

**Nigerian Youths as Producers in the Economy with specific reference to
Agriculture**

Being a Paper Presented by

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Introduction

Agriculture is as old as language as well as cultural. It is the fundamental basis for all development. This is why it is so sensitive, so political, so social and cultural an issue to be played with or trivialize. It is a tragedy for any country or nation to trivialize it. So what is Africa and Nigeria in particular doing about the invasion of its agro-ecological systems and the practice, promotion and development of its agriculture? Allow a willful imposition of alien culture and anti-people but capitalists' driven agenda? The passage of Biosafety Act 2015 marks the subtle subscription of government to genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or genetically engineered organisms (GEMs) into the country. This is an action that should be resisted by all and sundry. GMOs or GEMs are alien to our culture, unsafe practice in our food system, a no answer to the food security question facing Africa especially Nigeria but a submission to high and powerful capitalistic agenda of the powerful nations of the world and food colonization of Africa. This is unsafe for our health, agriculture, identity and future. The youths of Africa with particular reference to Nigeria are producers and engine room of African agriculture if properly motivated and the huge demography of these youths inspired into agriculture remains the answer to our food security question. Therefore, African governments especially Nigeria should address squarely all issues that make agriculture unappealing to the youths to incentivize them into greater participation in agriculture for our national security, development, competitiveness and survival. No time provides such an appropriate opportunity than now when government's quest to diversify the economy and make agriculture its engine room as a cardinal policy in this era of Change under the new government of President Buhari appears sacrosanct.

Conceptual Clarifications

There is need to understand the concepts of **Youth, Producer and GMOs/GEMs**. So who is a youth? In the global context a youth is anybody within the age bracket of 15-24 years (United Nations Organization, ND.). In the African context, it is an age bracket of 40 years and below. This is due to the challenges of contending with the struggles of education in the face of

poverty, qualifying for different age grade level initiations, employment and marriage. Usually before an average African Child goes through this process, he is within this age bracket. However, the African Union (AU) adopted 35 years. Nigeria too, in its national youth policy adopted 35 years. In any case, in the context of this discourse and my paper presentation, I defined a youth as some one that is 40 years or below.

The youth are characterized as energetic, acting in spontaneity, change agents, dynamic, passionate, risk-prone, unpredictable, aggressive and can be builders or destroyers of a society or nation depending on the investment of the society or nation on them and the use to which they are put.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) or Genetically Engineered Organisms (GEMs) by simple definition refers to the manipulations of living things (Two or more heterogeneously) through their chromosomes with a view to creating a new artificial product.

Youths as Producers and Wealth Builders in Nigerian Economy: The Agricultural Sector

Global population is expected to increase to 9 billion by 2050, with youth (aged 15–24) accounting for about 14 percent of this total (ILO, 2012) While the world's youth cohort is expected to grow, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for youth – particularly those living in developing countries remain limited, poorly remunerated and of poor quality. In Africa with a population of over 1 billion, over 61% of this population are 25 years and below.

Youth in the context of the African environment and for the purpose of this discourse is seen or defined as people in the age bracket of 40 years and below. Given the above statistic, it will imply that of Africa's population of over 1 billion, over 75% fall within this bracket. Hence the future of Africa and its agriculture in entirety is in the hand of the youth. Therefore we must come to the realization that the future of Africa is the youth of Africa.

This conclusion about demographic spread of Africa as above is not materially different from the Nigerian scenario. In fact about 80% of Nigeria's estimated population of 175m are 40years and below. In spite of the grave marginalization and intolerable neglect of the Nigerian youths

they remain the engine room of the Nigerian economy. They are the reservoir and stock of asset that Nigeria can bank on for its survival, sustainability and competitiveness. They are largely the creators of the common wealth and essentially the future of Nigeria if there is a bargain or plan for one, and even if not, they are the ones to invent that future. So the Nigerian youth is a producer and potential future of agriculture and food security/sovereignty for our nation. This is why their neglect is a devastating policy gap in our national development architecture that demands immediate redress. As a matter of fact the condition of the Nigerian youth demands priority national emergency now than at any other time in our history.

