

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENTS' NEEDS: CHALLENGES FOR EXTENSION VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the needs of youth development agents as it affects extension volunteer managers' competencies. Youth development agencies who had registered with Global Youth Actions Network (GYAN) in Nigeria were used as the population of the study. A total of twenty nine (29) managers of these agencies with agricultural extension based activities were selected using purposive sampling technique. Structured questionnaire was administered online to elicit relevant information from the respondents for the purpose of the study. The study revealed that, majority (70%) of the respondents were male with an average age of twenty six (26) years. Out of the seventeen (17) areas of competencies identified among these managers, motivating youth volunteers ranked first, having a mean value of 4.07. The hypothesis testing carried out using correlation showed a significant relationship between agent's frequency of using volunteer administration and importance of volunteers in management ($P < 0.01$) giving 0.653 while a significant relationship of 0.390 ($P < 0.05$) was also observed between importance of volunteers in management and training among agencies managers. It was also observed that volunteer agents could benefit from educational opportunities, resource materials and other support services in each of the areas of competencies. Regular training was therefore recommended for youth development agents to enable them update, improve and learn new strategies in the application of their competencies for extension service delivery.

Keywords: Youth, Development, Agents' needs, Volunteer management, Competencies.

INTRODUCTION

The term "youth" is a concept with controversial definitions. The definition in most cases, reflect the perspective through which it is viewed and or the purpose for which the people in this category are expected to fulfill at a particular point in time. The National Youth Advisory Council (NYAC, 1987) defined "Youth" as persons within the age bracket of 15 and 36 years while Adejunmobi (2002) concluded in a study that, there is no age limit for who is to be called a youth. Just like every country has its own unique flag and national anthem, the definition of the term "youth" varies from country to country and is essentially based on issues such as maturity and right to vote.

The presence of large population of youth in a society (particularly in rural areas) can be related to high adoption levels of innovative practices as they would always want to try their hands on new things. According to Ekong (2003) youth constitute a powerful force for community and national development. An important area of development where youth participation had had a significant impact on the rural areas is volunteerism and this is noted globally.

The basic concern of agricultural extension is to extend education to people. The emphasis on extension education is on helping people to help themselves using the available resources at their disposal to better their lots (Gonzalaz, 1982; patton, 1987; Sanders and Mauder, 1966) as reported in a study by Martin (1988). The problems in the rural areas are complex and multi-dimensional and require that the extension agents are well-grinded in all the various areas calling for development. In order to function successfully in the context of a multi-functional agriculture, extension educators must be technically competent in the various disciplines related to agriculture and highly competent as educational practitioners (Richard and David, 2004). Silvera (1999) defines competencies as “the skills, knowledge, and ability that describe successful performance”. Having the required competence by change agent is therefore a key to fulfilling the vision and mission of agricultural development effort. However, the fast dwindling manpower in the extension based organizations in most of the developing countries of the world (Nigeria inclusive) over the years had opened a window of opportunity for youth volunteers who have relevant trainings in the subject-matter areas to render complimentary services and thus helping to bridge the gap that had hitherto existed in the extension service delivery.

Creating and managing a strong youth volunteer programmes in extension allows an agent to maintain and improve current programs as well as introduce new ones to meet the needs of the local resource poor and small-scale farmers. Vines and Anderson (1976) concluded in a study that, “without the cooperation and energy of youth volunteers, it is inconceivable that agents could succeed in rallying the resources they have, to help solve individual and community problems or challenge”. Therefore, organizations need youth volunteers to strengthen their responsibility for inducing constructive change within the organization and community. To keep pace with rapid development in the rural or agrarian communities, the delivery of quality extension programmes is dependent upon two elements as observed by Zainuddin and Teh, (1982). These elements are:

- (A) An adequate amount of appropriate information and technology; and
- (b) Sound teaching approaches to bring about the desired change.

Majorly, extension professionals are expected to diffuse information, using appropriate teaching strategies, procedures, and techniques (Maatoug, 1981). However, involvement of youth volunteers in the execution of agricultural extension services can pose a challenge if such volunteers do not possess the relevant competencies. This brings to focus, the need to understudy the level of management competencies of youth volunteer agencies' managers whose knowledge of the subject-matter are believed to affect either positively or negatively the multi-mate levels of competencies of their youth volunteers. Richard and Mustain (2004) identified seven core competencies areas and these are knowledge of the organization, technical / subject-matter expertise, programming, professionalism, communications, human relations and leadership.

