

STRATEGIC MEDIA ADVOCACY IN ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ACTIVE YOUTHS' PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *Our aim in this paper was to propose the means of achieving sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria through strategic media advocacy and youths' participation in order to promote Nigeria's economic indices for enduring national growth. To achieve the purpose of this study, three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Ex-post facto research design was adopted involving quantitative and qualitative methods for the study. A sample of one hundred and eighty youths across the eighteen local government areas of Cross River State were used for the quantitative study while three focus group discussion comprising different sizes in each of the three Senatorial Districts of Cross River State and in-depth interview with three key informants were held. The selection of the youths for the quantitative study was done through the Multistage sampling technique in the study area. While the purposive non-probability sampling technique was used to select members of the focus group discussion and in-dept interview. The instruments used for data collection were questionnaire, focus group discussion and in-depth interview with key informants. The instruments were validated by experts in social research in communication. The reliability estimate of the instruments was established using Cronbach Alpha with a coefficient of .79. The data was analysed using Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient as well as descriptive and inferential statistics. Critical analytical technique was employed as an approach to the discussion. The theories of the Diffusion of innovations and Social Marketing served as theoretical framework. Findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between strategic media advocacy and youth participation in agriculture and subsequent sustainable economic development in Nigeria. The study also revealed that media advocacy has significant influence towards youth participation in agriculture in Nigeria. The study equally revealed that there are no significant challenges to effective youths' participation in Agriculture where strategic media advocacy is employed.*

KEYWORDS: Sustainable Agriculture, Strategic Media Advocacy, Sustainable Economy

Introduction

The oil boom of the 1970s led to the neglect of agriculture which was at Nigeria's independence, a critical sector in the nation's economy. The neglect which was in favor of potential unhealthy dependence on crude oil revenue, has led to ever increasing search for diminishing white collar jobs resulting in current youth unemployment in Nigeria. According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO):

Youths in Nigeria no longer perceive career in agriculture as remunerative or prestigious venture. Agricultural development is an integral part of national

development (Daneji, 2011). Agriculture provides employment opportunity, raw materials for Agro-allied industries; contributes significantly to the Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and it is one of the major sources of Foreign Exchange Earnings for Nigeria. Until the later part of the 1970s, Agriculture used to be the mainstay of the Nigeria's economy with the sector contributing more than half of the country's GDP and about 70 percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings (Akpan, 2012 & Yakubu, 2015). According to Gbaiye, et al (2013), Nigeria could be considered as an Agricultural economy during the first decade after independence because agriculture served as the engine of growth to the overall Nigerian economy. They aver that "during this period, Nigeria was the world's second largest producer of cocoa, the largest exporter and producer of palm product and also a major exporter of leading commodities such as cotton, groundnut, rubber, hide and skin." Surprisingly today, the tide has turned the other way round as Nigeria is now trying to grapple with food insecurity even as it struggles to feed itself.

Statement of the Problem

It is disheartening to observe that a country that was once the major exporter of Agricultural products is today a net importer of essential foodstuff she formally exported.

The problem of this study, therefore, is that the mass media which are supposed to play the crucial role of reinvigorating youths' interest and subsequent participation in agriculture through strategic advocacy have not lived up to this expectation; or what explanation should we advance for the neglect of agriculture! One critical question therefore, begging for urgent response is: Where did we get it wrong in agricultural development as Nigerians? The answer is not farfetched –over dependence on oil revenue without any strategic information to reassure the relevance of other sectors, particularly, to the detriment of agricultural development is probably, the major reason. The agricultural sector began to suffer neglect with the discovery of crude oil. The oil boom of the 1970s accompanied by huge attention in the media led to the neglect of this critical sector of the economy in favor of an unhealthy dependence on crude oil revenue. Given its high return in foreign exchange earnings, oil became the mainstay of the Nigerian economy and the agricultural sector began to decline. According to Gbaiye, et al (2013), the major cause of this development was "the oil price shocks of 1973-1974 which resulted in large receipts of foreign exchange earnings by Nigeria and the neglect of agriculture." This also made Nigeria a mono-economy nation, solely depending on oil as the major source of foreign exchange earnings. In fact, crude oil proceeds have been the major source of financing the annual national budget. Over the years, oil price benchmark in the international market has been the major yardstick for determining the national budget.

However, given today's ailing national economy and the dwindling oil pricing in the international market, it is apparent that Nigeria can no longer depend solely on the oil revenue. There is a dire need for economic diversification; and agriculture, on which the Nigerian economy once depended upon, remains the best alternative to crude oil. It is high time Nigerians and the government of Nigeria began to consider investing in critical agricultural sub-sectors in order to save the country from being plunged into serious economic and food crisis. Government should begin to put in place effective agricultural interventions and initiatives that will make the sector more robust and attractive once again, most especially to the youths. The question is how could this be done? We firmly believe in this paper that strategic media advocacy can do the miracle.

