ASSESSMENT OF YOUTHS’ PARTICIPATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract: In view of the need to harness the potentials of youths in developing rural areas, this study assessed youths’ participation in rural development interventions in South Western Nigeria. The study was designed to identify programmes that have taken place, youths’ participation in such programmes, their major constraints and their attitude towards rural development interventions. Three states were randomly selected from the six states of southwestern Nigeria. Two Local Government Areas were selected from each state and a community was selected from each Local Government Area, while 20 respondents were selected from each rural community making a total of 120 respondents. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential analysis. Results indicate that; Youths participate more in agricultural related rural development programmes. Youths’ constraints to participation in rural development programmes are low financial status (42.5%), lack of cooperation among the youths (15.8%) and poor educational background (30.8%). Inferential analysis showed that age ($X^2 = 34.502, P = 0.001$), sex ($X^2 = 21.981, p = 0.034$) and income ($r = 0.631, p = 0.021$) can influence youths participation in rural development programmes. There is a positive and significant relationship between youths attitude and participation in rural development interventions ($r = 0.541, p = 0.004$).

Keywords: Rural youths, Participation, Development Interventions, Attitude

INTRODUCTION

Every nation across the globe regardless of classification by international organization is craving for development. Nigeria as a nation is not an exception to this. Development is growth plus change. Growth is a sustained qualitative increase in country’s per capita output accompanied by expansion in its labour force, capital and value of trade (Jhingan, 2001). Development is a qualitative change in economic worth, goods and productivity and the upward movement of entire societal system (Awe, 2006). It is also derived from the effort or abilities of man to harness the resources of nature (Land) using his inventiveness bearing the risk not only for current sustenance but also for the improvement of living standard (Nnadi, 2006).

Most of the major development that have taken place in the southwestern rural areas of the country were accomplished by the government, but most of these developmental activities were fast tracked and catalyzed by the mobilization of the rural youths. Apart from the action of youths in informing the government about the major problems that hampered the development of their regions, they were also involved and took active parts in some minor developmental activities in their localities (Jibowo, 2005) such as building town halls, formation of vigilante group, erecting pipe borne water facilities, digging of drainage channels etc.

A case of study is that of the construction pedestrian bridge by the youths of Tede and Irawo Owode in Shaki East Local Government Area of Oyo State. This bridge has been reported to hasten economic activities of the two regions (Nigeria Tribune, 2009).

Rural youths, sometimes are involved in minor developmental programmes in their areas and on
the other hand complement government’s programmes by providing labour for a wide variety of activities. They receive farm information and in some cases, assist rural dwellers in analyzing innovations. Israel and Ilvento, (1992) reported that if rural youths are omitted from being involved in rural development interventions on the basis of their age it will unnecessarily limits a community’s capacity to solve local problems. By increasing rural youths’ participation in decision-making, the traditional relationships between adults and youths working together as active members of a team can be enhanced (Adeyemi, 1991). Balogun (2006) reported that school-based community development project can meet the information needs of the community, and lay the foundation for development involved and effective citizen participation. The question now is ‘who are the youths?’

Youth is the state of being young. It is a transitional period in personality development that bridges the years between late childhood and adulthood (D’ souza, 1970). The age bracket varies among authorities. It can be from ten to twenty years (Shingi et al., 1980) and ten to thirty years. In some societies, as long as one remains a bachelor or spinster, one is a youth! Youths possess unique capabilities, dynamism, strength, adventure and ambition (Udah, 2001; Waldie, 2004, Akwiwu et al., 2005).

Though youths have contributed greatly to rural development, the fold and scope of their involvement have not been scientifically ascertained. More so, studies in the past have not addressed the determinance of rural youths’ participation in rural development, rather, efforts were made at examining how to harness their potentials.

Despite the bounty natural resources that are found in the rural areas, most of them are yet to be harnessed. For instance, most of the lands that are rich in nutrients are yet to be cultivated due to poor involvement of rural youths in agriculture.

Youths’ participation in rural development in south western Nigeria should be a major concern. Government always shows nonchalant attitude towards developing rural areas which has resulted into massive migration of rural youths to urban centers. This is because rural youths felt they are deprived of necessary basic social amenities which are lacking in the rural areas. Development status in rural areas is still below average in Nigeria and youths’ participation in rural development intervention is highly needed.

Rural areas have been noted to be the food basket of each state in the country which equally has impact on the economy. Hence, there is need to make an integrated and collaborative approach in developing the rural areas by harnessing the potentials of both the government and rural youths.

