

APPRAISAL OF YOUNG FARMERS' CLUB PROGRAMME IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study appraised Young Farmers' Clubs programme in secondary schools in Abia State. Data were collected using simple random sampling technique and structured interview schedule as instrument. Results showed that only a small proportion (about 27%) of the secondary schools had functional YFCs. Reasons for this situation were government, school authorities, agriculture teachers and student-related. The projects embarked upon by the YFCs were Agriculture, Home economics, Handicrafts, Educational and Managerial projects. The activities most frequently embarked upon by these clubs were crop production under Agriculture and food preparation under Home economics. The problems facing the YFCs in the state were related to the government, school authorities, agriculture teachers and students, with government-related problems predominating. It was recommended that government should create a fund similar to industrial training fund to provide logistic support to YFCs, and make mandatory the organization of YFCs programme in secondary schools.

Key words: Young Farmers' Clubs programme, secondary schools

INTRODUCTION

The importance of agriculture to a developing economy like Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. It supplies food and fibre to the teeming population, raw materials to the industries, employment to a large proportion of the population and earns foreign exchange for the country (Shaib, Adamu and Bakori, 1997; Idachaba, 2006). The ability of agriculture to perform these roles in the country has been on a steady decline since about two decades due to some reasons, among which is the ageing farm population (Ogumbameru, 1998). Besides, most of the farmers in the rural economy are old and have difficulty in coping with the rigorous demands of farm work and there is also a decrease of new entrants into agriculture from among the youths. The youths who have the energy for rigorous farm work are migrating to the urban centres in search of quick money generating jobs and, hence, agriculture is left in the hands of aged men and women. These aged people are risk averse and slow in adopting improved agricultural technologies that are important for increased agricultural production (Asumugha and Chinaka, 1998). In addition, many youths have developed negative attitudes towards agriculture as a career. They view it as an occupation that is full of drudgery and fit only for people of low social status (Ugwoke, Adesope and Ibe, 2005). The involvement of youths in agricultural production through youths-in-agriculture programmes, such as young farmers' club (YFC) programme, can contribute significantly to expected increase in agricultural production and improved rural life. A young farmers' club (YFC) is an organization in which young people, aged between nine and twenty-five years, are engaged in learning about farming and home-making techniques (Maunder, 1972; Ogunfiditimi, 1984; Ajayi, 2006; Ogunbameru, 1997). A successful YFC programme is beneficial to the participating youths, the family, local government and country as a whole. Club members

contribute to rural improvement and better living. In many countries, youth work is an effective way to close the gap between what is known about agriculture and home economics, and what farmers and house wives do. In this way club members serve as messengers of the government. They spread information that the farmers need to produce food and, thus, improve health and family living for the whole country (Bradfield, 1966; Maunder, 1972; Ajayi, 1987; Ajayi, 2006). The YFC is a government strategy for involving youths in agriculture. Members also have the potentiality of generating income and disseminating improved agricultural technologies to their parents and other farmers because they have more trust in them than in the formal extension agents (Ajayi, 1998; Adewunmi, 1999; Adekunle, 2001). It may be in-school or out-of-school. The in-school club lays emphasis on both theoretical and practical agriculture, while greater emphasis is placed on practical agriculture in the out-of-school club. This is premised on the principle of learning by doing (Eastern State of Nigeria Ministry of Agriculture, 1964).

Basically, a Young Farmers Club is established to: help boys and girls develop ideals for better farming, home-making and rural community development; give informal training in agriculture; provide social and recreational activities; make boys and girls better citizens, and to encourage and practice thrift. It is also established to encourage team work, encourage boys and girls to use their leisure prudently, promote patriotism, reduce juvenile delinquency, help give dignity to agriculture as an occupation, develop good and competent agricultural leadership, provide an opportunity for self expression, and help raise the standard of living of rural people (Ogunfeditimi, 1984; Ajayi, 2006).