Therefore, the focus of this paper is to assess the role of strategic media advocacy in enhancing sustainable Economic development in Nigeria. Attention is made to how media advocacy can be used to enhance active youths' participation in Agricultural activities in Nigeria. According to Ajani, Mgbenka and Onah (2015), "majority of agricultural policies and programmes formulated in Nigeria do not consider constraints confronting youths involved in Agricultural development". They outlined lack of interest as a result of drudgery in farm operations, lack of competitive markets for agricultural products, inadequate finance/credit facilities, among others, as problems confronting youth's involvement in agriculture in Nigeria. Strategic media advocacy or support of agricultural initiatives is germane to creating wide sensitization, engender project acceptance, change youths' negative behaviour and attitude toward agriculture, as well as, influence key government agricultural policies. In particular, media advocacy in the context of this work is bi-directional – in the direction of changing the attitude of the youths toward agriculture and influencing key government policies on Agricultural development.

The paper proposes practical approaches toward attaining sustainable agricultural development and domestic food-sufficiency for the teeming Nigerian populace. The proposed approach, which centres on Strategic Media Advocacy, is aimed at boosting active youths' participation in agriculture, thereby enhancing the economic growth of the nation.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to sensitize the youths in Nigeria in general and Cross River State in particular, where the study is set to engage in agricultural programmes for food sufficiency and for export.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine the role of strategic communication in enhancing agriculture in order to achieve sustainable economic development in Nigeria
2. Examine the place of media advocacy in engendering youths' participation in Agriculture
3. Identify key challenges to effective youths' participation in Agriculture and how to overcome them through strategic media advocacy.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are to guide this study:

1. Strategic communication does not play significant role in youths' participation in agriculture and subsequent sustainable economic development in Nigeria.
2. Media advocacy does not have significant influence in youths' participation in Agriculture in Nigeria.
3. There are no significant challenges to effective youths' participation in Agriculture where strategic media advocacy is used.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL REVIEW

Strategies for Communicating Information for Youths' Participation in Agriculture

Strategic communication is an orchestrated use of channels of communication to move and influence public policy or to promote an agenda (www.google.com). To be effective, communication strategies must *have* a combination of various channels. According to Strong, Lee and Wang (1997), poor information quality can create chaos. According to Ladzani (2001), the priority ranking of the needs of youths' participation in agriculture clearly puts information provision at the top of the list of services to be provided. Youths participation in agriculture is hampered by an "information-poor" environment. In most developing countries, negative impression about the role of agriculture in individual development in general and youth participation in agriculture in particular, are not communicated, effectively (Ladzani, 2001). The youths' participation in agriculture performs better in information-rich environments (Moyi, 2000 and Ladzani 2001). In looking at the challenges, we need to consider them from the three core components i.e. information players, challenges faced and strategies (interventions) so as to achieve quality information (Matovu, 2011).

Stimulating youths' participation in agriculture requires access to adequate information to enhance set goals and to facilitate youths' employment. Youths' participation in agriculture and the effective utilisation of quality agricultural information - has been identified as crucial in attaining long-term and sustainable commercially-oriented agricultural growth for developed and developing countries, alike (Corps, 2005). However, in most developing countries, the agricultural sector suffers from inadequacies in the provision of information and when information is provided, it is not provided in an integrated manner (UNIDO 2005).

Access to information is insufficient. ...Youths' participation in agriculture needs tailor-made information solutions - i.e., agricultural information services that assess, verify and apply agricultural information to a specific youth-oriented agricultural project" (Matovu, 2011).

In sum, agricultural information service provision service must include the following:

- Provision of information on agricultural trends and markets
- Provision of information on farmers' organisations
- Provision of advisory services - provided one-on-one - on *inter alia*: legal and regulatory aspects, agricultural management, produce markets, opportunity expansion and diversification, technology, etc.
- Identification and communication of agricultural opportunities
- Provision of access to linkages, finance and markets. For example, agricultural trade fairs

Agriculture and Sustainable Economic Development: Assessing Ongoing Policy-based

Interventions of the Federal Government

There exists a strong connection between agriculture and economic development. As stated in the introductory section of this paper, Agriculture provides employment opportunity, raw

materials for Agro-allied industries; contributes significantly to the Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and it is one of the main sources of Foreign Exchange Earnings for Nigeria. All these indicators are indices for measuring a nation's economic growth. Once in the history of Nigeria, agriculture used to be the mainstay of the nation's economy; accounting for about 70 percent GDP level, over 50 percent employment rate and about 90 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings (Akpan, 2012, Gbaiye, et al, 2013 & Yakubu, 2015). Although the story is different today due to successive government's benign neglect of the sector in favour of the oil revenue, agriculture still remains a major driver of the nation's economy. It still contributes substantially to the national GDP, employment generation and domestic food production.