Agriculture need three critical and fundamental resources – land, water and human labour. Nigeria in no doubt has enough of these resources to meet its food security need and to grow its agriculture for export competitiveness and national development. In the different sectors of the Nigerian economy, from education to religion, services to agriculture, military to manufacturing, Nigerian youths in their majority are contributing to the gross domestic product and national development.

However, youth participation in agriculture is waning. This is not unconnected with the demoralizing developments around Nigerian agricultural policies. Right from its abandonment for oil money since the early 70s, there has not been very inviting incentives in agriculture to woo youths in view of the national attention given to oil over the years. This has essentially made Nigeria a monolithic economy. However, with the down turn in oil fortunes and the freeze of oil price, Nigeria has little choice but turn its search light on agriculture now. Therefore to attract the youths to agriculture, Nigeria and Africa needs to address critically some fundamental limitations and challenges surrounding the low level of youth participation.

Limitations/Challenges to youths increasing Involvement in Agriculture

There is no doubt that there are some fundamental challenges and disincentives that have kept Nigerian youths away from agriculture. Government's attention and policy direction in tackling these challenges headlong and with sincerity of purpose will pave the way for youths' influx to the field of agriculture. The following are the limitations and challenges:-

(i) Absence of Information, knowledge and education

If you are not informed you are deformed (Bishop Oyedepo). What you do not know you cannot do. Research and Literature corroborate that education is key to overcoming development challenges both in agriculture and other spheres of life. So information, knowledge and education are corner stone for agricultural productivity. Not only is there a direct link between food security and education of the youths, but it has also been shown that basic numeracy and literacy skills help to improve farmers' livelihoods (FAO, 2007). **Youth's access to knowledge and information is crucial for addressing the main challenges they face in agriculture. In order for rural youth to shape agricultural policies affecting them directly, in terms of access to markets and finance as well as green jobs and land, they need to receive appropriate information and education.** This is of particular concern in the developing countries, where young rural inhabitants may lack access to even the most rudimentary formal education, and where educational institutions are often less developed. Formal primary and secondary education can provide young people with basic numeracy and literacy, managerial and business skills, and introduce youth to agriculture

Vocational training and extension services are potentially effective tools for teaching agricultural skills and providing capacity-building trainings for rural youth, but they do not always transmit the necessary skills, and so can result in poor employment outcomes (Bennell, 2007). Training programmes frequently lack funding and the capacities of service providers are rather weak. Low education levels among many rural youth further limit training possibilities (IFAD, 2010a). Furthermore, there is often a mismatch between the kind of training offered and the requirements of the labour market in an evolving agricultural sector (UNESCO, 2010). Rural youth repeatedly reported lack of training in areas such as leadership and business management as well as the need for apprenticeship opportunities.

Higher education is equally essential for the development of the agricultural sector. The creation of high quality universities that focus on agricultural research and establish linkages with the farming community has proven beneficial for the development of the agricultural

sector in countries such as Brazil, India, Malaysia and China (Blackie et al., 2010). Connecting universities with farming communities is essential in order to broaden knowledge, increase research and development dissemination and enhance local problem-solving. It is equally important to connect educational institutions with labour market opportunities and to build strong partnerships with employers to ensure that the skills of agricultural professionals respond to labour market needs so that young graduates are employable (Paisley, 2012). Unfortunately, in most developing countries, such systems are rarely instituted and access to tertiary agricultural education is low (FAO, 1997; Beintema and Di Marcantonio, 2009; World Bank, 2011a). In sub-Saharan Africa and Asia respectively, only 2 and 4 percent of university students are enrolled in agricultural studies (AFDB/OECD/UNDP/UNECA, 2012). Gender-disaggregated data on agricultural science and technology are scarce, but a recent IFPRI (International Food Policy Research Institute) study shows that women are underrepresented in agricultural research and higher education (Beintema and Di Marcantonio, 2010). Modern ICTs such as mobile

Principal challenges identified among others is youth's insufficient access to knowledge, information and education. Poor and inadequate education limits productivity and the acquisition of skills, while insufficient access to knowledge and information can hinder the development of entrepreneurial ventures. Particularly in developing countries, there is a distinct need to improve young rural women's access to education, and to incorporate agricultural skills into rural education more generally. Agricultural training and education must also be adapted to ensure that graduates' skills meet the needs of rural labour markets.