These seven core competencies have been found to be applicable in all organizations working with the public. Having come to term with the reality on the ground in respect of the low ratio of extension agents to the resource-poor and small-scale farmers and the attendant poor program coverage in Nigeria, it would not be out of place to bring to the front-burner the contribution of youth volunteers and the short-fall in the extension agent manpower.

Thus, for the total involvement of youth in the development program of a nation, there is the need to identify some volunteer management competencies for youth development agents' managers. It is on this premise that this study sought to provide insights to the following research problems;

- (1) What are the socioeconomic characteristics of youth development agency managers?
- (2) What are the levels of importance of management competencies to youth development agents in Nigeria?
- (3) What are the frequencies at which youth development agents in Nigeria use management competencies?

The general objective of the study was to analyse the youth development agents' needs as a challenge for extension volunteer management competencies in Nigeria. The specific objectives were to;

- (1) describe the socioeconomic characteristics of youth development agency managers in Nigeria.
- (2) identify the levels of importance of management competencies to youth development agents in Nigeria.
- (3) evaluate the frequencies at which youth development managers use relevant management competencies.

Hypotheses of the study

The hypotheses of the study are as stated below;

Ho 1: There is no significant relationship between agency managers' socio-economic characteristics and the level of their need for competent management performance.

Ho 2: There is no significant relationship between level of importance and frequency of use of management competencies.

METHODOLOGY

Study area

The study was carried out in Nigeria to explore into the youth management agency managers' competency needs and its challenges for extension volunteerism. The Federal Republic of Nigeria occupies a total land area of 923,768Km² and geographically located between

latitude 4 15 and 13 55 N. The country has an estimated population of 140,003,542 people with 65% of this figure residing in the rural areas (National Population Commission, NPC, 2006). The country has thirty six (36) states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The major ethnic groups are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo among several others. Basically, the people in the rural areas of all the states of the Federation including the Federal Capital Territory are predominantly farmers. Youth volunteers are found across the length and breadth of the country partaking in one form of development effort or the other.

The population of this study comprises all youth development agency managers in Nigeria with particular emphasis on those operating agricultural extension based programmes. The framework for the study was obtained from Global Youth Actions Network in Nigeria and this consisted of about 173 youth development agents out of which only 82 were functional. However, 29 youth development agents with agricultural extension based programmes were purposively selected to form the sample size.

Carefully constructed "mail questionnaire" was administered online to elicit relevant information on 18 areas of competences from the respondents across the country and 100% return was achieved. The 18 areas of competences adapted for this study is in agreement with 18 areas of volunteer administration which was identified in the conceptual GEMS model of volunteer administrations (Culp et al, 1998).

Data collected was subjected to descriptive statistics such as mean, percentages, frequency counts and ranking (which was specifically obtained from five point likert-type scale). Inferential statistics such as chi-square and correlation were employed to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From (table 1), it is shown that majority (79%) of the respondents were males while 21% of the development agents were females. The poor presence of females as youth development managers in the study area could be linked to the enormous challenges involved in dealing with the arrays of characters likely to be presented by youth. Seventy percent (70%) of the respondents were between the age bracket of 18 and 29 years, 20.7% were below 18 years of age, the remaining 9.3% of the respondents were aged 30 years and above while their mean age was 26 years. The mean age of the respondents fell within the national youth council's working definition of youth (i.e those between the ages of 15 and 29). The bulk (41.45%) of the respondents had HND/B. Sc, 24.1% had OND/NCE, 13.8% had Senior School certificates and the rest (20.7%) had post graduate certificates. The high level of respondents' educational qualification confirms the fact that, one cannot give out what he doesn't have. The relatively high level of respondents' knowledge base has therefore positioned them to be able to dish out the required knowledge, skills and attitudes to the volunteer youth. Majority (93.2%) of the respondents were Christians while respondents practicing Islam and Traditional religion constituted same percentage of 3.4 each. Churches could

therefore be a viable Institution through which useful development information can be transmitted to the respondents.

Table 1 also shows that seventy percent of the respondents have served as youth volunteer agents for a period of 6-10 years, 24.1% served for less or 5 years while 5.9% served for a period of 11 years or more. The implication of this is that, agents with high working experiences have the tendency to have learnt all the intricacies of the job than their counterparts with low working experiences. However, 93.2% of the respondents operated non-profit oriented youth volunteer agencies, 3.4% operated profit-oriented organization and 3.4% of the respondents also gave no response. Fifty nine percent of the respondents covered more than 500 youth volunteers 14% had 1-500 youth volunteers in their coverage while 3.4% did not indicate the size of their coverage. In terms of focused areas of activity, 31.0% of the respondents focused on agriculture, 27.6% focused on democracy programs, 17.2% health, 6.9% leadership program, 3.4% media network, 3.4% religion and the remaining 10.3% gave no response.