According to the Report on Gross Domestic Product for the second quarter of the year 2016 by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Agriculture contributed 19.71% to nominal GDP during the quarter under review. This was higher than the shares recorded in the corresponding period of 2015, and the First Quarter of 2016 of 17.89% and 19.17% respectively. According to the report, the contribution of Agriculture to overall GDP in real terms was 22.55% in the Second Quarter of 2016; higher than its share in the First Quarter of 2016, which was put at 20.48% (NBS, 2016). Also from the report, Agriculture led the non-oil sector of the economy to contribute 91.74% to the nation's GDP in real terms, higher than the shares recorded for the first quarter of 2016 (89.71%). During the period under review, the oil sector only contributed 8.26% to the total real GDP compared to that of the first quarter, which was put at 10.29%. This decline was attributed to the drop in oil production from 2.11 million barrels in the first quarter of 2016 to 1.69 million barrels per day in the second quarter. Report from other sources indicated that oil exploration in Nigeria had dropped below one million barrel per day at the end of third quarter of 2016. Agriculture is also the source of employment to a teeming Nigerian populace, especially Nigerians living in the rural area, who engage in agriculture basically as their means of livelihood.

Over the years, the federal government has put in place a series of Agricultural intervention programme aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in food production and sustainable agricultural development in the country. Some of such programmes include: National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Green Revolution Programme (GR), Agricultural Development Programme (ADPs) and Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI). All these programmes have the same policy objective of enhancing the growth of the agricultural sector. Their difference simply rests on the different nomenclature successive administrations, who may have initiated them attributed to each of them.

In recent times, the federal government has once again recognized the need to invest in critical agricultural sectors for optimum food-sufficiency domestically and for export purposes. Beginning from 2010, the federal government designed a road map to reform the agricultural sector through its Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA). The ATA programme, which was in place until 2015, focused on how to make Nigeria's agriculture more productive, efficient and effective, generate employment, foreign exchange earnings and reducing expenditure on food importation (FMARD, 2016). The ATA intervention recorded some major success in the area of agricultural financing, input supply, provision of infrastructure and logistics and creation of market access to farmers. ATA has been

recognized as an important first step towards rediscovering agriculture in the country (FMARD, 2016).

Adopting strategies towards consolidating on the level of success recorded by the ATA intervention, the federal government through the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) came up with a policy document tagged: *The Agricultural Promotion Policy (2016-2020): Building on the Successes of ATA, Closing Key Gaps*. As part of its synopsis, the document states: “Nigeria is facing two key gaps in agriculture today: an inability to meet domestic food requirements and inability to export at quality levels required for market success (FMARD, 2016). The focus of the strategic policy document is to provide a disciplined approach to build an agribusiness ecosystem by solving core issues at the heart of limited food production and delivery of quality standards. Specifically, its goal reads: “putting Nigeria’s agriculture sector on the path to growth will require actions to solve these two gaps: produce enough fresh, high quality foods for the Nigerian market; and serve export market successfully and earn foreign exchange.” The key areas the policy seeks to address include: food security, import substitution, job creation and economic diversification. There is high hope that when this is achieved, then the agricultural sector will be able to rescue the Nigerian economy from the current precarious ailing condition.

Like most preceding policies or programmes of successive regimes, the new policy has lofty goal aimed at revamping the agricultural sector. However, the problem has not always been policy formulation. It is mostly associated with policy implementation or the ability to transform the policy framework into action to achieve the required target goal. In addition to this new policy framework and as a way of finding solution to the myriad challenges bedeviling agricultural growth in Nigeria, this paper strongly proposes that engaging the younger population in productive agricultural activities will go a long way to cushion the incessant economic hardship experienced in the country. We also believe that the best approach to boost youths’ involvement in the country is through strategic media advocacy.

Advocacy simply means the act or process of supporting or backing cause or proposal. The aim of advocacy is to gain the support and acceptance of key stakeholder for a policy or project that will impact on the lives of the people. Media advocacy is the strategic use of the mass media to support or promote government, organisation or individual’s efforts to advance public initiatives. The aim is to generate news in support of the initiative in order to create awareness or information about the initiative. Employing media advocacy in agriculture, for instance, can allow us to tell the sweet stories of agricultural prosperities and the gains of embarking in productive agricultural initiatives. It is therefore the place of media advocacy to drive agricultural development through awareness creation, provision of information and education on incentive, ways of accessing credit facilities and financial services and so on.

This constitutes the major concern of this paper.

Review of Empirical Studies

In 2011, Olumuyiwa Akin Olaniyi, Oyefunke Olayemi Adebayo and Samson Akintola conducted a study titled: Perception of Rural Youth and Utilization of Agricultural Information in Oyo State, Nigeria. In the study, the authors sought to investigate Rural youth's perception of utilisation of agricultural information in Oyo state. The finding revealed that friends/neighbours, parents and extension agents were the most frequently used sources

of information by the respondents. This implies that strategic communication is supposed to target these persons. It was also found that Positive and significant relationship existed between perception and utilization of agricultural information and farming experience. Generally, the study discovered that There was significant difference in the perception and utilization of agricultural information among rural youth in the selected local government areas. Consequently, it was concluded that the adoption of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure should be encouraged in rural areas to facilitate information delivery to future young farmers in the study area.