Agricultural education and training must reflect the needs of the agricultural labour market and enhance the familiarity of young women and men with the world of work, including its practical challenges and rewards. In Cambodia, China and the Bahamas, internships and exposure trips are offered to trainees. In Rwanda, youth receive customized advice and are linked up with business partners and farmers so that their ICT-based agricultural solutions can fit the needs of the users. The challenges related to access to information and education are complex. Ministries of education should work with a range of rural stakeholders including other

ministries, the private sector, NGOs and producers' organizations to identify context-specific solutions. The capacity of service providers should be built and innovative integrated training methodologies should be explored. In order to improve the quality of education and to attract youth to the agricultural sector, youth should be directly linked to business partners and they should be given hands-on experience.

(ii) Limited/No Access to Land

Access to land is fundamental to starting a farm. It can often be difficult for young people to attain, not in this age of land grab by capitalists. Inheritance laws and customs in developing countries often make the transfer of land to young women problematic, and so are in need of amendment. Loans to assist youth in acquiring land are also needed, while leasing arrangements through which youth gain access – though not ownership – to land may also prove effective.

Young men have to wait many years before inheriting their share of the family land, if at all. It is rare to encounter land transfer inter-vivos in developing countries, because land ownership is perceived as an adult privilege. On the one hand, youth are expected to wait until adulthood to own land. On the other hand, many young men are delaying marriage because they lack their own plot of land. However, in many parts of Latin America and the Pacific, tradition prescribes that one can only own land once one has established a family of one's own while in many parts of Africa, it is taboo for young people to access the family land while the parents are still alive (UN-HABITAT, 2011). While waiting for their inheritance, many youth just enjoy subsidiary land rights and work on the family land for little or no remuneration. In many developing countries, women do not inherit land and only obtain user rights via a male relative. Several countries have reformed their formal law system so that women are granted equal property and inheritance rights, but the enforcement of these formal laws can be very challenging, also because parallel customary law system might exist denying equal land access for women.

Land management systems might change over time. Where land used to be owned by the community, lineage or clan, the control and management of land is becoming increasingly individualized. In developing countries, poverty often forces parents to sell their land to outsiders, excluding younger community members from land access. Large-scale land deals are particularly unfair towards young people, given that they are often not even consulted on agreements which may bar their and the next generations' access to land (White, 2012).

It is unrealistic to expect youth to purchase land through acquired savings, given high rates of youth unemployment, low wages for most rural youth and high land prices. For young women in developing countries it is an even greater challenge to obtain the necessary capital to buy land as they often do unremunerated household work or subsist on low wages (FAO, 2011a)

Youth land rights are frequently not included in policy and legal documents and if they are included, no concrete implementation mechanisms are in place. Young people are not involved in the drafting of policies and laws related to land and find these frameworks unresponsive to their needs. In response to this challenge, FAO's Voluntary Guidelines on Land Tenure state that "effective participation of all members, men, women and youth, in decisions regarding their tenure systems should be promoted through their local or traditional institutions" (FAO, 2012).

In order to facilitate youth's access to land, action is required on various fronts. The actions to be taken will depend on the prevailing issues in a given country, and so will vary both between developed and developing countries, and among developing countries. It is important that the various mechanisms that respond to the needs of young men and women be explored. Some could be:

- Advocacy towards implementing existing laws and regulations granting youth access to land.
- Rehabilitation and subsequent distribution of land to young people. This mechanism is especially suitable when there is a scarcity of arable land.

