

Examining the extent of youth participation in agricultural training program in Malete Youth Farm Kwara State

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Abstract: *Participation is a concept that has multi-dimensional meanings depending on the user. Youth participation in the same vein can be perceived according to the circumstance, the need, and the nature of the subject involved in the participation. Therefore, youth participation in agriculture training program in malete farm is a circumstantial idea designed to empower the youth in order to acquire some skills in agriculture business. This study examines the extent of youth participation in this program considering the prevailing socio-economic condition of the youth and how the youth is involved in segments of the participation process. Using Malete youth Integrated Training Farm, qualitative case study method was employed for the study and the findings revealed that, there was a different degree of participation in the decision-making, implementation, sharing and evaluation. It appears that youth participate in the program as induced by the government through the monthly stipend and other motivational packages.*

Keywords: *Agricultural training, community development, Malete Farm, participation, Youth Participation*

I. Introduction

Participation in agriculture has become a new paradigm in addressing the high rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria in order to reduce youth restiveness, criminal activities and susceptibility to other criminal acts. In this kind of intervention program, participation will require some processes that could be perceived from different angles or as seen by the users. These views conform to the nature of social science concepts or constructs that have multidimensional opinions and interpretations that their usage are based on application. Participation is one of the key principles of community development because it involves people in the community project [1]. Involvement of people in the community project allows democracy, sharing of resources and sense of ownership, which also rest upon membership of the community as we found in this study; that focuses on the youth community.

Participation, as a concept emerged as a community strategy in 1950 in order to put the social unrest that arose with post-colonial developing world under control [2]. Around 1970s, the United Nations initiated a shift from top-bottom to make participation more democratic and encourage active participation. In this way, participation will become voluntary, and people-centred so that development goals will be achieved. By 1980s and 1990, participation has become part of the mainstream of development (3, 4). It, therefore, became a paradigm shift in participatory development as participation entered into development fields. The entrance attracted donors, international organizations, and NGOs because, it was more a grassroots base and people-centred approach to development (3, 5).

However, it is important to mention that, participation as an essential element in community development can occur in different circumstances, even though, the bottom-up is favored as the best form of participation. It is a fact that, people or beneficiaries of a community development project tend to protect and show more commitment to a project that is initiated by them. But, in another situation that the community does not discover the potentials of a development project or the need for such project; mobilization and sensitization of people in such community is imminent either by the government or through its agency as part of government responsibility to cater for the people through initiation of developmental projects. Participation is 'to take part in', or to be involved in the activity and this could be through different ways. Kinyasha [6] explained that, 'the term, 'participation' means 'being part,' whereas "part" means an integral and essential features or component of something.' Therefore, community participation is involvement of a community or a condition of been involved in a community action. In other word, "community" can be referred to as a group of people that is organized and have a typical value, attributed to geographical location, and social cohesion but larger than a household community; this can be a tribe, gender group, religion, age group (e.g. youth), etc. [7]. As regarding the concern

of this study on youth community, the World Bank [8] defined participation as “a process through which stakeholders influence the share control over development initiatives and decisions and resources which affect them”. The use of stakeholders in this definition concurs that, participation is not limited to the community but also, to other interested parties. The purpose of such participation is because of shared interest, influence over resources and decision-making. In this case, it can portend that participation can be applied based on intended purpose.

1.1 Approaches to participation

Participation can be approached in three ways. As mentioned above, there is top-bottom approach and bottom-up approach [9] also identified these two approaches and based the difference on implementation agency. The top-bottom approach is a development program that is initiated and implemented by the government while bottom-up is initiated and implemented by the people. It is the belief in development discuss that; the former is not a people friendly approach due to its imposition posture. Development experts feel that such approach is mostly used by the government to serve its purpose and use the people as a rubber stamp or to use such development program for political benefits. The later, on the contrary, is a person oriented, initiated by the people as their priority; people participate in the decision, implementation and benefit that may arise after. Johnson [10] Observed that, there may be conflicts between the two approaches in a situation where the government has a development plan, and the community also has a plan for same development program and alternative means of achieving it. Therefore, partnership approach was considered, whereby the government and the community will work together in Partnership as the third approach to participation as a way to moderate between the top-bottom and bottom-up [11].

