



Youth Agripreneurship: A Driver for Sustainable Economic Development in Nigeria

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Abstract— This review examines the role of governmental agricultural policies and programs, and targeted interventions in fostering youth agripreneurship as a driver for sustainable economic development in Nigeria. Accordingly, the paper analyzes the effectiveness of existing programs, policies, and institutional frameworks designed to support young people's engagement in the agricultural sector. Therefore, having identified and reviewed the best practices, gaps, and areas for improvement in policy design and implementation, it was however noticed that some key areas such as access to finance, land access, skills development, market access, and technology transfer need to be refocused. Hence, it concludes by offering specific policy recommendations to strengthen the enabling environment for youth agripreneurship and maximize its contribution to Nigeria's sustainable economic development, among others.

Keywords— Youth Agripreneurship, Driver, Sustainable, Economic Development, Nigeria, Agricultural entrepreneurship, Youth empowerment, Food security, Policy, Unemployment, Rural development.

I. INTRODUCTION

The current global economic crisis has forced many nations, including Nigeria, to consider unconventional approaches to economic diversification. Population growth, climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and violent conflicts are some of the main causes of this economic crisis (Iwuagwu, 2021). Because the world is committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations by 2030, especially goals 1 and 2 (reducing poverty and hunger) and the eighth goal, which points to sustainable economic development, the trend of economic diversification has therefore been a major source of concern among these countries. Nigeria, one of the most troubled economies in the world, has been rocked by its over-reliance on oil as a monoculture; therefore, a strong economic diversification plan is essential, according to Donatus et al. (2019). According to Isukul et al. (2019), human capital development is crucial for substantial economic diversification in a country like Nigeria.

Before gaining independence, Nigeria's economy was based on agriculture and had a strong GDP and foreign exchange, being the most populous black country in the world and the most densely populated country in Africa. When oil was discovered in the early 1970s, however, the nation ignored its thriving agricultural industry because of some political machinations (Onuka, 2017). Given that it is an agrarian country with about 85 million hectares of arable land, only less than 10% of which is under cultivation (NBS, 2015), Nigeria has the capacity to feed itself and export the excess for foreign exchange, but it still imports a lot of food (Ajekwe & Ibiamke, 2020). Nevertheless, despite the ongoing neglect, the sector is especially well-known for providing jobs, foreign exchange, and raw materials for industries, as well as meeting the nation's growing population needs without needlessly relying on the importation of necessities (Jamal et al., 2018).

According to Adeyanju (2017), the sector has also been reported by various researchers to hold high employment potentials (70%) for the populace, provided that it is supported by adequate investments and a conducive legal environment with

appropriate policy framework. Therefore, it is imperative to equip young people with entrepreneurial orientation in order to help themselves and become employers of labor in the future.

Undoubtedly, Nigeria has the capacity to actively contribute to its agricultural growth in order to achieve sustained food security and wealth creation, having a sizable youth population. However, these resources have not been harnessed and as such they experience a high unemployment rate as a result of limited options in their immediate doorsteps, which mostly leads to poverty (Kabiru et al., 2021). As a result, many of them turn to criminal activities such as kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery, political thuggery, and cybercrime in response to these immense problems, while others become depressed or hopeless (Surajo & Karim, 2016). Given this, the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2021) reported that the country's youth unemployment rate is 42.5%, which frequently leads to a variety of social ills in society as they become vulnerable to its detrimental effects, such as low self-esteem, a lack of skills, and poverty, which can result in the waste of vast human resources. Nonetheless, it is clear from the aforementioned submissions that encouraging young people to work together is crucial, especially in agriculture, which has historically had a low level of accommodation, so they can contribute their fair share to the long-term economic growth of our beloved country.

One promising way to solve the issues of unemployment, poverty, and food security in emerging nations including Nigeria is through youth agripreneurship. Young people benefit economically, socially, and psychologically from it, and it promotes sustainable development by fostering innovation and employment creation (Subhiksha & Vennila, 2024). In line with the foregoing, Ouko et al. (2022) believed that young people's involvement in agribusiness may boost food production and address unemployment, especially in rural areas where a large population is always assumed. However, a large number of educated young people thought that agriculture was an unappealing job choice because they associated it with antiquated methods and an unfavorable way of life (Ajekwe & Ibiamke, 2020). A multi-stakeholder approach is required to dispel these misconceptions and encourage youth involvement in agripreneurship, as will the provision of entrepreneurial education, training, start-up capital, and the establishment of agricultural incubation centers (Ouko et al., 2022). The development of human capital and the resolution of problems such as corruption and poor planning are essential to the nation's capacity to reap the benefits of its population (Pontianus & O.E.D, 2021).

