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THE ACHIEVEMENT OF RURAL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES: SUPPORT TO INTEGRATED AGRIBUSINESS HUBS PROJECT IN NIGERIA, IMPLICATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This study carefully described the achievement of rural youth employment opportunities: support to integrated agribusiness hubs project, tagged International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Agrihub project in Nigeria, and x-rayed its implication for sustainable development. It employed descriptive statistical design to analyse data obtained from the project beneficiaries, using carefully structured questionnaire developed by the project monitoring and evaluation team. Data were presented using frequency counts and percentages. Result shows that 50.1 percent of the beneficiaries were male, most of the

Keywords: Rural youth, employment opportunities, integrated agribusiness hub, sustainable development, policymakers, development agencies

beneficiaries (22.8%) were from Kaduna State while maize and soya beans production (14%), dairy production (11%) and renewable energy (10%) were the commodity value chains mostly engaged in by the project beneficiaries. Though the objectives of the IFAD Agrihub project were achieved, there is the need for consolidated efforts of all stakeholders to create enough employment opportunities for the growing youth population in Nigeria. Policymakers and development agencies who intend to design and implement projects with sustainable impacts for the citizenry should adopt the design of the IFAD Agrihub project. Doing this will guarantee the success of such project and create positive impacts that outlive the project on the beneficiaries.

Introduction

Agricultural sector provides opportunities to create sustainable employment, enhance the agri-food system, and alleviate chronic poverty. For sustainable impact, agriculture must leverage the potential of youth, as development drivers, change agents, and promoters. In the recent past, it is becoming increasingly difficult to transition Nigerian youths into the economic mainstream, because stakeholders in youth development do not seem to see an urgent need for this. Hence, there are strong negative social, environmental, political, and psychological consequences of this challenge in urban and rural communities of Nigeria. Many youths had acquired qualitative education without a better match in terms of employment opportunities. Subsequently, these youths have been left with no option but to develop negative mindset and carve a niche for themselves as non-state actors in control of the common welfare and resources through criminal means. For national prosperity, this tendency and situation must be reversed in good time. To reverse these, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) developed plans for agribusiness hubs to leverage a broad-based and inclusive rural growth, self-employment, and fulfilling careers for rural young people. This is key to attaining inclusive rural transformation and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). It represents a shift in paradigm from the one that views the development of socio-economically viable rural communities as a necessity;

and views youth as frustrated job seekers, to the one that views youth as the catalyst for new agribusiness, resulting in self-employment of successful entrepreneurs and serves as magnets for decent employment, as these agribusinesses grow and diversify.

When contacted about the intention of IFAD to develop youth agribusiness hubs in Nigeria, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) responded to the call using its experience with youth engagement in agribusiness. The IITA pioneered the Agripreneur movement and for the past ten years has provided a business-oriented, youth-led empowerment model built around experiential learning and entrepreneurship that has proven successful in stimulating agribusiness start-ups. IITA recognizes the importance of mindset change as a prerequisite to advancement and offers proven mechanisms to develop increasing self-confidence through assigned responsibilities. IITA relies on a process of agribusiness incubation as a means of experiential learning and the development of skill sets in agriculture needed to achieve realistic livelihood goals in rural areas. The project, Rural Youth Employment Opportunities: Support to Integrated Agribusiness Hubs in Nigeria tagged the IFAD Agrihub project; therefore, leveraged the competencies in IITA and augmented by the practical experiences of its partner, African Project Development Center (APDC) in coaching, mentoring and training of young men and women and connecting them to wage and self-employment through establishment of agribusiness hubs in project sites in Nigeria and partnership with private sector actors in agriculture and its adjacent sector. This project adopted a distinctive and broad approach to the establishment, testing, and operations of youth agribusiness hubs in Nigeria and leveraged the capacities for agribusiness incubation and youth training model of the IITA Youth Agripreneurs. It relied on some partners to provide specialist services and recognises the training and support mechanism requirements of different age groups and aspirations of youth. At the same time, it recognises that some proven effective training tools are applicable across the project. The project is based upon two components that quickly identify optimal hub designs, align current training systems to them, train a large number of youth, and then provide support services so that these imparted skillsets result in improved livelihoods. Throughout this process,

special attention is paid to knowledge management and how lessons from this project may be communicated and successfully applied by others.