Cognizant of the strategic role of youth towards increased and sustained agricultural production, many administrations in Nigeria have introduced projects aimed at interesting the youths in farming (Ajayi, 2006; Ogunbameru, 1998). The Eastern Region Government, like its Western region counterpart, introduced YFCs programme into the Eastern Region in 1964 (Eastern State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1964). Through the introduction of Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) in 1976, agricultural science as a subject of study was introduced into the curriculum of many secondary schools in Nigeria (Odewumi, 1986; Ajayi, 2006). Hence YFCs were found in many secondary schools and villages in the region. As a result of the creation of states in the country, Abia State was carved out of the region in 1991 and is expected to have functional YFCs programme in secondary schools for boosting agricultural production. Presently, there is a dearth of vigorous or energetic hands among the farmers, as new entrants into agricultural production from among the youths are not forthcoming. This raises such pertinent questions as: Is the YFCs programme present in secondary schools in Abia State? If no, why? What are the problems facing the YFCs in the state? This study was, therefore, designed to determine the proportions of secondary schools in the state with functional YFCs programme; find out reasons why YFCs are not present in some secondary schools, determine the various projects being embarked upon by YFCs in secondary schools where they exist, as well as problems facing the existing YFCs in the state.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Abia State of Nigeria, which is one of the nine states in the South—east agro-ecological zone of Nigeria. Abia State is situated in the rainforest zone, with a mean annual rainfall of about 2400mm, which is distributed over a 10-month period of February to December (Unanma, Odurukwe, Okereke and Ene 1985). Its soil types range from loamy through the red, deep soil rich in iron, and gray sandy soil to clay and gravel (Abia State Development Committee, 1991). Agriculture is the main occupation of the people of the state, as

about 70% of the population earns its living from it. The state produces such crops as cassava, yam, cocoyam, rice, plantain, banana, maize, palm produce, cocoa and rubber. The population of the state is estimated at 2,338,407, with youths accounting for about 45% (FOS, 1999). A list of secondary schools compiled from the State Ministry of Education (SME) showed that there were 63 secondary schools in Umuahia education zone, 59 in Aba zone and 64 in Ohafia zone. Using the simple random sampling technique, 30 secondary schools were randomly selected from each of the education zones. The most senior Agricultural Science teacher from each secondary school was purposively selected and interviewed. This gave a total of 90 respondents constituting the sample size. A structured interview schedule was used for the collection of relevant data from the respondents. Data were analyzed using percentages and mean scores.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Existence of YFCs programme in secondary schools in Abia State

Table 1 reveals that the young farmers’ clubs programme is in existence in about 27% of the secondary schools in Abia State. In Aba education zone, 13.3% of the secondary schools had YFCs, 5.5% had in Ohafia zone whereas in Umuahia zone 7.8% of the secondary schools had it. This means that majority (about 73%) of the secondary schools in the state did not have YFCs programme.

Table 1: Existence of YFCs programme in secondary schools in Abia State (N=90)

Category	Percentage			
	Aba zone	Ohafia zone	Umuahia zone	Total
Existence	13.3	5.5	7.8	26.6
Non-existence	20.0	27.8	25.8	73.4

Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondents according to reasons why YFCs were not in existence in secondary schools in Abia State (n=66)

Category	%*
Government-related	
Negative attitude of government towards YFCs in secondary schools	75.8
Lack of logistic support by government	80.3
Lack of rural youth agricultural extension personnel	51.5
Lack of legislation backing up YFCs in secondary schools	54.6
Inadequate number of agriculture teachers	51.5
School authorities-related	
Lack of interest by school principals	28.8
Lack of farmland	42.4
Lack of financial support by school authorities	68.2
Lack of farm input supply	75.8
Lack of student motivation by school principals	45.5

Agriculture teacher-related	
Lack of time	33.3
Lack of interest	24.2
No previous knowledge of YFCs programme by agriculture teacher	25.8
Lack of farming experience	21.2
Lack of empathy with rural life	21.2
Student-related	
Lack of interest from students	65.2
Lack of support from parents/guardians	63.6
Lack of time	51.5
Negative attitude towards agriculture as career by students	75.8
Lack of co-operation by students	74.2

Source: Field work, 2010.