In another study titled: *Youths' Participation in Farming Activities in Rural Areas of Imo State, Nigeria: Implications For Agricultural Extension*, *F. O. Ugwoke, O M Adesope and F C Ibe* investigated youths participation in farming activities in rural areas of Imo State. Questionnaire was administered to 70 randomly selected respondents from six rural communities in the study area. Findings indicated that the youths participated in a wide range of farming activities, such as bush clearing, cultivation, planting, weeding, harvesting, among others. Findings also indicated that significant relationship exists between the level of participation and the level of education. It was therefore, concluded that if youths are given the right incentives, they will intensify their participation in farming activities.

J. T. Pur, Ibrahim Shehu and Elizabeth Sabo also carried out another study titled: **The Role of Youth Associations in Empowering Youths in Agricultural Activities in Adamawa State, Nigeria. In this study, they sought to examine** the role of Youth Associations in empowering youths in Adamawa Central Senatorial District of Adamawa State, Nigeria. A random sampling procedure was used to select 31 associations from 71 registered associations. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used for data analysis. Results indicated that skills acquired by youths as a result of joining associations' activities reveal that 84.4% of the respondents acquired one agricultural skill or the other, with crop production, cattle fattening and poultry production accounting for 30.6, 42.5 and 11.3%, respectively. Findings also indicated that due to the skills acquired, 72.6% of the beneficiaries were engaged in the personal agricultural activities. The study concluded that participation in Agricultural related youth associations was very profitable as those who were found to be participating learned various skills and majority of them extended those technologies to their own farms. Considering the role of media advocacy in youths' participation in agriculture, this will imply targeting such associations with communication needed to bring about youths' participation in agriculture.

Theoretical Framework

The theories of Diffusion of innovations and Social Marketing served as theoretical framework for this study.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

The diffusion of innovation theory was put forth by Everest Rogers in the 1960's. Diffusion is seen as the process by which an innovation or new idea is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. An innovation can be an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by members of the social system in which such innovations are targeted at. The theory centres on the conditions which can increase or decrease the likelihood that a new idea, practice, policy, product or object will be adopted by members of a given social groups. According to Baran and Davis (2000, p. 161), "diffusion

theory explains how innovations are introduced and adopted by various communities.” It is another way to look at how people process and accept information (Lattimore et al, 2009, p. 49). Rogers identified four elements of diffusion – the innovation, communication channels, time and the social system or context. In other words, before any new idea or innovation can get to the people or make any impact in them, it must be communicated to the target group over a period of time. Here, communication is regarded as the process by which participants create and share information with one another in order to reach a mutual understanding. The information flows through networks and the nature of the networks determines the likelihood that the innovation will be adopted or not.

The theory also posits that the people adopt an idea only after going through five stages – awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption. The role of the mass media is concentrated on the first stage of the process (awareness stage), whereas personal sources are most important in the adoption process (Anaeto, Onabanjo & Osifeso, 2008, p. 178). In other words, mass media and interpersonal contacts (opinion leaders) provide information that can influence opinion or judgment. Baran and Davis (2000) summarise the five stages through which new innovations will pass through before being widely adopted by the target social group:

First, most people will become aware of them, often through information from mass media. Second, the innovations will be adopted by a small group of innovators or early adopters. Third, opinion leaders learn from the early adopters and try the innovations themselves. Fourth, if the opinion leaders find the innovation useful, they encourage their friends Finally, after most people have adopted the innovation, a group of laggards or late adopters make the change (pp. 161 -162).

This theory can be found to be very useful to this paper because it can help in getting the Nigerian youths to participate actively in productive agriculture. Firstly, the government and concerned individuals must put in place a youth friendly agricultural innovation or initiative. The mass media must be very useful at this stage for the purpose of awareness creation. Even at the later stage, the mass media combine with interpersonal sources to influence or change the people’s behaviour or attitude; and subsequently, the adoption of the innovation.

Social Marketing Theory

According to Baran and Davis (2000, p. 291), “the social marketing theory is not a unified body of thought, but rather a collection of middle-range theory dealing with the promotion of information deemed by elite sources to be socially valuable”. It is the process that applies marketing principles, tools and techniques to create, communicate and deliver value in order to influence target audience behaviours that benefit society (Gallopel-Morvan, 2008). As opposed to the marketing of goods and services, social marketing theory as a communication theory proposed by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman in the 1970s is aimed at selling ideas, attitude or behaviour. However, the theory is predicated on the application techniques and such marketing techniques like audience research and analysis, audience segmentation, setting up of objectives and goals, implementation and evaluation are used extensively. Also, the theory makes use of the 4Ps, popularly called the marketing mix, to sell the required ideas or policies. These include: product, price, place (distribution) and promotion (communication). In this perspective, the product refers to the socially needed behaviour or

attitude change (engagement in productive agricultural initiatives) that the target population needs to buy into. The product should be useful to the target population and must be accessible or affordable (price). This may be in form of time and effort required and the cost of changing certain behaviours by individuals. The place is where the social target can be found or where the implemented changes will take place. Social campaigns should be aimed at reaching the target group in the best ways possible. Lastly and most importantly is the idea of promotion and communication. This could be through the mass media advocacy (news and news commentaries, advertisement, drama and educational programmes, among others) or interpersonal means.