Statement of the problem

Youth are the most important target group for human resources development (Awotodunbo, 2019). While Awotodunbo (2019), viewed youth as constituting the foundation of sustainable development, Akpabio (2005) reported that half of the world's population is made up of youth and women. Supporting Akpabio (2005), the Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO (2009)], asserted that about 50% of the population of the developing world consists of youth. Out of this 50%, about 565 million youth reside in rural areas in developing countries where they perform increasingly indispensable roles in agricultural and national development (Akpabio, 2005). Kumar (2002) in his study identified youth as constituting a clear asset for community development projects. In the opinion of Udemezue (2019), the large youth population in Africa should be seen as an asset for the continent's development, if appropriate human capital investment measures are taken. From the foregoing, therefore, the attainment of sustainable food production and viable agricultural development is possible only if youth occupy a very central stage (Awotodunbo, 2019).

For youth to occupy a central stage, they must be empowered and engaged as active citizens (Kumar, 2002). Youth are energetic, enthusiastic, resourceful, resilient and have great potential for agricultural economic transformation and growth in Sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria, but they are tactlessly marginalized and forgotten in the national development equation. FAO, (2009) reported that youth are tactically forgotten when conceptualizing development and formulating policies and programmes. Consequently, most youth are either underemployed or outrightly unemployed in Nigeria. To fill the vacuum created by unemployment, Nigerian youths engaged themselves in various degrees and dimensions of criminality. These include kidnapping, unknown gunmen, banditry, cultism, ritualism and insurgency. To close the unemployment gap and provide solutions to these associated menace, the IFAD Agrihub project was implemented in most agro-ecological zones in Nigeria from 2020 to 2024.

Project objectives

The IFAD Agrihub project aimed at developing a network of integrated agribusiness hubs to build entrepreneurial capacity and technical/managerial skills of Nigerian youth for sustainable employment. Specifically, the project:

- supported the development of youth-integrated agri-business hubs through strategic partnerships, and;
- generated empirical evidence of the developed and tested integrated agribusiness hub models to inform policy and national institutional adjustments, to drive scaling up of the successful models and to create jobs for youth.

The IFAD Agrihub project was implemented in five geo-political zones in Nigeria as hub locations with networks across different States. It focused on developing the skills of unemployed Nigerian youth with low and high levels of education; as well as aspiring agripreneurs to either become self-employed or to secure employment in agriculture. Through its various initiatives, the project was structured to improve the livelihoods of youth, aged between 18 to 29 years; in the rural economy, with consideration for gender balance, 50 percent male and 50 percent female. In addition, the project directed younger school-age youth to careers in agriculture through the Start Them Early Programme (STEP) project engineered by IITA.

The project beneficiaries are segregated into the entrepreneurial (30%) and employment (70%) tracks and were trained in commodity value chains, including

- crop value chains such as grains, legumes and root crops;
- livestock value chains including cattle, small ruminants and poultry;
- aquaculture value chain; fruit, forestry and horticulture value chain; and food processing;
- farm machinery and irrigation; seed, plant and soil technologies;
- renewable energy and emerging industries, as well as
- supply services, crafts and cottage industry.

The project objectives were achieved through 2 main project components and two interrelated sub-components. The first component was hub support and

capacity development. This component focuses on preparing and operating agribusiness hubs and has two inter-related sub-components; which include:

- Hub Systems Development

  This involves planning for agribusiness hubs and describes conditions that guide the formation and operations of the agribusiness hubs. This is a leading process in the promotion of social awareness and economic interests of rural youth. It also involves the actual establishment of *a*gribusiness hub. In this subcomponent, the activities undertaken include advocacy and youth awareness which was aimed at popularising agribusiness hub approach; organizational strengthening, targeting and selection of potential youth, upgrade/renovation of training facilities which is done to bring agribusiness hub to the desirable standard. Other activities include business modelling and planning (including assessment of agricultural commodity value chains and identification of financial mechanisms, for mentorship, job placement and finance for business start-ups.
- Hub operations and Expansion.