*Multiple responses

Reasons why YFCs are not in existence in secondary schools

The reasons why YFCs were not in existence in secondary schools in Abia State were grouped into four, namely, government, school authorities, agriculture teacher and student-related reasons (Ajayi, 2006). As shown in Table 2, lack of logistic support by government ranked highest (80.3%) among government –related reasons. This was followed by negative attitude of government towards YFCs in secondary schools (75.8%), lack of legislative back-up for YFCs in secondary schools (54.6%), non-availability of rural youth agricultural extension personnel (51.5%) and inadequate number of professional agriculture teachers (51.5%). Lack of farm input supply ranked highest (75.8%) among school authorities-related reasons. This was followed by lack of financial support by school authorities (68.2%), lack of student motivation by school authorities (45.5%), lack of farm land (42.4%) and lack of interest by school principals (28.8%). Among agriculture teacher-related reasons, lack of time by agriculture teacher ranked highest (33.3%), followed by absence of previous knowledge of YFCs programme by agriculture teacher (25.8%), lack of interest (24.2%), as well as lack of farming experience (21.2%) and lack of empathy with rural life (21.2%). The student-related reasons had negative attitude towards agriculture as a career by students ranking highest (75.8%), followed by lack of co-operation by students (74.2%), lack of interest from students (65.2%), lack of support from parents/guardians (63.6%) and lack of time (51.5%).

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to problems facing YFCs in secondary schools in Abia State, Nigeria (n=24)

Problem	Mean(M) score	Overall level of effect
Government-related		
Negative attitude of government towards YFCs in secondary schools	2.42**	
Lack of logistic support from government	2.33**	
Non-availability of rural youth agricultural extension personnel	2.46**	2.33**
Lack of legislation backing YFCs in secondary schools	2.21**	

Inadequate number of agriculture teachers	2.25**	
School authorities-related		
Lack of interest on the part of school principal	2.00**	
Lack of farm land	2.17**	
Lack of financial support	2.13**	2.10**
Lack of farm input supply	2.21**	
Lack of students' motivation	2.00**	
Agriculture teacher-related		
Lack of time	2.00**	
Lack of interest	2.00**	
Having no previous knowledge of YFCs programme	2.00**	2.00**
Lack of farming experience	2.00**	
Having no empathy with rural life	2.00**	
Students-related		
Lack of interest on the part of students	2.21**	
Lack of support by parents/guardians	2.04**	
Lack of time on the part of students	2.08**	2.10**
Negative attitude towards agriculture as career	2.17**	
Lack of co-operation on the part of students	2.04**	

**=*High contribution*

Projects embarked upon by YFCs in secondary schools

Members of the Young Farmers Club carry out various kinds of projects. These projects form the core of the YFCs programme (Ajayi, 2006). They can be carried out individually or in groups. Projects examined in this study were Agriculture, Home economics, Handicrafts, Educational and Managerial skills. As shown in Table 3, the projects embarked upon by the YFCs in secondary schools in Abia State were Agriculture, Home economics, Handicrafts, Educational projects and managerial skills. Under the Agriculture project, crop production had the highest (100.0%) level of participation by the YFCs. This was followed by horticulture and poultry production, each with 37.5% as level of participation, while piggery recorded the least level, 8.4%. In Home economics project, food preparation had the highest (83.3%) level of participation, followed by nutrition (58.3%), home improvement, (33.3%), and cloth making (29.2%). Under Handicrafts, broom preparation had the highest (41.7%) level of participation, followed by basket making (37.5%), drawing (29.2%), weaving and carpentry (16.7%), and brick layering (12.5%). Educational projects had debate (62.5%) as the activity mostly participated in by the YFCs. This was followed by career talks (58.3%), field trips (50.0%) and tours (25.0%). The activity with the highest level of participation under Managerial skills was record keeping (45.8%). This was followed by leadership development (33.3%), thrift (29.2%) and principles of accounts (20.8%). The activities most frequently embarked upon by the YFCs under each project were crop production (100.0%) under Agriculture, food preparation (83.3%) under Home economics, broom preparation (41.7%) under Handicrafts, debates (62.5%) under Educational projects and record keeping (45.8%) under Managerial skills. Overall, the activity with highest level of participation by the YFCs was crop production (100.0%). This was closely followed by food preparation (83.3%). The reasons for this situation may be that these activities were easy to understand and carry out, and that the materials needed to carry them out were easily available (van den Ban and Hawkins, 1996).

