to be actively involved in the implementation of the programme despite the fact that the school had an agricultural science teacher.

There was an existence of water-related challenge particularly for poultry and fishery enterprises. For instance, although there was a borehole at Baptist Grammar School, Idi ishin, the rocky terrain affected its yield. In the case of the fishery enterprise, the pond size was deemed too big for training purpose, as its management was time consuming and took the teachers and students away from other school activities.

IDI with the teachers in the school handling arable crop showed that there were recorded cases of students' deliberate truancy from the farm due to the laborious nature of the work during the school period was also a challenge. This may also be due to lack of novelty in the enterprise (arable crop) as it is a dominant enterprise in the area. In addition, schools managing fish and poultry enterprises reported finding it difficult to secure the cooperation of their students in performing some activities which require manual labour at times. This may be due to lack of clarity about the immediate benefits of the programme to the students apart from knowledge transfer.

The challenges raised are similar to those confronted by other government-driven youth-based agricultural programmes launched in the past (Ovwigho, Adebanjo and Mundi, 2012). This suggests a failure to learn from past projects in the conceptualisation of new ones on the part of government and its officials.

Ways of improving the design of the second phase of the programme

The principals and agricultural science teachers of the schools advocated the production of a comprehensive implementation manual to guide the activities of the programme in the schools to ensure uniformity in implementation and enhance empirical monitoring and evaluation of the programme in due course.

Record keeping materials were asked to be provided by the government while capacity building workshop on the use of the materials as well as filling of other skill gaps as also recommended.

The capacity building workshop could also serve as incentives for hardworking teachers who actively participate in the programme. For instance, the capacity of interested non-agricultural science teachers like the Yoruba teacher earlier mentioned should be built, to serve as volunteers in the overall interest of the programme.

Participants advocated the continuous running of the programme as part of the school curriculum and urged the resuscitation of the Young Farmers' Club extra-curricular activities to complement and sustain the School Farm programme. This position is in line with the Presidential Initiative on Schools Agricultural Programme which is scheduled to operate between 2014 and 2019 (Otunkpe, 2014).

Meanwhile, the teachers requested for the addition of more enterprises to be managed by each school for the students to have a broader perspectives of the potential of agriculture as a field of career. However, this should be done within a

manageable limit in order not to overwork the students and the teachers.

Principals and students opined that the government should limit itself to the provision of funds and monitoring of its eventual utilisation while, the school along with the students be involved in all aspects of the value chain (i.e. input sourcing, production, processing and marketing) in order to have a full understanding of the whole production-consumption process. This will enhance the learning process the more.

There was a general request for the employment of dedicated School Farm Programme assistants to reduce the work-load on the teachers as well as being able to handle the programme during the holidays when students are usually not on ground.

IDI with teacher in the school handling fishery enterprise showed that there was a need to redesign the pond to a manageable size for effective training of the students with consideration for time needed for other school activities.

In addition, site assessment should be carried out before designing water facilities needed for poultry and fishery enterprises. Such facilities should be such that will be within the means of the schools to maintain.

It was also suggested that enterprise to be allocated to a school should be novel in the area to promote the students' interest and thus, reduce truancy among the students while the selection of enterprise to participate in should be demand-driven. This could be reinforced with incentives such as earmarking a portion of the profit made from the enterprise to the participants of the programme.

CONCLUSION

The School Farm Programme was successful in enhancing the interests of students in taking up agriculture as a career in the future. The programme was however confronted by challenges such as poor coordination, documentation and low motivation of handlers. The second phase of the programme should be guided by a good implementation manual while innovative ways of motivating the implementers should be incorporated.

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