  Hub operation and expansion involves the actual operation of agribusiness hub. and is aimed at strengthening skill sets of youth in agribusiness and agro-industrial enterprises through learning-by-doing, within diverse agribusiness settings; so that participating youth can become better suited to become self-employed in agribusiness; or better meet the demands of the job market. It also involves expansion of agribusiness hub through provision of mentorship and support services to youth who were engaged in agribusinesses to reduce their businesses risks and accelerates their growth. Activities in sub-component 2 include technical support to trainers, curriculum development, technical, vocational and business training.

  The second component was the development and dissemination of Knowledge Management products. In this component, information was collected, compiled and interpreted during all stages involved in the formation and operation of Agribusiness Hub. This was integrated into knowledge management products. The activities relating to this component include knowledge management and its products, particularly the production of innovative knowledge to foster youth

empowerment through enterprise development and wage employment. This was done in a manner that established strong empirical base of evidence to scale up the integrated agribusiness hub model.

The project outcomes and output

The project was designed to achieve the following outcomes:

- training of 3,410 youth including 50% women in Nigeria and entry of 70% of beneficiaries into the agricultural sector as skilled wage earners and 30% as entrepreneurs.
- increased self- employment and wage-employment opportunities for youth through functional networks of integrated agribusiness hubs.

The project outputs include:

- the development and publication of guidelines in agribusiness hub design for use by IFAD and its grantees in the future
- the promotion of agribusiness hubs as an integrated rural development through a series of events and electronic messages.
- the development of published accounts relating to the participation requirements of different youth stakeholders, technical support to trainers and mentors,
- development of curriculum and extra-curricular outreach activities and the roles of ICT applications and social media in information access.
- tracking of trained youth, emergence of youth business clusters, the formation and services by a youth agribusiness help desk, and
- better access to capital and markets by young agribusiness persons.

Justification of the study

Efforts towards addressing youth' unemployment and attaining food security had given birth to the implementation of some agricultural development programmes in Nigeria. Some of the programmes, which include Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Better Life for Rural Women, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), River Basin and Rural Development Authority (RBRDA), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS),

Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) however; failed to fully address the development challenges they were designed to address because their implementation was fraught with some irregularities such that the expected impacts were either partially achieved or not achieved (Omokore, 2009). Agber et al, (2013) identified some irregularities with the implementation of the programmes. These include political interference, substantial funds were wasted to streamline sizes and functions, lands were indiscriminately used for farming operations, most of the participants were inexperienced and lacked knowledge of farm work, markets for produce were absent, programmes' execution was delayed, lack of monitoring and evaluation for which huge sum of money was expended and programmes were not designed to fully accommodate the participation of youth. Learning from the failure of past development programmes and recognizing the potential of youth for agricultural economic transformation; the IFAD Agrihub project was designed to close the unemployment gap, provide solutions to youth unemployment, and facilitate food security and sustainable economic transformation. The project started with youth in Imo and Ogun State; and was further extended to youth in most agro-ecological zones in Nigeria.

Methodology

The IFAD Agrihub project has been implemented as hub locations in Imo and Ogun States with network across five geo-political zones in Nigeria. To achieve the project's deliverables, the agribusiness hubs and agricultural centers established by the IITA in Nigeria were employed in delivering the developed and successfully tested training in agricultural enterprises, using a large cadre of trainers and mentors. The training falls into five broad categories. These include crop production, animal production, farm services, food processing and light industry.

Enterprises under crop production include:

- Field crops (grains)
- Field legumes
- Root crops
- Fruits/forestry
- Horticulture

Under animal production, the following enterprises were included:

- Small animals
- Cattle/dairy/swine
- Fish

Farm services. These include

- Seed technology
- Plant propagation
- Composting
- Farm machinery
- Irrigation

Food processing included

- Food processing
- Crafts/cottage industry
- Renewable energy

This study documents the achievement of the IFAD Agrihub project. It employed a descriptive statistical design to analyse information obtained using carefully designed questionnaires from the project beneficiaries. Tabulation was employed in presenting the result. Tabulation is a part of the technical process in which the classified data are placed as tables (Kakumba and Nsingo, 2008). Data were presented using frequencies and percentages.