- Provision of loans specifically targeted at youth for acquiring land. In order to make sure that youth are able to pay back the loan, they should be properly guided and trained. This holds true for both developed and developing countries, as limited access to credit for young entrepreneurs is a relatively universal problem.
- Leasing to provide youth with access to land. In Taiwan Province of China and Uganda, intermediaries (COA and RUL, respectively) encouraged landowners to lease their land to youth. Farmer and Nature Net (FNN), a farmers' organization from Cambodia, obtained long-term land lease contracts from landlords and then subcontracted the lease to young farmers' cooperatives. While FNN bought a rice mill to process the produce and financially supported the young farmers, the young farmers themselves invested their labour in the land. With the income from the sale of their produce, the young farmers are gradually taking over the lease from FNN.

(iii) Financing - Lack of access to credit and financial services

Just like access to land, access to financial services such as savings and loans is of fundamental importance to start any agricultural activity. Even if youth do have access to land, they still need finance to cover the costs of planting and harvesting, as well as investments in improved productive capacities. Payment and trading services, such as mobile banking and Internet trading, are important tools for selling their produce. Moreover, given that the agricultural sector is often exposed to adverse natural events that negatively affect production (Dalla Valle, 2012), access to insurance schemes is crucial for young farmers.

Most financial service providers are reluctant to provide their services – including credit, savings and insurance – to rural youth due to their lack of collateral and financial literacy, among other reasons. Promoting financial products catered to youth, mentoring programmes and start-up funding opportunities can all help remedy this issue. Encouraging youth to group themselves into informal savings clubs can also prove useful in this respect

Financial service providers (FSPs) (IFAD, 2010c) have to play a crucial role. FSPs include formal banking systems (commercial and development banks), semiformal banking systems (savings and credit cooperative organizations and informal banking systems

Therefore, youth often rely on informal sources – typically family and friends – to obtain access to financial services. Information about informal services in rural areas is mostly provided through informal channels (e.g. word of mouth and the radio) (Dalla Valle, 2012). Agro-processing companies, input suppliers and traders often supply credit for inputs or farmer insurance [chapter 5], but, like many MFIs, they often charge very high interest rates. ICT offers a wide range of products for accessing financial services, such as e-banking, e-business and e-trade through mobile banking. Nowadays, a third of the world’s population uses the Internet, and more than 45 percent of them are young people, mainly in urban areas. Many rural areas still lack Internet connections – particularly in developing countries – which can act as a drawback for young people wishing to stay in rural areas and conduct their business from there (Dalla Valle, 2012).

When trying to access financial services, youth from across the world face several common challenges: > restrictions in the legal and regulatory environment; > lack of specifically tailored financial products ;such as limited financial capabilities, reluctance of FSPs to work with clients who have limited trading records and security (often the case for rural youth). Provision of financial services allows youth to improve their livelihoods and accumulate assets in the long term. Appropriate and inclusive financial services can equip youth with the resources and support to become productive and economically active members of their agricultural households and communities, and make the transition from childhood to adulthood. Non-refundable grants, incentives and start-up capital for promoting rural youth entrepreneurship are instruments of critical importance. In the context of MFIs in the developing world, the experience of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh demonstrates that it is possible to lend to the poor, including youth with no land or collaterals of any kind.

(iv) Lack of or Dearth of Capacity in Agriculture/Green Jobs

There is a global drive towards transition to a green economy not only promoting environmental sustainability, but is also expected to create green jobs in all economic sectors, including agriculture, forestry and fisheries (FAO, 2010). The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) defines a green job as “work in agricultural, manufacturing, research and development (R&D), administrative, and service activities that contribute(s) substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality”. It includes jobs that “reduce energy, materials, and water consumption through high efficiency strategies; de-carbonize the economy; and minimize or altogether avoid generation of all forms of waste and pollution” (UNEP, 2008).