Table 1 : Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents:

Variables	Frequency (n=29)	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	23	79
Female	6	21
Total	29	100
Age (Years)		
< 18	6	20.7
18 - 29	20	70.0
30 and above	3	9.3
Total	29	100
Educational level		
SSCE/NECO	4	13.8
OND/NCE	7	24.1
HND/BSc	12	41.4
Post graduate	6	20.7
Total	29	100
Religion		
Christianity	27	93.2
Islam	1	3.4
Traditional	1	3.4
Total	29	100
Years of volunteer service		
< 5	7	24.1
6 - 10	20	70
11 and above	2	5.9
Total	29	100
Type of organization		
Profit oriented	1	3.4
Non-profit oriented	27	93.2
No response	1	3.4
Total	29	100
No of youth coverage		
1 - 500	4	14
>500	17	59
No response	8	27
Total	29	100
Focused area of activity		
Agriculture	9	31.0
Health	5	17.2
Media network	1	3.4
Democracy involvement	8	27.6
Religious program	1	3.4
Leadership	2	6.9
No response	3	10.3
Total	29	100

Source: Field survey,2010

Table 2 shows volunteer related professional development activities in which the agents were engaged in. From the table, the professional development activities related to volunteerism most often engaged in were team leaders (82.8%) followed by school related and organization activities with both 72.4%. Professional organization has 69.0%, then professional conference 62.1%, the volunteer related, seminar and workshop (62.1%) and Advisory (55.2%).

Table 2: Types of Professional Development Activities the Agents are engaged in

Professional activities	Yes	No	No response
Seminar/workshop	18 62.1%	1 3.4%	10 34.5%
Professional conferences	18 62.1%	2 6.9%	9 31.0%
Professional organizations	20 69.0%	- 0%	9 31.0%
Team leaders	24 82.8%	1 3.4%	4 13.8%
Advisory	16 55.2%	- 0%	13 44.8%
School related	21 72.4%	1 3.4%	7 24.1%

Source: Field survey, 2010

Table 3 indicates the level of importance of volunteers' administration as perceived by the agents. The agents reported all the eighteen competencies ranging from essential to negligible importance. The highest means score was in needs assessment (5.93) followed by identifying volunteers' opportunity with the mean score of 5.83. The least mean score (4.86) among the volunteer administration as perceived by agents are screening and disengaging volunteers and they were both ranked 18.

Table 3: Perceived Level of importance of Volunteer Administration to Youth Development Agents.

Adm.	Essential	Extreme Importance	High Imp.	Moderate Imp.	Some Imp.	Slight Imp.	Negligible Imp.	Mean	Ranking
Needs Assessment		1(3.4)	1(3.4)	2(6.9)	6(20.7)	4(13.8)	15(51.7)	5.93	1
Position Assessment			2(6.9)	6(20.7)	9(31.0)	10(34.5)	1(3.4)	4.90	13
Identifying Opportunity			1(3.4)	2(6.9)	9(31.0)	6(20.7)	11(37.0)	5.83	2
Recruiting volunteers	1(3.4)			8(27.6)	6(20.7)	5(17.2)	9(31.0)	5.38	7
Selecting volunteers		2(6.9)	2(6.9)	3(10.3)	8(27.6)	3(3.3)	10(34.8)	5.17	11
Orienting volunteers	1(3.4)		1(3.4)	1(3.4)	9(31.0)	6(20.7)	10(34.5)	5.48	4
Protecting volunteers		1(3.4)	1(3.4)	2(6.9)	2(6.9)	10(34.5)	11(37.9)	5.52	3
Providing volunteers	1(3.4)			3(10.3)	2(6.9)	13(44.8)	8(27.6)	5.41	6
Screening volunteers	1(3.4)		4(13.8)	5(17.2)	9(31.0)	7(24.1)	3(10.3)	4.86	18
Teaching volunteers				2(6.9)	7(24.1)	11(37.9)	7(24.1)	5.45	5
Engaging volunteers	1(3.4)	3(10.3)	5(17.2)	6(20.7)	5(17.2)	3(10.3)	3(10.3)	3.87	17
Motivating volunteers			2(6.9)	1(3.4)	7(24.1)	9(31.0)	8(27.6)	5.34	8
Supervising volunteers				5(17.2)	6(20.7)	11(37.9)	5(17.2)	5.21	10
Evaluating volunteers			1(3.4)	5(17.2)	5(17.2)	7(24.1)	9(31.0)	5.28	9
Recognizing volunteers			3(10.7)	2(6.9)	8(27.6)	9(31.0)	5(17.2)	5.03	12
Retaining volunteers	1(3.4)	1(3.4)	3(10.3)	8(27.6)	5(17.2)	2(6.9)	7(24.1)	4.48	15
Redirecting volunteers		2(6.9)	2(6.9)	6(20.7)	7(24.1)	6(20.8)	3(10.3)	4.34	16
Diseng. Vol.	1(3.4)	3(10.3)	5(17.2)	6(20.7)	5(17.2)	3(10.3)	3(10.3)	3.79	18