This study was conceived to assess rural youths’ participation in rural development interventions in south western region of Nigeria. The study was designed to identify socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, identify programmes that have taken place in their communities. identify constraints to youths’ participation and to determine factors that can affect youths’ participation in the programmes.

METHODOLOGY

The South West lies between 3°E and 6°E of the longitude and also between 6°N and 9°N of the latitude. It transverses six of the thirty-six states making up the Federal Republic of Nigeria including Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, Ondo, Ogun, and Lagos States with estimated population of 50 million people. The region hosts over eighty-five different ethnic groups speaking about two hundred and fifty dialects across about three hundred communities.
The target population of the study comprised youths within the age range of 18 to 30 years. A multi-stage random sampling procedure was used to select the respondents. Three out of six states within the south west region were randomly selected for the study. These states are: - Oyo, Ondo and Ogun States. Two Local Government Areas were selected from each state and a rural community from each Local Government Area while twenty people were randomly selected and a total of 120 respondents were interviewed. A structured interview schedule was used for collecting data for the study. Data were analyzed using frequency count, percentages, mean, median and standard deviation while inferential analysis was done using Chi-Square and correlation analysis.

Socio-economic characteristics

From Table 1, 78.5% of the respondents were aged between 21 and 30 years old while 21.5% were below 21 years of age. This is due to the fact the study focused on the youths in the study area. Most respondents (65.8%) were male and single while 41.7% and 54.2% belonged to Islamic and Christianity religions respectively. About 58.0% had secondary education while 28.3% had post secondary education. More than one third (38.3%) of the respondents were still in various post secondary institutions pursuing post secondary educational certificates. Also about one third (31.7%) had no definite income generating activities while 32.5% earned below N100,000.00 annually and 55.8% belonged to one social organization or the other.

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socioeconomic characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 21 and 30</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>78.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participation in rural development interventions

Figure 1 below shows that 55.0% of the respondents had participated in rural development programmes involving crop production while 48.0% had participated in programmes involving livestock production. About 40.0% of the respondents indicated that they had participated in rural development programmes such as vigilante, campaign against HIV/AIDS and communal labour. Other programmes respondents participated were campaign for breast feeding (30.0%), adult literacy (35.0%), computer literacy (25.0%), construction of roads (27.0%) and construction of town halls (20.0%). This implies that if rural youths are motivated and encouraged they can be used for rural development programmes and their potentials can be channelled towards rural
development interventions since the old people have less energy for such programmes.

Fig 1: Participation of Rural Youths in Development Programmes

Constraints to youths’ participation in rural development interventions

From Table 2 below, 42.5% of the respondents indicated that lack of financial support was the major constraint to rural development interventions. Other major constraints identified by respondents included poor education (30.8%) and lack of cooperation among the youths (15.8%). This finding implies that there should be financial support, motivation and adequate educational facilities for youths so that they can be effectively used for rural development programmes.

Table 2: Distribution of Constraints to Rural Youths Participation in Development Programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constraints</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial problem</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of cooperation among youths</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor education</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of encouragement from elders</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor leadership skill among youths</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field survey, 2011

Relationship between socioeconomic characteristics and participation

The result of the inferential statistical analysis reveals that there were significant relationship between respondents’ age ($X^2 = 34.502$), sex ($X^2 = 21.981$) as well as income ($r= 0.631$) and participation in rural development programme. This implies that respondents’ age, sex and how much they earn can influence their participation in rural development programmes. It can be further inferred that age of a youth will determine whether he or she will participate in rural development interventions. When an individual is growing old, he or she might be more occupied and this will hamper the participation of such individual in community development interventions. Also sex of individual will determine how far such individual can participate in rural development interventions. Culturally, females are to carry out household chores and other activities in the homes so they will
have less time for community development programmes. Money is needed for almost everything and so when an individual has more annual income he or she can easily participate in development programmes even when he or she does not have the time, money can be sent for such programmes.

Also positive and significant relationship exist between youths attitude and participation in rural development interventions (r = 0.541, p = 0.004). This implies that if the attitude of youths is improved it can lead to greater participation in rural development interventions.

CONCLUSION
It can be concluded that youths from south western region of Nigeria participate in rural development interventions such as agricultural development programmes, campaign against HIV/AIDs, and campaign for breast feeding, adult literacy, road and town hall constructions, vigilante programmes among others in their respective communities. Age, sex and annual income can influence youths’ participation in rural development interventions.

Recommendation
It is recommended from the study that rural youths should be adequately empowered financially to be able to participate more in rural development interventions. The empowerment should come in form of provision of financial support, educational facilities and youths involvement at the decision making stage of community development interventions.

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