Difficulty accessing green jobs was identified as the fourth challenge to strengthening youth’s involvement in agriculture. Green jobs can provide more sustainable livelihoods in the long run, and can be more labour intensive and ultimately involve more value added. However, rural youth may not have the skills (or access to the necessary skills-upgrading opportunities) to partake in the green economy. Improving youth’s access to education and training – including formal and informal on-the-job training – is needed to redress this skills mismatch. Case studies from the Zanzibar Archipelago, Rwanda, China, the United States, Bahamas, Kenya and Uganda all illustrate innovative ways of improving youth’s access to the skills and opportunities needed to generate green jobs in agriculture.

According to an ILO study, in order to achieve a green economy, the most important challenge is skills development (ILO, 2009; UNDESA, 2010a). The transition to a green and low-carbon economy affects skills in three ways: > reduced demand for some jobs (skills become redundant); > increased demand for other jobs (skills must be more widely acquired); > development of new jobs and “greening” of existing jobs (new skills required).

It is therefore necessary to develop the appropriate skills or upgrade existing skills, particularly for young men and women who are entering the job market for the first time. Education is required [chapter 1], both formal (classroom-based and vocational training within secondary and postsecondary education) and informal (internship programmes, on-the-job training and increasing exposure and knowledge through, for example, extracurricular activities). Specific

economic, education, social and labour policies also need to be in place, as well as specific labour market services and market information

(v) Absence/Poor Market and Lack of Market Access

Market access for farmers means the ability to acquire farm inputs and farm services, and the capability to deliver agricultural produce to buyers (IFAD, 2010a). Markets provide the opportunity to generate income, contributing to a reduction in poverty and hunger in developing countries. Markets also drive production to meet consumer demand in terms of quantity and quality (van Schalkwyk et al., 2012). Sustainable access to markets is required to guarantee smallholders an increase in income and to lift them out of poverty. Regrettably Africa and Nigeria still faces the challenge of growing and deepening its markets as many of them are still under developed.

Youth are the future of the agricultural sector in Africa and Nigeria in particular, their access to markets is vital for boosting productivity, increasing incomes and reducing poverty and hunger for the years to come. Even before accessing markets, young rural people have already faced numerous constraints to starting their farming activities, including difficulties accessing land [chapter 2], agricultural inputs and financial services. Furthermore, many young people lack experience and knowledge of how markets work; they often lack business, management and entrepreneurial skills, and like many other smallholder farmers, they lack information about prices. Access to information and education is poorer in rural than in urban areas. ICT literacy is also lower, in particular among poor young women.

In the context of booming globalization, the demand for higher value and processed foods, combined with the rise of supermarkets around the world, has implications for the global food marketing system, as it alters procurement systems and introduces new quality and safety standards.

Access to markets for youth is becoming even more difficult due to the growing international influence of supermarkets and the rigorous standards of their supply chains. Young rural women in developing countries face additional constraints in accessing markets, due in part to the fact that their freedom of movement is sometimes limited by cultural norms. Improving access to education, training and market information can all facilitate youth's access to markets, with niche markets offering particularly significant opportunities for young farmers. Facilitating their involvement in (youth) producers' groups can be similarly beneficial in this respect. Access to markets is crucial for young farmers all over the world. In developing countries, it is necessary to enhance productivity, generate increased incomes and thereby reduce poverty and food insecurity. Despite this, most market structures do not favour market access for youth

(vi) Non Participation in Policy Engagement/Dialogue –

If it concerns us or is about us, then we must have a say. Too often young people's voices are not heard during the policy process, and so their complex and multifaceted needs are not met. Policies often fail to account for the heterogeneity of youth, and so do not provide them with effective support. To remedy this, youth need the requisite skills and capacities for collective action to ensure that their voices are heard. Policymakers themselves must also actively engage youth in the policymaking process.

All over the world, youth unemployment rates are higher than adult unemployment rates (UNDESA, 2012). North Africa and the Near East (with youth unemployment rates of 27.9 and 26.5 percent, respectively) face the world's greatest youth employment challenge (ILO, 2012b). Modern agriculture can offer significant opportunities for job creation for young people (World Bank, 2009). However, in order to attract young people to the sector, an adequate enabling policy and regulatory environment is fundamental (ILO, 2012c).