1.2 Determining the extent of participation

Judging from the above three approaches to participation; the authors agreed with the popular notion that, the approach determines the extent of participation in a community development program. The top-bottom approach is likely to attract low participation from the community since the development program is initiated and ‘imposed by the government. On the contrary, bottom-up will attract more participation because it is the initiative of the community as their own, so they tend to protect and support it. On the partnership, participation is tending to be moderate hence it is based on a joint agreement between the government and the people. However, the authors argued that, this postulation is intervened by some factors that are peculiar to the existing circumstance in a community or by the nature of the community program or project. In other way, a development program can be top-bottom and attract a high level of participation and remain in the continuum measurable to the bottom-up paradigm in the same context of sustainability.

In applying these circumstances, it is important to consider the pre-condition of a community, nature of the program and the environmental factors in determining the degree of participation in a community development program. Also, of great importance is the objectives of the program or project as the case may be. In this case, participation in some stages of the process that lead to achieving the program objective might be insignificant or less significant to the implementation stage that has direct impacts on the beneficiaries of such program. As a youth community that faces some social denials with attendant issues of unemployment and restiveness with high desire to be empowered, it is likely that participation in all the stages may be high as a result of the “push” factor and “pull” factors regarding their extent of participation in agriculture related activities that this study is focused [12]. However, the extent of participation in this study was argued based on the continuum expressed by; Arstein 1969; Hollnsteiner 1977; Konaya 1978; Wondersman 1981; Oakley 1986; and United Nations 1981 [13].

II. Aim Of The Study

The aim of this study is to determine the extent of youth participation in agriculture training program at Maleta Integrated Youth Farm with a view to know the extent of youth involvement in different segment of the agriculture training program structure.

III. Method Of Data Collection

This study applied the qualitative method of data collection and analysis. Qualitative research method is “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretative techniques which to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomenon in the social world” [14]. As components of the case study, interviews were conducted with the stakeholders. These include the youth participants, the government officials, and implementers. The interview enabled the researcher to understand the feelings and motivating factor for the youth as occasioned by the social problem to participate in the program and the degree of their involvement as a response to the social challenges in one hand, and their role in the process of participation in the agricultural training.

In addition, responses from the government as obtained from this method respond to some circumstances that could limit the degree of youth participation in the program as initiator and as a body charged with responsibility for providing for the socio-economic well-being of the people relevant documents related to the study were obtain from them through the desk officer. It also identified the bureaucratic issues that are by nature retained within the confidentiality of the government procedures. The implementers are also of great importance in the study as they are the insider and the technical people that know the degree of intensity of the program. Focus Group Discussions was held to validate the data collected and to allow for those youth participants who were not reachable during the face to face interviews.

IV. Findings

The results of the study indicated differences in the extent of youth participation in an agricultural training program at Maleta Youth Farm (Table 1). The difference can be based on the nature of the program as an intervention program and the prevailing social condition of the youth and the motivational strategy adopted by the government in terms of monthly stipend and empowerment package of farm land, residence on the farm and other expected support from the government. The result was also attached to the extent of participation in decision-making, implementation, benefit (or loss) sharing, and evaluation of the program.

Table 1 Summary of findings

Adopted theory of participation (Cohen & Uphoff 1977)	Themes	Brief narrations on themes	Extent of participation (Findings)
Decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preliminary decision stage • On-going decision stage • Operations decision stage 	These are stages where decisions were taken regarding the activities of the program from the planning stage through when roles were identified on who does what, what was needed for the program to the stage of managing the program on day to day activities.	Low Low Low
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enlistment / recruitment; • Duration / range of activities • Capacity building; • Membership of theco-operative society. 	The decision on this stage was found to be of great importance to the youth because it centered on the transformation of the plan into actions. Participation in the implementation includes; involvement in the recruitment process for the youth participants; duration of the program; capacity building for the youth and membership of cooperative society that is designed as part of the implementation schedule.	High High High High
Benefit sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal benefit • Social benefits • Material benefits. 	The benefits of participation in the program were identified under three themes; personal benefit to individual participants that include economic and psychological domain of youth participants; social benefit as in bonding, bridging and linking social ties. Material benefits are the supports from the government in cash and farmland.	High High Low
Evaluation	Long term result of the agriculture training program / measurement of outcome	These include steps taken through a standardized process meant to assess the long-term performance of the program base on the purpose of the establishment of the program.	No participation

Source: Author's construct

4.1 Decision making

Participation of youth in decision-making was themed under three categories in accordance with the findings; the first is preliminary stage, on-going stage, and operations stage.