Key features of the social marketing theory are: target audience analysis and segmentation, awareness creation, targeting messages at specific audience segment that are most receptive or susceptible to those messages, message reinforcement, interest inducement and inducing desired decision-making process. According to Baran and Davis (2000, p. 291), “a key first step to promote ideas ... is to make people aware of their existence.” As noted earlier, most times government put in place lofty programmes aimed at revamping the agricultural sector, but such programmes fail sometimes due to the fact that the target social groups may not be aware of the initiative as a result of the poor publicity given to it. Hence, this theory is relevant to this study, because it suggests that communication targeting youths towards their participation in agriculture should be deliberate since for any agricultural initiative targeted at the youth to succeed, it requires that media advocacy must not be taken as a second option. Communication can be used to create awareness, provide needed information, change negative attitude, give the programme credibility and offer necessary assistance on how to access facilities needed for participation in the project.

The literature reviewed in this article has focused mainly on how steps had in the past been taken to boost agricultural products in Nigeria without necessarily oxygenating youths' participation in agriculture through deliberate communication strategy. While some of the literatures reviewed indicated efforts that leaned towards improving agricultural yields by forming cooperative groups, some focused on steps to increase funding as a means of enhancing agriculture in Nigeria. Unfortunately, from the reviewed literature, little was done in the area of sensitization of the youths towards participating in agriculture. This is the gap we intend to fill in this article; since in the past four decades, Nigeria has initiated and implemented several agricultural policies and programmes ranging from the Operation Feed the Nation in 1976 to Green Revolution, School to land etc. But food sufficiency has remained a problem, due largely to the fact that agricultural production is still woven around the poor and elderly and the youths see it as a programme for the uneducated because of the manual labour. This study therefore, can effectively fill the gap as it stresses strategic communication involving the sensitization of the youths to participate in agriculture for food sufficiency and for export. Consequently, the focus of this paper is to utilize the diffusion of innovation and Social Marketing Theories to examine and propose a practical approach toward attaining sustainable agricultural development and domestic food-sufficiency for the teeming Nigerian populace. The proposed approach, which centres on Strategic Media Advocacy, is aimed at boosting active youths' participation in agriculture, thereby enhancing the economic growth of the nation.

METHODOLOGY

This study set out to examine the means of achieving sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria through strategic media advocacy and youths' participation in order to promote Nigeria's economic indices for enduring national growth. Its specific objective was to propose ways of enhancing active youth's participation in Agriculture through strategic communication and media advocacy. To achieve the purpose of this study, three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Ex-post facto research design was adopted involving quantitative and qualitative methods for the study. A sample of one hundred and eighty youths across the eighteen local government areas of Cross River State were used for the quantitative study while three focus group discussion of different sizes in each of three Senatorial Districts of Cross River State and in-depth interview with three key informants were held. The selection of the youths for the quantitative study was done through the Multistage sampling technique in the study area; while the purposive non-probability sampling technique was used to select members of the focus group discussion and in-depth interview. The instruments used for data collection were three-item structured questionnaire with four likert scale of strongly agree-5 points, agree-4 points, strongly disagree-3 points and disagree-2 points involved; focus group discussion and in-depth interview with key informants. The instruments were validated by experts in social research in communication. The reliability estimate of the instruments was established using Cronbach Alpha with a coefficient of .79. The data was analysed using Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient as well as descriptive and inferential statistics. Data collection was based on survey, focus group discussion (FGD) and in-depth interviews with key informants among youths in Commercial Agriculture Development Project in Cross River State as the specific agricultural programme. More so, analysis of key government policies in agriculture was carried out to ascertain the extent to which these policies have promoted or hindered active youth's participation in Agriculture in Nigeria.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Survey Results From the Questionnaire Instrument

Table 1: Respondents' Opinion Whether Strategic communication plays significant role in youths' participation in commercial and other aspects of agriculture

Statement	SA/%	A/%	SD/%	D/%	Total/%
Strategic communication plays significant role in youths' participation in commercial and other aspects of agriculture and subsequent sustainable economic development in Nigeria	120 (66.67%)	30 (16.67%)	20 (11.11%)	10 (5.6%)	180 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2016).

The result in table 1 indicates that of the one hundred and eighty youths in the sample population, one hundred and twenty (66.67%) strongly agree with the statements that Strategic communication plays significant role in youths' participation in commercial and other aspects of agriculture. Thirty respondents (16.67%) agreed with the statement. While

twenty and ten of the youths representing 11.11% and 5.6% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively.

The result of the analysis, indicate that the percentage of agreement for the items are higher than 50. This result therefore signifies that strategic communication plays significant role in youths' participation in commercial and other aspects of agriculture.

Thus, the first hypothesis which states that strategic communication does not play significant role in youths' participation in commercial and other aspects of agriculture was rejected.