Source: Field survey, 2010.

The table 4 indicated the frequency at which youth agents are volunteers' administration. Motivating volunteers was ranked highest among the eighteen phases of volunteers' administration with the mean of 4.07 and ranked second among the eighteen phases in which agents use it, and its standard deviation was 0.2804. The least frequency used among the eighteen volunteers administration is disengaging volunteers which has 2.79 as mean standard deviation of 0.3045.

Table 4: Frequency at which the agents use volunteers' administration

Administration	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Mean	Rank
Needs assessment		2(6.9)	6(20.7)	6(20.7)	12(41.4)	3.66	12
Position (job) Description	1(3.4)	4(13.8)	5(17.2)	9(31.0)	7(24.1)	3.28	15
Identifying opportunity		1(3.4)	4(13.8)	8(37.6)	14(48.3)	4.00	4
Recruiting Volunteers	1(3.4)	2(6.9)	9(31.0)	10(34.5)	5(17.2)	3.34	13
Screening Volunteers		2(6.9)	5(17.2)	9(31.0)	11(37.9)	3.79	8
Selecting Volunteers		2(6.9)	7(24.1)	9(31.0)	9(31.0)	3.66	11
Orienting Volunteers		1(3.4)	5(17.2)	9(31.0)	11(37.9)	3.72	10
Protecting Volunteers		3(10.3)	2(6.9)	4(13.8)	18(62.1)	4.07	2
Providing Volunteers		2(6.9)	4(13.8)	9(31.0)	12(41.4)	3.86	6
Teaching Volunteers			3(10.3)	11(37.9)	13(44.8)	4.07	5
Engaging Volunteers	1(3.4)	8(27.6)	8(27.6)	1(3.4)	7(24.1)	2.80	17
Motivating Volunteers			3(10.3)	11(37.9)	13(44.8)	4.07	1
Supervising Volunteers			6(20.7)	7(24.1)	14(48.3)	4.07	3
Evaluating vol.		2(6.9)	3(10.3)	12(41.4)	10(34.5)	3.83	7
Recognizing volunteers		2(6.9)	12(41.4)	5(17.2)	7(24.1)	3.28	14
Redirecting volunteers		5(17.2)	13(44.8)	1(3.4)	7(24.1)	3.03	16
Disengaging Volunteers	1(3.4)	8(27.6)	8(27.6)	1(3.4)	7(24.1)	2.76	18

Source: Field survey, 2010

Table 5 shows mean and rank for perceived level of importance, frequency of use and needs need score. The need score was calculated as by using Borich model by subtracting the perceived performance score multiplying the result by the mean perceived importance score

Table 5: Mean and Rank for importance, Frequency of use and Needs score

Administration	Level of importance	Level of importance rank	Frequency use mean	Frequency of use rank	Mean needs score	Need score rank
Needs Assessment	5.93	1	3.66	12	13.46	1
Position Description	4.90	13	3.28	15	7.94	8
Identifying opportunity	5.83	2	4.00	4	10.67	3
Recruiting Volunteers	5.38	7	3.34	13	10.98	2
Screening Volunteers	4.86	14	3.79	8	5.20	16
Selecting Volunteers	5.17	11	3.66	11	7.81	9
Orienting Volunteers	5.48	4	3.72	10	9.64	4
Protecting Volunteers	5.52	3	4.07	2	8.00	7
Providing Resources	5.41	6	3.86	6	8.39	5
Teaching Volunteers	5.45	5	3.97	5	8.07	6
Engaging Volunteers	3.89	17	2.80	17	4.24	17
Motivating Volunteers	5.34	8	4.07	1	6.78	11
Supervising volunteers	5.21	10	4.00	3	6.30	13
Evaluating volunteers	5.28	9	3.83	7	7.66	10
Recognizing Volunteers	5.03	12	3.71	9	6.59	12
Retaining Volunteers	4.48	15	3.28	14	5.38	15
Directing vol.	4.34	16	3.03	16	5.69	14
Disengaging Volunteers	3.79	18	2.76	18	3.90	18

Sources: Field survey, 2010.