Problems facing existing YFCs in secondary schools

The problems facing existing YFCs in secondary schools in Abia State were also grouped into four, namely, government, school authorities, agriculture teacher and student-related (Ajayi, 2006). As shown in Table 3, non-availability of rural youth agricultural extension personnel made the highest (M=2.46) contribution towards government-related problems facing existing YFCs in Abia State secondary schools. This was followed by negative attitude of government towards YFCs in secondary schools (M=2.42), lack of logistic support from government (M=2.33), inadequate number of agriculture teachers (M=2.25) and lack of legislative back-up for YFCs in secondary schools (M=2.21). government-related problems has M=2.33 as the overall level of effect, implying that it has a high contribution towards the problems facing existing YFCs in the state secondary schools. This is in agreement with Ajayi (2006) who found a similar high contribution of government to the dwindling nature of YFCs in Ondo State of Nigeria. Among school authorities-related problems, lack of farmland made the highest contribution (M=2.17). this was followed by lack of financial support (M=2.13), lack of input supply (M=2.13), lack of interest by school principals (M=2.00) and lack of student motivation (M=2.00). With overall level of effect of M=2.10, school authorities-related problems made a high contribution to the problems facing YFCs in secondary schools in Abia State. This is in agreement with the findings of Ajayi (2006).

All the problems under agriculture teacher-related problems had equal mean value of M=2.00. The overall level of effect was M=2.00. Thus its contribution to the problems of YFCs in secondary schools in Abia State was high, and at variance with Ajayi (2006) who found a low contribution by agriculture science teachers to the dwindling nature of YFCs programme in Ondo State of Nigeria. The student-related problems had lack of interest, with mean score of M=2.21, as the highest contributor to problems facing YFCs in secondary schools in the state. This was followed by negative attitude towards farming as a career (M=2.17), lack of time (M=2.08), lack of support by parents/guardians (M=2.04) and lack of co-operation (M=2.04). The overall effect was M=2.10, implying that it made a high contribution to the problems affecting organization of YFCs in secondary schools in the state. This finding also differed from that of Ajayi (2006). The foregoing analysis showed that government-related problems made highest (M=2.33) contributions towards problems confronting YFCs in secondary schools in Abia State. This is so because YFCs programmes the world over are sponsored by government (Ajayi, 2006). Next in effect were school authorities- and student-related problems, each with mean score of 2.10 and, lastly, agriculture teacher-related problems (M=2.00). A similar trend was observed among the reasons why YFCs were not in the secondary schools. This implies that resolution of the government-related problems would minimize the existence of the other problems and, subsequently, lead to increased organization of YFCs programme in secondary in the state.

CONCLUSION

As shown by the study, majority of the secondary schools in Abia State did not have functional YFCs programme. The reasons for this situation, as well as problems facing the organization of YFCs in Abia State, were related to government, school authorities, agriculture teachers and students. The government-related problems predominated, showing that the government has a major role to play in alleviating the problem. The YFCs embarked upon such projects as Agriculture, Home economics, Handicrafts, Educational and Managerial skills, with crop production under Agriculture and food preparation under Home economics as the activities

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mostly engaged in by the YFCs. On the basis of these findings, it is recommended that the government makes it mandatory for each secondary school to organize YFCs programme, and create a fund similar to the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) for provision of logistic support.

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