Table Two: Respondents' Opinion on Whether Media advocacy positively influences youths' participation in Commercial and other aspects of Agriculture in Nigeria in general and Cross River State in Particular

Statement	SA/%	A/%	SD/%	D/%	Total/%
Media advocacy positively influences youths' participation in Commercial and other aspects of Agriculture in Nigeria in general and Cross River State in Particular	150 (83.33%)	20 (11.11%)	10 (5.6%)	0 (0.0%)	180 (100%).

Source: Field Survey, (2016).

In Table two, one hundred and fifty of the one hundred and eighty youths studied, representing 83.33% strongly agreed to the statement that Media advocacy positively influences youths' participation in all aspects of Agriculture in Nigeria. Twenty of the youths representing 11.11% agreed to the statement. While only ten youths strongly disagreed with no youth studied disagreeing.

The result of the analysis, indicate that the percentage of agreement for the items are higher than 50. This result therefore signifies that Media advocacy positively influences youths' participation in Commercial and other aspects of Agriculture in Nigeria in general and Cross River State in Particular. Consequently, the second hypothesis which stated that Media advocacy does not positively influences youths' participation in Commercial and other aspects of Agriculture in Nigeria in general and Cross River State in Particular was also rejected

Table Three: Respondents Opinion on Whether Communication strategies and media advocacy can help to eliminate challenges to effective youths' participation in Agriculture

Statement:	SA/%	A/%	SD/%	D/%	Total/%
Communication strategies and media advocacy can help to eliminate challenges to effective youths' participation in Agriculture	100 (55.56%)	30 16.56%)	25 (13.89%)	5 (2.78%)	

Source: Field Survey, 2017

In Table three, one hundred out of the one hundred and eighty youths studied representing 55.56% strongly agreed to the statement; thirty (16.67% agreed to the statement. While twenty-five, representing 13.89 strongly disagreed with 5 (2.78) disagreeing.

The result of the analysis, indicate that the percentage of agreement for the items are higher than 50. This result therefore signifies that Communication strategies and media advocacy can help to eliminate challenges to effective youths' participation in Agriculture.

Following this result, the third hypothesis of this study which stated that There are no significant challenges to effective youths' participation in Agriculture where strategic media advocacy is used, was upheld.

Data Presentation and Analysis of Interview of Key Informants Using Commercial Agriculture Development Project in Cross River State

According to a personal communication with the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer for Cross River State Commercial Agriculture Development Project (CADP), Mr. Nyambi Ndifon Inyang (2017), Commercial Agriculture Development Project is a World Bank assisted Agricultural development intervention and initiative established in 2009 by the Central Bank of Nigeria in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources to provide finance for agricultural value chain in four key areas of production, processing, storage and marketing. It is basically targeted at women and youths. The project is meant to support unemployed youths and women in Agricultural entrepreneurship development in their chosen vocational skills. The five year project which was supposed to have ended in 2014 was restructured to inculcate women and youths' empowerment and further extended to May, 2017. Nyambi Inyang, (2017) further indicated that in Cross River State, CADP has begun to empower the first 100 youths out of the 600 that were trained.

According to him, all the trainees submitted a business plan, registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC); and then copy of the business plan and evidence of registration with CAC are forwarded to the bank for consideration and empowerment. Each beneficiary is empowered to the tune of at least 2.5 Million naira. Part of this money is also converted into inputs supply. The major aim of the programme is to create employment, not only to the direct beneficiaries, but also indirectly to those who will work under them because each of them is expected to engage at least two persons. It is a World Bank assisted programme in collaboration with the state government. The World Bank is the major financier of the programme, providing about 70 percent of the required funds. But for the Youths and Women Empowerment Programme, funding is done 100 percent by the World Bank.

On what specific areas of interventions are covered by Commercial Agriculture Development Project in Cross River State, Nyambi Inyang (2017) stated that the programme covered cocoa, palm oil and rice value chain. However, he revealed that through the restructuring that brought about the Youths and Women Empowerment Programme, the programme was expanded to include poultry rearing and aquaculture. So, they are now five value chains. And using the value chain approach, he observed that the Youths and Women Empowerment Programme focused majorly on food processing and marketing. According to him:

We focus majorly on adding values to the existing areas agricultural production. For instance, Cross River State is known as the second largest producer of cocoa in Nigeria, but this. Accprdomg tp jo,. does not really translate to value addition due to poor processing and

marketing. This is where the commercial Agricultural Project in Cross River State is deeply involved. He stated that the project is involved in primary processing of the cocoa products.

On media approach employed by Commercial Agriculture Development Project in Cross River State, the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer of the project, Nyambi Inyang in a personal communication (2017), revealed that Most of the project's activities are publicized by the media, though he focused mainly on traditional media at the expense of the social media more widely used by youths in the state today. This limitation in media focus of the project was corrected by the Media Affairs Officer of the project in the state, Mrs. Davina Nyiam who according to a personal communication (2017) stated that CADP also adopts the social media. According to her, the project uses social media platforms like Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter among others because the social media are highly recognized by the youths. She averred that the social media have become some of the fastest means of disseminating information as they set agenda for many issues.