4.1.1 Preliminary stage (or planning stage)

The findings indicate that the youth was involved in the planning stage even though it was initiated by the government. Youth involvement was through Office of the Senior Special Assistant (SSA) to the governor on youth empowerment with the use of coordinators and liaison officers who served as field officers. The field officers liaised with the youth representatives in the 16 local governments in the state and discussed the agriculture training plan by the government and agreement was reached to commence the training program. However, the agreement was rested on the need to empower the teeming youth population so that they will be self-sufficient and less depends on white cola job. Some motivational incentives were promised to attract the youth's participation in the program. These include monthly stipend base on qualifications, residency in the farm center, membership of co-operative society and empowerment package that also include; farmland, loan facilities and agricultural inputs supports. Participation that is stimulated by incentives and packages as stated above that does not arise from the free-will of the youth is considered to be low [15, 16]. In addition, such

process of using local government coordinators who are employees of the government to discuss with the youth with the aim to convince them to participate in a program initiated by the government can be regarded manipulative, deceitful or cajoling the have-not (the youth) through information and consultation to the top level of the ladder tagged; "citizen power" and Participation for material incentives [17-19].

4.1.2 On-going decision stage

This stage of decision making in the training program involve issues regarding the needs for the program operations in terms of human, equipment and material, location of the program site, who participate in the program, who implement the program, who funds the program and continuity of the program. It is related to the planning stage in the sense that, planning activities was outside the program while on-going is inside the program. Findings on this stage of decision making revealed that, the youth participated in the recruitment process by sitting for the entry examination, disseminate information to their peers, and they were also involved in the decision to accommodate all participants in the farm center. Youth participation in this stage, as found out, was advisory and not binding or compulsory on the government. Therefore, the participation is low[16]. Participation in decision making at operation level in a community development program can be regarded high when such participation is an authority on its own and not subjected to consideration for approval of another body [20].

4.1.3 Operations decision stage (or management)

The operations level of decision-making is aimed to promote the goal of the program. Findings on youth participation at this stage indicate low degree of participation because it is indirect, subjective and advisory in nature in response to government expectations [16]. It was also noted that, youth participation was accommodated through consultation with their leaders that makes it look manipulative because their participation can be described as a mere way of getting cooperation for such decision [15].It is important to mention that, the youth leadership was elected democratically, and they remain the officials of the co-operative society formed by the youth as part of the participation process. Therefore, it is easy to get support for government policy and other activities that affect the generality of the participants.

4.2 Implementation

Implementation is actualization or execution of planned program. Participation of youth in this activity is very paramount as it remains the primary purpose of the program. The extent of participation in this stage determines the success of the program. Findings at this stage revealed that, there are four segments of the implementation stage and the youth participated in these segments accordingly. These segments are; enlistment / recruitment; duration / range of activities; capacity building; and membership of the cooperative society.

4.2.1 Enlistment / recruitment

Recruitment of youth into the agriculture training program involved all the intending participants. It started with the expression of interest, screening, written and oral examination and identification by the individual community leader. These activities under implementation rest on the interest and willingness of the targeted participants as narrated by Cohen and Uphoff [20]. It may be recall that, the background of the training program was to reduce youth unemployment and to discourage 'get money quick' syndrome among the youth populace, therefore, the findings revealed that, some incentives were applied to encourage participation, even though, a number of participants had previous experiences and willingness to participate without incentives. The important aspect of this implementation stage is that, if the youth is not willing to participate, the program will be as good as dead because implementation would have ended there. However, the incentives attached to participation like the monthly stipend and empowerment package of cash and farmland played a significant role in inducing participation in the program. This type of participation is voluntary because participants were not forced or coerced but stimulated with reward thereby making participation high [16].

4.2.2 Duration / range of activities

This stage of implementation includes the frequency, length and range of activities required by the program. The duration of the program according to findings is 12 calendar months (one year); all participants are mandated to participate fully in the training schedule throughout the period while resident in the farm. It was observed that residency at the agricultural center is a significant sacrifice that may not have been possible with only incentives or reward if some degree of personal commitment is not applied. For instance, some of the participants left their previous job to participate in the program that attracts stipend that was far below what they earned from their previous job. Also, few of the participants are married, but they have to sacrifice leaving their young family to reside at the farm center and see them only for one or two days in a week. One of the participants; informant 6, is an agronomist and journalist. He writes news articles on agriculture matters in

another state, but he left the job and traveled about 400 kilometers to participate fully in the program for a year. It is also important to mention that, the curriculum for the program was designed for 20% to 80% theory and practical respectively which make the field work more rigorous and demanding. Some assessments are also applied from time to time to evaluate each participant and group performance on the program schedules. Therefore, it can be said the youth participation as per duration, frequency of program activities, and length of the program is high in the first place because; involvement for such duration is by choice as all participants had prior knowledge of the duration [21]. Participation in this context can also be said to be partnership between the government that provides the facilities and finances, and the youth participants who agreed to the pre-condition for participation, either by inducement or manipulation [15, 17, 22].