Sustainable economic development, according to Kruja (2013), refers to a key idea for the twenty-first century which seeks to satisfy current needs without endangering the capacity of future generations to satisfy theirs. Additionally, the concept integrates economic, social, and environmental performance with an emphasis on human welfare and fair economic growth distribution. Thus, this can play a major role in achieving sustainable economic development in Nigeria, especially by engaging the youth in agribusinesses who are the nation's engine room. Therefore, this paper aimed at reviewing the role of youth agripreneurship in driving sustainable economic development in Nigeria, putting into consideration the challenges and opportunities.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has several associative concepts such as: having an "entrepreneurial mind," an "entrepreneurial spirit," "being passionate about one's undertaking," "taking financial risks in the hope of making profit," "bringing about beneficial innovations and creative transformations," "increasing productivity"; "creating employment for self and others," "making improvements to one's standard of living in an economy," "eradicating poverty through legal and socially acceptable means," among others. Therefore, agricultural entrepreneurship/agripreneurship results from the associative concepts and ideas of entrepreneurship that are applied to agriculture. Hence, the concept of agripreneurship, according to Nwibo et al. (2016), is perceived to be the combination of agriculture and business in a profitable way. It is however, considered a process of determining the farmers' creativeness, imaginative capacity, preparing them to take calculated risks, and constantly looking for methods to enhance and extend their farm business to make money/profit. In the same vein, SIANI (2017) viewed agripreneurship as an effective way of getting rid of poverty or its reduction as it enables farmers to produce surpluses for sale and can involve the whole value chain, hence, sustaining food production.

Therefore, those who undertake business activities within the agricultural value chain with an entrepreneurial spirit are agricultural entrepreneurs/agripreneurs. In that regard, agripreneurs are those set of people who will initiate and accelerate transformative agricultural changes that raise productivity to a level of reducing real food prices, yet boosting rural incomes and creating jobs, and making financial profit from performing the activity or activities in any stage(s) of the agricultural value chain.

III. OVERVIEW OF THE AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

In an effort by the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to reduce youth redundancy by boosting their productive capacities and to make them self-reliant, several agricultural empowerment programs have been put in place. These programs include; Farm Settlement Scheme (FSS) of 1967, National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), 1972, Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB), 1973 to date (now Bank of Agriculture), Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), 1975 to date, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), 1976 to 1979, River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), 1977 to date, Green Revolution (GR), 1979 to 1983, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), 1988 to 1993, National Agriculture, Land Development Authority (NALDA), 1986 to date, National Agricultural Insurance Corporation (NAIC), 1987 to date, National Fadama Development Projects (NFDP), 1990 to date, Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA), 2011 and Anchor Borrowers' Program of the Central Bank of Nigeria 2015 to 2021 (Cokes et al., 2017). Growth Enhancement Support Scheme (GESS) provides subsidized inputs to small-scale farmers, enhancing farm output despite challenges like politicization and delayed input delivery (Michael et al., 2018). The Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk-Sharing System for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL) aims to de-risk agricultural lending, while the Agricultural Transformation Agenda Support Program focuses on infrastructure improvement and job creation (Ntukidiem Inimfon Imaenyin, 2015).

In addition to that, non-governmental organizations and other philanthropic sets of individuals also keyed into these empowerment programs by empowering the youth with different sets of agricultural skills with the aim of making them important personalities in the society. Similarly, a replica of such a program was carried out by the TETFund Center of Excellence for Teaching Agribusiness Skills at FCE, Yola, for a period of one month. Where participants were trained in different agricultural skills such as poultry, feed formulation, crop production, fish farming, etc. and were all given a stipend as a start-up and equally certificated.

However, given the above overview of the bold steps taken by several governments in power, individuals and government affiliates to see to the youth capacity development toward increased food production in the country and, by extension, economic development sustainability of the country. Still, the rate of youth unemployment is on the increase in the country, with its attendant massive food insecurity and poverty among the populace. Therefore, this advocates urgent need for more effective policies and programs that can engage young people in meaningful agricultural practices. By fostering innovation and providing access to resources, governments can empower the youth to become active contributors to both food security and economic stability.

