

VOCATIONAL TRAINING OF NIGERIA UNEMPLOYED YOUTHS IN NORTHEAST NIGERIA AS FISH FARMERS – A MEANS OF ENSURING FOOD SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

Vocational training for unemployed youths as fish farmers plays an important role in meeting fish protein need of Nigeria, contributing immensely to the national economy by providing nutritious food for the populace, creating jobs and enhancing national health and wealth. Youths are the leaders of tomorrow thereby their contribution towards food security is important. The study considered their opinion on the training based on skills acquired during a-6-week intensive vocational training. Results show that most trainees (97.03%) are within the economically active age group of 20-39years. Most trainees were confident that the programme will ensure food abundance and have a great impact on national economy. They also considered the training helpful and not only to their immediate families but also to the country at large. Skills were acquired in 8 various enterprises of fisheries but most trainees (43.56%) show greatest interest in fish fingerlings production through induced breeding, a situation that could boost aquaculture in Nigeria in few years to come. According to the trainees, the programme is laudable, and came at the right time when Nigeria is agitating to be put among the economically developed nations. However, youths exercise fear over inconsistency that could impede the progress of the programme. Recommendations are made on how to ensure better food security through a laudable programme of this nature.

INTRODUCTION

A vocational training programme was organized by the Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of President Umar Musa Yar'adua for 10,000 Nigeria unemployed youths in all the six geo – political zones of the country on different enterprises, in January, 2009. The focus of Federal Government by this programme is food security and job creation as stated in its 7-point agenda. This was in line with the United Nations Millenium Development Goals. In its list of goals, the first Millennium Development Goal states that United Nation is to eradicate hunger and poverty, and that agricultural productivity is likely to play a key role in this if it is to be reached on time. Agriculture first constitutes a major significant factor in the Nigeria economy as well as the survival of the nation. This also places a great responsibility on government to ensure development in agricultural sector.

Food Security means availability of food and accessibility to it. According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. A household is therefore considered to be food secured when its members do not live in hunger or fear of starvation. About 850 million people worldwide are chronically hungry due to varying degrees of poverty (FAO, 2003). Meanwhile, food insecurity on the other hand has been described as a condition in which people lack basic food intake to provide them with energy and the nutrients for fully productive live. Food insecurity exists when people are undernourished as result of physical unavailability of food; which can lead to hunger and breakout of diseases, reduced ability of adults to work and give birth to healthy children, and erosion of children's ability to learn. This truncation of human development undermines a country's potential for economic development – for generation to come. According to FAO (2006), it is noted that not only does aquaculture help reduce hunger and malnutrition by providing food rich in protein, fatty – acids, vitamins and minerals, it also significantly improves food security by creating jobs and raising incomes. The rearing of fish appears to be an efficient alternative method of subsistence in tropical counties, which may play a role in poverty alleviation.

The plan to incorporate aquaculture as one of the enterprises for trainees could then be borne out of the fact that fish occupies a unique position in the agricultural sector of the Nigerian economy as it provides the bulk and most affordable source of animal protein. Fish contributes immensely to the national economy by providing nutritious food for the populace, creating jobs and enhancing national health and wealth (Dada, 2004). Fish though a renewable resource must be harnessed in a manner that ensures its sustainability. Therefore, the overall importance of aquaculture in food security and job creation can not be overemphasized, as it will also ensure one of the basic principles of the programme which is self reliance and empowerment. In this study, the general perception of the trainees in Federal College of Freshwater Fisheries Technology, Baga was sorted, collated and

analyzed so as to arrive at a real picture of their disposition towards the training. This knowledge can then be used to improve on policy formulation in nearest future.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Structured questionnaire were administered on 101 trainees in Federal College of Freshwater Fisheries Technology, Baga. Also, oral interview was conducted round the trainees in order to seek their perceptions towards the programme. The sample size was based on the quota given to the college by the Federal Government for the start. Respondents in the study were trainees across the north – east part of Nigeria. The question were simple descriptive and quantitative. Statistical tools of frequencies and percentages were used in analyzing the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most of the trainees interviewed (81.19%) were within the age range of 20 – 29 years (Table 1), 15.84% were within the 30 – 39 years while 2.97% were within the 40 – 49 years. The economically active age group of most youths is within the age 20 – 39 years age group (Bolorunduro and Sule, 2001). Therefore, 97.03% of North – east unemployed youths are in the economically active age group. Males (94.06%) dominated with the 5.94% of the trainees being females. Majority (64.36%) were single while 35.64% were married, an indication that they have responsibilities on them. 89.11% were Muslims while 10.89% were Christians This should be due to the major religion of the region. 72.28% had SSCE while 27.72% had Higher education certificates from across universities, polytechnics, and monotechnics. 51.49% are in full unemployment/idleness, 4.95% are into trading, 28.71% are into peasant farming while others are into menial jobs like driving, mechanics, carpentry, bakery and tailoring.