HYPOTHESES TESTING

H_i: There is no significant relationship between level of importance and frequency of use of management competencies by the agency managers.

Table 6 above shows correlation matrices for selected variables on volunteer administration. There is a positive and significant correlation between the level of importance and frequency of use of management competencies among agents (0.653). This implied that what the agents perceived important in volunteers administration, the more frequently it is used by them. Importance increases the use of volunteer administration. The higher the rate at which agents perceived important in carrying out activities perceived important in carrying out activities, the higher the volunteer administration needed with 99% certainty of its occurrences.

Also, from table 6, there is a low but positive significant relationship between level of importance and training need by the agent. This implied that the higher the level at which agents perceived important volunteer administration to be, the more percentage training they required on such activity i.e. the more an agent are able to identify and attach importance to his work, the higher the need to acquire more knowledge. The certainty of this is 95%.

Also, there is high and positive significant relationship between level of importance of volunteer management and type of development activities the agents serves i.e. either profit organization or non-profit organization. This implied that depending on type of development agents carried out made agents attach the degree of important to their activities.

Table 6: Correlation Matrices of Selected Variable and some Selected Volunteers' Administration.

	Frequency Use	Important	Training	No of Youth covered	Years of services	Type of development
Frequency of use of volunteer administration						
Importance of volunteers management	0.653** 0.000 29					
Training	0.144 0.457 29	0.390* 0.037 29				
Number of Youth covered	-0.034 0.863 29	0.043 0.826 29	0.173 0.370 29			
Years of experience in Service	0.332 0.079 29	0.176 0.361 29	0.070 0.719 29	-0.128 0.509 29		
Types of Development	0.176 0.361 29	0.506** 0.005 29	0.563** 0.001 29	0.042 0.828 29	0.139 0.472 29	

Source: Field survey (2010)

** Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$

* Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$

From table 7, a low and negative relationship was observed between agents' gender and the level of importance of volunteers' administration. This implied that gender of an agent has a lot to do with the degree of importance attached to the volunteer administration. The predictor has 46.3% certainty to this claim. The table also showed that there is a positive relationship between type of development and the level of importance of volunteer administration. The relationship also claimed 43.6% certainty.

Table 7: Regression Model on importance of Volunteer Administration.

Model	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardize coefficient		
	B	Standard error	Data	T	Sig
Constant	74.086	39.964		1.854	0.078
Gender	-19.767	8.232	-0.400	-2.401	0.026
Youth Covered	5.566E-06	0.000	0.152	0.895	0.381
Educational Status	-2.243	3.537	-0.106	-0.634	0.533
Years of Service	0.578	0.629	0.156	0.920	0.368
Religion	8.355	12.925	0.110	0.646	0.525
Types of Development	25.679	9.104	0.516	2.821	0.010
Areas of Youth focused	-1.337	1.070	-0.243	-1.244	0.225

R²=46.3% F=2.583 P<0.05

Source: Field survey, 2010

CONCLUSION

The study confirmed that youth development agents use volunteer administration in their activities. There is strong and substantial association between agents' perception of the importance and the frequency of use of these administrations. The performance of youth development activities depends on their knowledge of the administrative competencies. This study was able to point out that youth development agents of Nigeria need to work more on some areas of competencies for their volunteers to be more effective in the performance of their duty. From the eighteen areas of competencies upon which the youth volunteer agents were examined,

it could be concluded that, development agents possess the necessary knowledge, skill and attitude which had qualified them to be able to impact positively on youth volunteers whose contributions to rural development have been complimentary to those of conventional public extension agents. The contributions of these volunteers (even-though occurs in an informal way) in effective extension service delivery as noted in their agricultural programme was profound. The study therefore recommended among other, adequate training for Youth development agents where they will be better equipped regularly on issues relating to agricultural resources and developmental programmes. Also, there should be a synergy between Youth development agents and the ADPs across the nation to allow for interchange of development programmes and ideas at the fortnight review meetings.

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