It is increasingly recognized that youth participation has an important role in decision-making and policy dialogue, and policy-makers are urged to work not only for but with youth. For example, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, which guides

the United Nations Youth Agenda, identified the full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making as one of its ten priority areas (UNDESA, 2010b). The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the year commencing 12 August 2010 as the “International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding” (UN, 2010), focusing on three key areas, including “Mobilize and engage (increase youth participation and partnerships)”. The recent Arab Spring revolutions have seen youth stand up to claim their right to fully participate in society (Ncube and Anjanwu, 2012; Youth Employment Network, undated).

However, there is still a long way to go to ensure the active participation of youth in policy processes. Too often their participation remains tokenish or passive. Seniority is frequently associated with authority, and youth are not expected or allowed to speak out or voice their concerns, let alone have a role in policy development processes (Lintelo, 2011). In many developing countries, young women’s participation in policy-making is particularly challenging as a result of traditional beliefs about the suitability of women to hold decision-making positions and the persistence of gender inequalities at household level (World Bank/IFAD, 2009). Little information is available on the participation of youth in policy processes specifically related to agriculture and rural development

(vii) Absence/Lack of Data

The role of data in national development cannot be over emphasized. It is very crucial in the planning process which is the engine room of development. Due to poor national value or flair for research and development, we do not have natal data bank that can aid agricultural development planning and research along economic, social and political development planning and their dynamics in the development process. In this situation, project planning, management and execution becomes very difficult and discouraging to many or even leads to bad outcome. Data are critical part of information needed for operational management and development in the various sectors of the economy with particular reference to agriculture.

(viii) Influence of Globalization

Globalization has succeeded in branding its way so expressly into the lives, value system and cultures of people especially in the developing countries. The invasive influence of globalization on different cultures leaves so much to be desired and visible setbacks and disruption to development leanings of the developing and poor countries especially in Africa. It gives the common belief that anything local is inferior and debasing. Agriculture is one of such tools.

GMOs and the Seven Deadly Social Sins

We must resist GMOs in its entirety because it is evil and amounts to selling our birth right, loss of our identity and originality and the betrayal of a cause greater than us. Nature is almighty and supercedes every other process and creations of Man. The promoters of GMOs are ill intentioned (profittering against the interest of humanity) committing the Seven Deadly Social sins of Mahatma Ghandi;-

- (i) Politics without principle
- (ii) Pleasure without conscience
- (iii) Wealth without work
- (iv) Knowledge without character
- (v) Business without morality (ethics)
- (vi) Science without humanity
- (vii) Worship without sacrifice

All Promoters of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or genetically engineered organisms (GEMs) are at least guilty of the first six of these socially deadly sins Mahatma Gandhi advocated.

Conclusion

While these challenges are complex and interwoven, a number of key conclusions can be drawn ensuring that youth have access to the right information is crucial; integrated training approaches are required so that youth may respond to the needs of a more modern agricultural sector; modern information and communications technologies offer great potential; there is a distinct need to organize and bring youth together to improve their capacities for collective action; youth specific projects and programmes can be effective in providing youth with the extra push needed to enter the agricultural sector; and a coherent and integrated response is needed from policymakers and development practitioners alike to ensure that the core challenges faced by youth in Nigeria and African agriculture are effectively addressed. Indeed, a coordinated response to increase youth's involvement in the agricultural sector is more important than ever, as a rising global population and decreasing agricultural productivity gains mean that youth must play a pivotal role in ensuring a food-secure future for Nigeria and Africa. Africans over 1 billion population has 65% of it as people below 25 years and this constitute huge demographic gains for Africa if only it can develop their capacity and harness their potentials and creativity; and agriculture will be redefined automatically. The youth are certainly the future of Africa and its agriculture and so Nigeria in the specific.

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