4.2.3 Capacity building

Capacity building is the central transformation point in a program that is targeted to impact the ability of youth in a way that will be more beneficial to them socially, economically, psychologically and by extension, politically. Capacity building is an empowerment either by imparting or acquiring new skills or adding to existing skills of the beneficiary in order to improve their knowledge in the new skill. The findings on the degree of youth participation in capacity building as an implementation stage revealed that, the whole burden of participation in this context rested on capacity building. For any participants to get empowered in this program, he or she must have participated in the capacity building schedules that cover agricultural skills on; crop production, agriculture engineering, livestock production, and rural enterprise / extension. The breakdowns of these four areas include a number of other classroom theory and field practical work on the ratio 2:8 respectively. Specifically, records and observation shows that, the objective of the capacity building include;

- (1) To train youth farmers in modern agriculture and agroforestry practices.
- (2) Vocationally, trainees must at the end of the program be able to:
 - Produce range of agricultural products efficiently for income generation. (Tree crops such as cocoa, cashew, oil palm, plantain, citrus etc., arable crops such as rice, cowpea, maize, millet, sorghum, cassava, soya bean, and yams, etc. Livestock such as sheep, goat, cattle, poultry, rabbit, and agro-forestry that involves the production such as honey, snail, grass cutter, mushrooms etc.);
 - Operate, maintain and service various farm implements including animal traction implements as well as carry out a simple survey and understand simple technical drawing;
 - Carry out soil conservation methods and demonstrate knowledge of irrigation processes;
 - Demonstrate knowledge of simple storage and preservation of farm produce;
 - Carry out accounting and managerial activities on his farm (stock taking, balance sheet, cost statistics, planning, Organizational command, coordination, and control.

From the findings above, participation in the implementation is high because it involves a kind of partnership between the government and the youth while the youth take part in the primary schedule that signifies implementation [17]. The high degree of participation in implementation can also be related to conceptualizing participation as an end due to the integrated skills and knowledge acquired in relation to the social, economic and psychological potentials contained in the capacity development schedules [23]. By extension, the program also gave the youth freedom to make suggestions and criticize the activities for the improvement of the process [16].

4.2.4 Membership of co-operative society

The study finds out that, one of the fundamental requirements for implementation of the program is that, each batch of the trainees must form a co-operative society as part of the process. The co-operation is to enable them to have access to credit facilities and as a prerequisite for eligibility for micro credit scheme available for farmers' groups. All participants are required as a matter of compulsion to be a member of the society. It is managed by the youth through their elected officials, and members make monthly financial contributions to the society and participate in the general meeting. This type of participation allows for democratic principles, social, economic, political and psychological empowerment [24]. The extent of participation is, therefore, high even though it is a means to empowerment in this context [23]. In addition, It can also be asserted that participation is induced because it is a precondition for credit facilities been a member of the co-operative society [22, 25].

4.3 Benefit sharing

Youth participation in benefits sharing on this study was categorized under three themes; personal benefits, social benefits, and material benefits. Personal benefits include all those psychological abilities derived in the cause of the training program, like self-esteem and self-efficacy. Having been empowered by the

training to become self-reliant, the participants become financially independent and socially relevant and influential among peers, family and community members. Findings further revealed that, some of the past participants are consultants to the middle and intermediate local farmers and also represent farmers' associations beyond the borders of the country. Also, economic benefits were enhanced by the CBN/FGN Commercial Agricultural and Credit Scheme (CASC) for the benefit of individuals through the co-operative society. Social benefits to participants can be found in the social ties of bonding, bridging and linking. It enhances social capital and improved networking among the youth farmers' association and the local farmers as the new generation of modern farmers. Improved education and knowledge were identified as social benefits as those with prior knowledge of agriculture learn new technology; those participants that are new also acquired basic knowledge in culture. Material benefits are farm inputs, herbicides and seedlings that were supplied by the government through World Bank (FADAMA) projects, and Africa Development Bank's Community Based Agricultural and Rural Development (CBARD) projects. In addition, participants were also allocated farmland at the three designated farm settlements across the state; Alateko; Olofere and Okeoyi.