Recognizing the relevance of the media to the success of the Commercial Agriculture Development Project in Cross River State, all the key informants in separate interviews indicated that Most of the projects' activities are aired on Cross River Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC), and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Channel 9 Calabar. Documentaries of project sites and how they operated are produced and aired by the electronic media to give the project maximum publicity and to educate intended participants about the integrity of the programme. All programmes of the project are announced on electronic media and published in newspapers. Training sessions are covered live by the media.

Nyiam (2017 in a personal communication (2017) further stated that Women and youth farmers are friends of CADP on Facebook. The project has other people who come on the platform. Members of the general public interested in the project send to the project, friend requests and it accepts them. When CADP posts its stories, they are also share. According to the project, there is a media desk officer in charge of media affairs. The analysis of the result from the interview with key informants in this study corroborates the results from the survey.

Data Presentation and Analysis of the Focus Group Discussions

Three focus group discussion (FGD) sessions were organized across the three senatorial districts of Cross River State involving youths participating in the Commercial Agriculture Development Project (CADP) in the state. The aim was to determine the role of media advocacy in enhancing youths' participation in agriculture in Nigeria in general and Cross River State in particular. The size of the FGD was determined by the number of local government areas in each senatorial district as every local government area was represented by one youth in CADP. Consequently, the FGD for the Northern Senatorial District comprised of five youths, the one for the Central Senatorial District comprised of six youths, while the FGD in the Southern Senatorial District consisted of seven youths.

In all the FGD's, the participants extensively discussed media role in agriculture as well as the process of ego building towards active youth participation in agriculture. The FGD's all reached the consensus that the use of one or combination of relevant media of communication available in any community in terms of accessibility, can promote commercial agriculture. They all approved and applauded the introduction of the social media platforms, particularly, Facebook, Whatsapp, U-tube and Twitter to the Commercial Agriculture Development

Project in Cross River State. They all appreciated the use of the social media because of their interactive nature.

They were of the opinion that the use of media like the television, radio and the newspaper in promoting commercial agriculture creates in them, a sense of pride as this convinces them that agriculture is not for the poor.

All the FGS's suggested that the indigenous media should also be used to disseminate positive information about the CADP among their parents and opinion leaders in their communities as some of them have considered in the past, youths particularly, university graduates who had taken to agriculture, as having failed to utilize their university education properly.

DISCUSSION

Youths in Nigeria have over the years, been confronted with several hindrances to their participation in agriculture. More than half of Nigerian population consists of youths and able-bodied workforce. The estimated population of Nigeria by the Nigerian Population Commission (NPC) and the United Nations (UN) at the end of the third quarter of 2016 was put at over 180 million people. By this figure, Nigeria ranked seventh in terms of population. Out of this figure, youth unemployment hit a record height of 49.5% (National Bureau of Statistics, August, 2016). This indicates a high increase over the figure quoted at the end of the first quarter (Q1) of the year, which was 38.2 million, representing 48.7% of total labour force of 78.48 million). A total of 15.2 million of these youths, representing 42.24 percent were either unemployed or underemployed at the end of first quarter (NBS, 2016). The figure will keep increasing except something is urgently done to cushion the current ailing state of the nation's economy. Therefore, in response to the country's current economic realities, most economic experts and scholars across different disciplines are clamouring for economic diversification. If this cry must be heeded, the first sector to look into, should of course, be agriculture.

The first step, as proposed in this paper, is to boost active youths' participation in agricultural activities by removing key challenges confronting them by way of policy initiative and strategic media advocacy. According to Ajani, Mgbenka & Onah (2015), "majority of agricultural policies and programmes in Nigeria do not consider constraints confronting youths' involvement in agricultural development". Though youths have desirable qualities that can promote agriculture, most of them have strong apathy toward it. (Kimaro, Towo & Moshi, 2015) as most of them consider Agricultural activities to be tedious, squalid and unprofitable. Ajani, et al (2015) outlines some of the challenges encountered by youths in agriculture to include: lack of interest in agriculture as a result of drudgery in farm operations, lack of start-up capital and lack of competitive market for agricultural products. Others are inadequate labour saving technologies for ease of operations and inadequate financial/credit facilities. This point was further amplified by FAO (2014), in its publication entitled: *Youth and agriculture: Key challenges and concrete solutions*. The world's body asserts that "rural youths are the future of food security; yet around the world, few young people see a future in themselves in agriculture or rural areas." The publication also avers that most of the world's food is produced by (ageing) smallholder farmers in developing countries – like Nigeria where subsistent agriculture is widely practiced – older farmers are less likely

to adopt the new technologies needed to sustainably increase agricultural productivity. Drawing its conclusion, the following summary was made by Food and Agricultural Organization:

Young people account for a large percentage of the rural population, and are often unemployed or underemployed, despite the need for labour force in agriculture. They do not perceive agriculture as remunerative or prestigious profession, and until they find meaningful economic opportunities and attractive environments promoted and amplified through strategic media advocacy in rural areas, they will continue to migrate to cities. No doubt, as the result of this study has revealed, these challenges can be eliminated if media advocacy is effectively packaged and directed towards enhancing youths' participation in agriculture. Investing in young people living in rural areas and promoting such investment in strategic communication, is therefore key to enhancing agricultural productivity, boosting rural economies and ensuring food security. (FAO, 2014).