IV. ROLES OF YOUTH AGRIPRENEURSHIP ON SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A promising approach to fostering sustainable economic growth and national development is empowering young people in agribusiness, which blends entrepreneurship and agriculture (Arumugam & Manida, 2023; Subhiksha & Vennila, 2024). Arumugam and Manida added that by encouraging eco-friendly behaviors and boosting regional economies, agriprenurship aligns with sustainable development objectives. Furthermore, it encourages creativity and the development of societal value by empowering young people to create their own employment possibilities (Subhiksha & Vennila, 2024). To ensure the successful implementation of the aforementioned programs, they also suggest a multi-stakeholder approach that incorporates government assistance, entrepreneurial education, and start-up capital. These, however, are in line with the conclusions of Ouko et al. (2022), who pointed out that young people's involvement in agribusiness has the potential to boost food production and lower poverty in the Kenyan Republic. They went on to say that by encouraging youth agriprenurship, nations have a better chance of advancing towards achieving sustainable development goals and converting smallholder agriculture into a contemporary, economically focused industry.

Based on the foregoing, recent research emphasizes the value of young people's orientation in agriprenurship, showing that youth intentions to pursue agriprenurship are positively influenced by favorable economic perspectives of agriculture, secondary school agricultural instruction, and financial support (Magagula & Tsvakirai, 2020). Agribusiness, according to Radha & Renjini (2019), includes, among other things, horticulture, dairying, apiculture, poultry, food processing, feed formulation, snailry, and nursery farming which particularly are highly profitable. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that agricultural training initiatives, like Nigeria's Fadama Graduate Unemployed Youth and Women Support (GUYS) greatly enhance young agripreneurs' success as indicated by their average revenue from agribusiness ventures (Adeyanju et al., 2021).

Unemployment causes a lot of societal issues, and young people are particularly susceptible to its negative impacts, which include poverty, marginalization, low self-esteem, a lack of skills, and the waste of vast human resources (Obayelu, 2019). Therefore, these unemployment issues can be handled by empowering and training youth through agricultural development

programs. Through agricultural entrepreneurship, they will be able to work as independent contractors or employers in the agricultural industry and earn money on their own (Agu, 2013). Nwibo et al. (2016) stated that the problem of underemployment, unemployment, and disguised employment has created a gap between the "haves" and "have nots" in the population, which must be closed and as such agribusiness can play a vital role. Agripreneurship is the outcome of a shift in agriculture's perception as an enterprise that combines entrepreneurship with agriculture (Uche, 2018). The agriculture sector's reform will contribute to eradicating the negative perception of poverty that industrialization has produced. The majority of countries have been burdened by the issue of unemployment, which this will help to resolve (Ripoll et al., 2017).

However, given the foregoing, a similar program may help our young people become more productive, which would contribute to the nation's long-term economic growth. This method encourages creativity and entrepreneurship in addition to equipping youth with the required abilities and information. We can build a more robust economy that benefits all by investing in their potential. Additionally, cooperation among the public and private sectors will be essential in supplying the tools and assistance required to develop this talent. By working together, we can create a strong foundation that supports lifelong learning and adjusts to the constantly shifting needs of the labor market.

V. CHALLENGES OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA'S AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

Although several opportunities exist in youth agripreneurship, internal and external barriers hinder its success among the youth. As such, they often find it difficult to effectively participate in the programs designed and implemented by both the government and non-governmental organizations with the sole aim of making them productive, hence, accelerating the country's food production capacities for sustainable economic development. According to Ouko et al. (2022), these challenges include; negative perception of agricultural activities, lack or inadequate skills, limited access to infrastructure, lack of access to land, finance, and information, networking and mentoring, insufficient market information, negative effects of climate change, low levels of value-addition, inadequate policies supporting youth agripreneurship, and poor markets.

According to Afande et al. (2015), most farmers have trouble getting loans from financial institutions because they don't have the collateral that the lenders require. As a result, young people, especially those from rural areas, are never able to get the money they need, which limits their ability to invest in agriculture (FAO, 2014). Because of this, young people are always dependent on traditional finance sources like friends, family, clubs, support groups, etc. for saving and lending, or on contractor loans for insurance or agricultural inputs (Demirguc-Kunt et al., 2015).