4.4 Evaluation

Findings on evaluation revealed that there was no participation in evaluation of the program, not only on the part of youth but also on the part of the government. One informant from the supervising ministry claimed during an interview that, there were monitoring and evaluation sections.

Of course, we had monitoring and evaluation of all our programs, all the programs in the Ministry of Agriculture including support to farmers. Moreover, in my mind the program was successful at least up to that point. It was successful; we met the objectives for which the farm was established. (Informant C2)

Another informant that was also a coordinating officer of the program responded when he was asked about the issue of evaluation of the program that:

We just said it now that they need a psychologist to sustain the interest. The M and E are low. It is very low, and that could be as a result of institutional deficiency. If there's an institutional arrangement, and then you can properly harness then channel the monitoring capacity very well. (Informant C6).

These two responses were corroborated by the project implementers who are the field officers and run the day to day activities of the farm center. Therefore, participation in evaluation is low (or non-existent). However, it is pertinent to mention that the head of the department of extension maintains contact with former youth participants and assists them from time to time on a personal level. This relationship enhanced data gathering for this study.

V. Discussion

The extent of participation in the development program is mostly related to the approach of the program. If a development program or project is initiated by the people, it is believed to be bottom – up approach. Therefore, the degree of participation is expected to be high [24]. In other words, if the program is initiated by the government, it is a top – bottom approach, and therefore, the extent of participation is expected to be low because such a program is imposed on the people by the government or an external body as the case may be [11]. As a balance between the bottom – up and top – bottom approach is the situation of the people coming together with the government to initiate a development program. This will make the two parties to partner in terms of responsibility. This approach is referred to in the field of community development as partnership approach. In this case, the extent of participation is expected to be moderate [9].

While the above is the general belief in the field of community development, it is important to point out that the extent of participation may not rely only on the approach. The nature of such a development project is another important factor in determining the degree at which people participate in such a program or project. As in the case of this study, it is a youth empowerment program that is aimed to reduce the rate of unemployment. Therefore, it is an intervention program for a group in a society. As an intervention program, it appears to mean that those affected have been victims of social injustice or denial. In this case, the approach cannot be otherwise than a government intervention because; one cannot expect any contribution (as in partnership approach) from the unemployed youth in terms of material but participation only. Youth participation, in this case, is pushed by their helpless condition of unemployment that had kept them at a socio – economic disadvantage. Therefore, the approach to the development program, as found in this study as it appears to be top – bottom, does not affect the extent of youth participation in the training program.

It can also be observed in this study that, the youth participated in the determinant variables upon which their involvement in the training program is described; decision-making, implementation, and benefit sharing [20]. To a large extent, the extent of participation in these variables can be said to be commensurate with the nature of the program or the circumstances that ignite the government intervention in order to reduce the rate of unemployment among the youth. This explains why the extent of participation is low at the level of decision-making and high at the level of implementation because implementation is the key area of the program. If the

youth does not participate or have low participation at the implementation level, the program itself is as good a failure, but there is limit to power sharing in the case of decision making because it is government initiated program (Peter Bachrach, &Baratz, M. S. 1962).

VI. Conclusions

Participation, as mentioned earlier, does not have a universally accepted definition like other social science terminologies, but as placed by users. A number of authors have agreed with the definition of participation by Cohen and Uphoff [20] as one that described the new paradigm of community development popularly known as bottom-up approach which is the guide for this study. Findings of this study, as presented, shows that, prevailing conditions, and push factor of idleness, economic need and individual conviction can enhance participation of youth in empowerment program, even from the top-bottom approach. As the result indicates, participation in decision making was low because the program was introduced as intervention program by the government, but the youth were still involved either by suggestion, cohesion or inducement [16, 17, 25]. Participation of youth in implementation in this study did not reflect the top-bottom nature of the program because participation was high in implementation despite duration of the program, enlistment procedure, rigor capacity building schedules and range of other activities. Findings of the benefit also can be described as normal because the outcome of such program cannot be all positive. Therefore, when looking at sharing of the benefit of a development program, the harmful conditions too are likely to be shared [20]. Finally, the findings on evaluation appear to indicate a threat to the sustainability of the program. In the absence of efficient evaluation system, it will be difficult to know the result of outcome of a development program, or measure the success or failure and causes of either in qualitative and quantitative terms in the long run. In this situation, the program will not be sustained.

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