Borrowing from this assertion, it is important to observe that youths' integration in agricultural activities in Nigeria through strategic media advocacy is very important to enhancing sustainable Agriculture and economic development. The youths have great potentials to drive forward the sector and also preserve it for posterity – they have the physical strength, mental alertness and innovations to embark on large scale Agricultural activities.

There is need for reorientation of the psyche of the youths in Nigeria through strategic media advocacy to be able to consider the option of engaging in full time agricultural activity in the rural area. No matter how laudable an initiative may appear, without proper education and awareness creation through strategic media advocacy, such initiatives are bound to fail. According to FAO (2014), “the first principal challenge identified to be associated with youth's apathy to agriculture is youth's insufficient access to knowledge, information and education.”

CONCLUSION

In the past four decades, Nigeria has initiated and implemented several agricultural policies and programmes ranging from the Operation Feed the Nation in 1976 to Green Revolution, School to land etc. But food sufficiency has remained a problem, due largely to the fact that agricultural production is still woven around the poor and elderly and the youths see it as a programme for the uneducated because of the manual labour. This is why this study has been embarked upon to fill the gap in which strategic communication can be used to sensitize the youths to participate in agriculture for food sufficiency and for export. Consequently, the focus of this paper was to examine and propose a practical approach toward attaining sustainable agricultural development and domestic food-sufficiency for the teeming Nigerian populace. The proposed approach, which centres on Strategic Media Advocacy, was aimed at boosting active youths' participation in agriculture, thereby enhancing the economic growth of the nation. Thus, the specific objectives of the study, among other things were to examine the place of strategic communication and media advocacy in engendering youths' participation in Agriculture as well as identifying key challenges to effective youths' participation in Agriculture and how to overcome them through strategic media advocacy.

To achieve the purpose of this study, three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Ex-post facto research design was adopted involving quantitative and qualitative methods for the study. A sample of one hundred and eighty youths across the eighteen local government areas of Cross River State were used for the quantitative study while three focus group discussion comprising different sizes in each of the three Senatorial Districts of Cross River State and in-depth interview with three key informants were held. The selection of the youths for the quantitative study was done through the Multistage sampling technique in the study area. While the purposive non-probability sampling technique was used to select members of the focus group discussion and in-dept interview. The instruments used for data collection were questionnaire, focus group discussion and in-depth interview with key informants. The instruments were validated by experts in social research in communication. The reliability estimate of the instruments was established using Cronbach Alpha with a coefficient of .79. The data was analysed using Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient as well as descriptive and inferential statistics. Critical analytical technique was employed as an approach to the discussion. The theories of Social Marketing and the Diffusion of innovations served as theoretical framework. Findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between strategic media advocacy and youth participation in agriculture and subsequent sustainable economic development in Nigeria. The study also revealed that media advocacy has significant influence towards youth participation in agriculture in Nigeria. The study equally revealed that There are no significant challenges to effective youths' participation in Agriculture where strategic media advocacy is employed.

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that strategic media advocacy is a catalyst to Agricultural revolution in Nigeria which remains the most potent antidote to the ailing Nigerian economy and youths' rising unemployment.

Arising from the findings of this study, it can further be concluded that most agricultural policies and programmes in Nigeria have failed to achieve their full potentials and will continue to fail due to inappropriate or lack of strategic media advocacy aimed at reorientating and sensitizing the youths towards participating in agriculture. Consequently, it can further be concluded that unless strategic communication and media advocacy which are catalyst to Agricultural revolution are professionally employed and tailored into agricultural policies in Nigeria, the expected desire to promote agriculture as potent revolution which remains the antidote to the ailing Nigerian economy and youths' rising unemployment will remain a futile venture.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this paper, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should integrate strategic media advocacy into agricultural policies at all levels of implementation in order to give wide publicity to such policies and to facilitate speedy adoption by the target social groups.
2. Services of communication professionals should be incorporated into all agricultural policies and researches aimed at stimulating youths' participation in Agriculture in Nigeria.
3. Inability to realize the objectives of agricultural policies in Nigeria should be interpreted to imply failure of effective communication of the benefit of the sector to

every segments of Nigerian society, including the youths; and therefore, agricultural policy makers must Endeavour to build in effective communication strategies into their policy framework.

4. Strategic media advocacy in agricultural revolution should be integrated into all syllabi of communication studies and public policy and administration at all levels of education in Nigeria to ensure that those charged with the communication and implementation of government policies as they relate to agriculture become aware of the importance of media advocacy to agricultural policy directions in Nigeria.

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