Conceptual model and theoretical Framework

A conceptual model is a representation of a system, made of the composition of concepts which are used to help people know, understand or simulate a subject the model represents. Conceptual model can also be a descriptive model or diagram that shows the key elements in the system of interest and the hypothesized relationship between them. A conceptual model must be developed to provide an easy understanding and system interpretation by the users. Kung and Solvberg (1986) posited that when conceptual model is properly implemented, it should address four key objectives, which are:

- It should enhance an individual's understanding of the representative system

- It should facilitate efficient conveyance of system details between stakeholders
- It should provide a point of reference for system designers to extract system specifications, and
- It should document the system for future reference and provide a means for collaboration.

This study is premised on the theory of social change. According to Ekong (2010), social change is the process by which alteration occurs in the structure and function of a social system. Social change can assume modification in attitude and behavior, major reforms in legal and functional systems as well as change in material and non-material culture. The technological and Economic theory of social change is considered relevant to this study. Technology refers to the application of knowledge to the making of tools and the utilization of natural resources. Technology involves the creation of materials and instruments used in human interaction with nature. In the scheme of mode of production of Karl Marx (1964), which forms the basis for the change in society; he attached great importance to technology. The development, dissemination, adoption and utilisation of agricultural technologies are key in technological theory of change.

The economic theory of social change is also propounded by Karl Marx (1964), and it rests on key assumptions that changes in the economic "infrastructure" of the society are prime movers of social change. These infrastructures consist of forces and relations of production. Karl Marx postulated that change is the order of nature and society, and that the activity of the mind does not arise independent of the material. This implies that everything mental or spiritual is the product of the material process. Marx believed that it is man's material necessities that are at the root of his productive efforts, which in turn is the basic of all other forms of his life. Going by the two theories of social change, participation of the youth beneficiaries in the IFAD Agrihub project can be logically tied to the expectation of a positive change or increased productivity, improved livelihood, income and level of living of the youth beneficiaries. The proper implementation of the IFAD Agrihub project outputs facilitated and enhanced the achievement of the project's expected outcome.

Result and discussion

The total number of applications received from potential beneficiaries of the IFAD-Agrihub project was 123, 564 (one hundred and twenty-three thousand, five hundred and sixty-four). Though the project targeted 8, 200 (eight thousand and two hundred) direct beneficiaries, a large number of applications were received. This is an indication that large number of youths are either outrightly unemployed or underemployed. This may also indicate that Nigerian youth are becoming more aware of the role agricultural entrepreneurship training may play in providing sustainable employment for them, and are willing to attend such training. In Figure 1, more male (50.9%) participated in the project, despite 50% consideration for gender balance, that is 50% for both male and female participants. This indicates that male youth still dominates in expression of interest towards development projects that target them. This result aligns with the findings of Awotodunbo (2019)