Table 1: Personal characteristics of trainees

Age range	Frequency	%
20 – 29	82	81.19
30 – 39	16	15.84
40 – 49	03	02.94
50 – 59	-	-
> 60	-	-
<i>Gender:</i>		
Male	95	94.06
Female	06	05.94
<i>Marital Status:</i>		
Single	65	64.36
Married	36	35.64
<i>Religion:</i>		
Islam	90	89.11
Christianity	11	10.89
<i>Educational Background:</i>		
Higher education	28	27.72
SSCE	73	72.28
<i>Employment status:</i>		
Unemployed	52	51.49
Trading	05	04.95
Peasant farming	29	28.71
Menial jobs	15	14.85

When taking into consideration, the opinions of trainees on whether the programme will ensure abundance of food in Nigeria, majority (95.05%) were confident that, it will ensure food abundance based on what they, learnt and have seen during the training, while only 4.95% disagreed and argued that unless Federal Government show more seriousness, the training alone will not ensure food abundance because acquired skills without practice is a waste (Table 2). This group of people is of the opinion that federal government should provide them with loan and or materials on time to start and become productive. Table 3 shows that 91.09% are of the opinion that the programme will have great impact on the national economy, 5.94% said it will only have little impact while 2.97% disagreed that it will have no impact on the national economy.

Table 2: Area of interest from training

Enterprises	Frequency	%
Fingerling production	44	43.56
Table-size production	07	06.93
Fish feed production	11	10.89
Pond construction	09	08.92
Combined enterprises	30	29.70

Table 4 shows that 43.56% preferred to go into fingerlings production through induce breeding, 6.93% preferred table – size fish production, 10.89% preferred fish feed production, 8.92% for pond construction while 29.70% choose a combination of two or three enterprises together. Majority (95.05%) said they are ready and eager to go back to their place/town to start the business but they still plead with the federal government to provide them with loan on time as promised from the on – set of the programme (Table 5).

Table 4: Study coverage and state participation

State	Frequency	%
Gombe	40	39.60
Jigawa	31	30.69
Borno	13	12.87
Katsina	08	07.92
Bauchi	07	06.93
Adamawa	01	0.99
FCT	01	0.99

Table 5: Perception on food abundance

Opinion	Frequency	%
Yes	96	95.05
No	05	05.95

In Table 6, majority (97.23%) of the trainees considered the training helpful not only to themselves alone but also to their immediate families, while about 3.0% are of contrary opinion. Majority claimed we need to culture fish in Nigeria in order to solve many socio – economic problems. All the trainees are of the opinion that the programme should continue so that many unemployed youths in the country can benefit, this they believe can put Nigeria on a track of developed nation (Table 7).

Table 6: Impact of training on national economy

Impact	Frequency	%
Great impact	92	91.09
Little impact	06	05.94
No impact	03	02.97

Table 7: Importance of training on youths

Importance	Frequency	%
Helpful	98	97.23
Not helpful	03	02.97

The training was conducted for 101 unemployed youths mostly from the north – east zone. Table 8 shows that 41 local government areas of 7 states were each represented. Gombe has the highest participants (39.60%), followed by Jigawa (30.69%) while Adamawa and FCT have the least of 0.99% each.

Table 8: Continuity of the programme

Continue	Frequency	%
Yes	100	100
No	-	-

Vocational training is characterized by providing skills and education that prepares one for a job which all the trainees have been able to acquire. The only problem that are likely to impede the success of this programme is derailing on the part of the federal government when it comes to sustainability and implementation by providing support (loans) to the potential fish farmers. This can put a serious set – back to the programme as laudable as it is, while the effort of resource persons (trainers) will be in vain, the knowledge and skills already acquired by trainees may be a waste.

This should not happen as we are presently ‘preaching the gospel’ of 20-20-20.

This programme is in no doubt a means towards ensuring food security and to reduce the problem of unemployment in the country. The following are recommended measures to ensure the success of the programme.

- Agricultural policies like this should be reviewed annually or periodically by calling together all stake – holders on a particular subject matter, to ensure sustainability
- This training should continue so as to cover a large number of unemployed youths throughout the federation.
- Government should facilitate agricultural loan for the trainees without wasting time for result to be forth coming.

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