Another challenge is the negative perception of agricultural activities among the said youth. This is seen as one of the most difficult challenges in Nigeria, where the youth, particularly those in urban areas, perceived agriculture as a venture for the less privileged individuals (Ajekwe & Ibiamke, 2020). Rural residents, who make up a greater portion of the nation's youth, frequently migrate to cities in search of better opportunities, if applicable. According to Okello (2014), in the majority of Sub-Saharan African nations, schools penalize students with agricultural tasks, which exacerbates their unfavorable opinion. In their contribution, Mugisha & Nkwasi (2014) provided a very good example of Uganda, where youth still find agricultural-related activities unappealing in part because schools employ them as a form of discipline and reprimand for misbehavior. By implication, this influences how young people view agribusiness and may lessen their excitement for it.

Youth engagement in agripreneurship is hampered by inadequate policies. According to a 2018 United Nations report, young rural women's and men's opinions are frequently ignored by the appropriate authorities, which mostly leads to subpar execution of the agricultural policy-making process in the SSA. Youths also often miss out on involvement in policy forums due to a lack of negotiation strength and experience. Laxity and a failure to engage young people have been seen as a deterrent to promoting agriculture (World Bank, 2016). Geza et al. (2022) also discovered that youth participation in agricultural and rural development projects is restricted by a lack of inclusivity in the creation and application of policies.

The land tenure system is another factor contributing to the youth's distaste for agriculture, and it still plagues the majority of African youth. While some young people are interested in engaging in agricultural ventures, their hopes are frequently dashed by the country's rigid tenure system. To support the aforementioned, Njeru & Gichimu (2014) believed that land is a valuable resource in agriculture, and that having access to it encourages one to work in the field. According to Justine et al. (2012), while parents typically hold the title to land for agricultural production, youths may also have access to small parcels of land that are unsuitable for commercial and large-scale agriculture. As a result, policymakers must immediately devise strategies to support and facilitate youths' access to land.

Another problem identified with encouraging youth agripreneurship is a lack of expertise. According to Gitau, as mentioned in Ouko et al. (2022), most young people are receptive to new ideas and are able to try out new methods, therefore they can overcome the majority of the obstacles that agricultural production faces. They can utilize their thoughts to guide the adoption of new technologies, pest management, and genetic enhancement in order to increase agricultural productivity. Upon discovering that the young people engaged in agriculture are rural and less educated, Addo (2018) argues that youth involvement in the agro-food system should be more inclusive.

VI. CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that, considering the position occupied by the youth in our immediate societies and the role they can play for the economic development of the nation if empowered, youth agripreneurship will not just be looked at as a mere solution to youth unemployment; but a strategic pathway to building a resilient and diversified economy in Nigeria. Therefore, empowering young people to become innovators and leaders in the agricultural sector can help the nation to address her critical challenges such as food insecurity, poverty, and climate change, among others.

However, sustainable economic development hinges on the ability to create an ecosystem that supports youth agripreneurs, fostering innovation, promoting sustainable practices, and ensuring equitable access to resources. Moving forward, a collaborative approach involving government, private sector, academia, and civil society is essential to cultivate a thriving youth-driven agricultural sector that contributes to Nigeria's long-term prosperity and sustainable development goals—a quest for all the members of the United Nations.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper puts forward the following recommendations:

- 1) **Youth Reorientation:** Youth should be reoriented on the embedded benefits of agricultural profession to them and to the society at large.
- 2) **Youth Inclusion in Policy:** Efforts should always be made in integrating views of the youth in drafting, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the policies and programs related to agriculture.
- 3) **Dedicated Youth Agripreneurship Fund:** The need to create a specialized dedicated fund for youth agribusinesses with accessible financing.
- 4) **Constant Training and Mentorship:** The need for implementing constant practical trainings and mentorship programs for skill development among the youth as well as follow-up by the officials.
- 5) **Secure Land Access:** Simplify the bureaucracy for land access and tenure for young farmers.
- 6) **Digital Agriculture Promotion:** Expand technology adoption particularly among the rural populace where agricultural activities are given more priorities.
- 7) **Strengthen Market Linkages:** Improve market access and value chain development within which the young aspiring agripreneurs can showcase their entrepreneurial skills.
- 8) **Supportive Policy Framework:** There is also the need to create enabling policies and regulations for youth agripreneurship to thrive.
- 9) **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track the effectiveness of youth agripreneurship programs.
- 10) **Public-Private Partnerships:** Foster partnerships between government, private sector, and civil society to support youth agripreneurship initiatives.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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