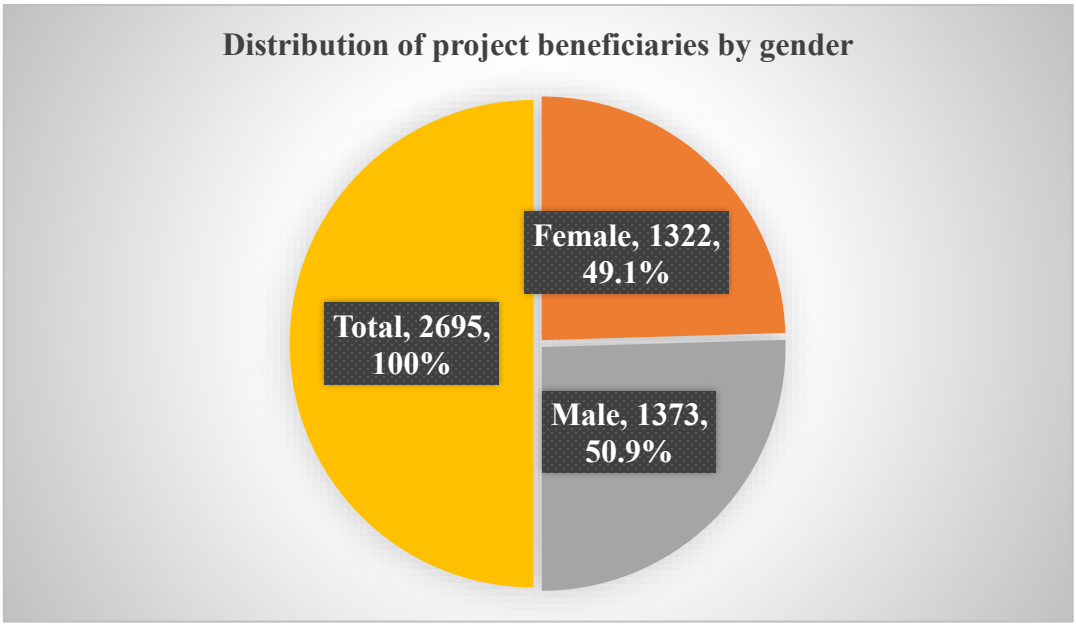


Figure 1: Distribution of project beneficiaries by gender

Source: Field Survey, 2024

In Table 1, the highest number of beneficiaries were produced by States in Northern Nigeria. Most of the beneficiaries (41.01%) were from Kaduna (22.83%), Adamawa (11.13%), and Nasarawa (7.05%) States. About 22.16 percent of beneficiaries were from the South West, Nigeria including Ogun, Lagos, Oyo, Osun and Ondo States. In the Eastern States including Imo, Anambra, Abia and South Southern States of Akwa Ibom and Cross River States, the beneficiaries

accounted for about 25.43%. Only 6.90 percent of the beneficiaries were from the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. This indicates that most of the beneficiaries of the IFAD Agrihub project were from the Northern part of Nigeria. This may be attributed to the importance attached to agricultural enterprises as the mainstay of the economy or access to arable land for arable crop production in the Northern part of Nigeria. In Nigeria, the northern region is known to have flat land surfaces with abundant sunlight and soil suitable for arable crop farming, while the southern region has tropical rain forests making it conducive for forestry production but a little difficult for the production of arable crops (FAO, 2009).

Table 1: Distribution of project beneficiaries by location

State	Town	Frequency	Percentage
Nasarawa	Gaate and Keffi	190	7.05
Federal Capital Territory	Abuja	186	6.90
Plateau	Jos	16	0.59
Ogun	Abeokuta	192	7.12
Lagos	Epe	35	1.29
Imo	Owerri	376	13.95
Oyo	Ibadan	298	11.05
Osun	Iwo	50	1.85
Ondo	Akure	23	0.85
Anambra	Awka	80	2.96
Akwa Ibom	Uyo	138	5.12
Abia	Aba	52	1.92
Cross River	Calabar	40	1.48
Kano	Kano	104	3.85
Kaduna	Kangimi	615	22.82
Adamawa	Yola	300	11.13

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 shows that maize and soya beans production (14.25%), dairy production (11.22%) and renewable energy (10.51%) were the commodity value chains mostly embraced by the beneficiaries of the project. The training in renewable energy may not be unconnected with the current calls for renewable energy to mitigate the impact of climate change in the globe.

Table 2: Distribution of beneficiaries by commodity value chains

Value Chain	Frequency	Percentage
Aquaculture	105	3.92
Renewable Energy	281	10.51
Vegetables	138	5.16
Cassava	71	2.65
Poultry	137	5.12
Livestock	14	0.52
Fabrication	41	1.53
Palm-Oil	30	1.12
Food Processing and Value Addition	135	5.05
Maize and Soybean Production	381	14.25
Groundnut Production	104	3.89
Integrated Farming	80	2.99
Cotton Processing	140	5.23
Rice and Sorghum	96	3.59
Diary Production	300	11.22
Cashew	200	7.48
Others	420	15.71

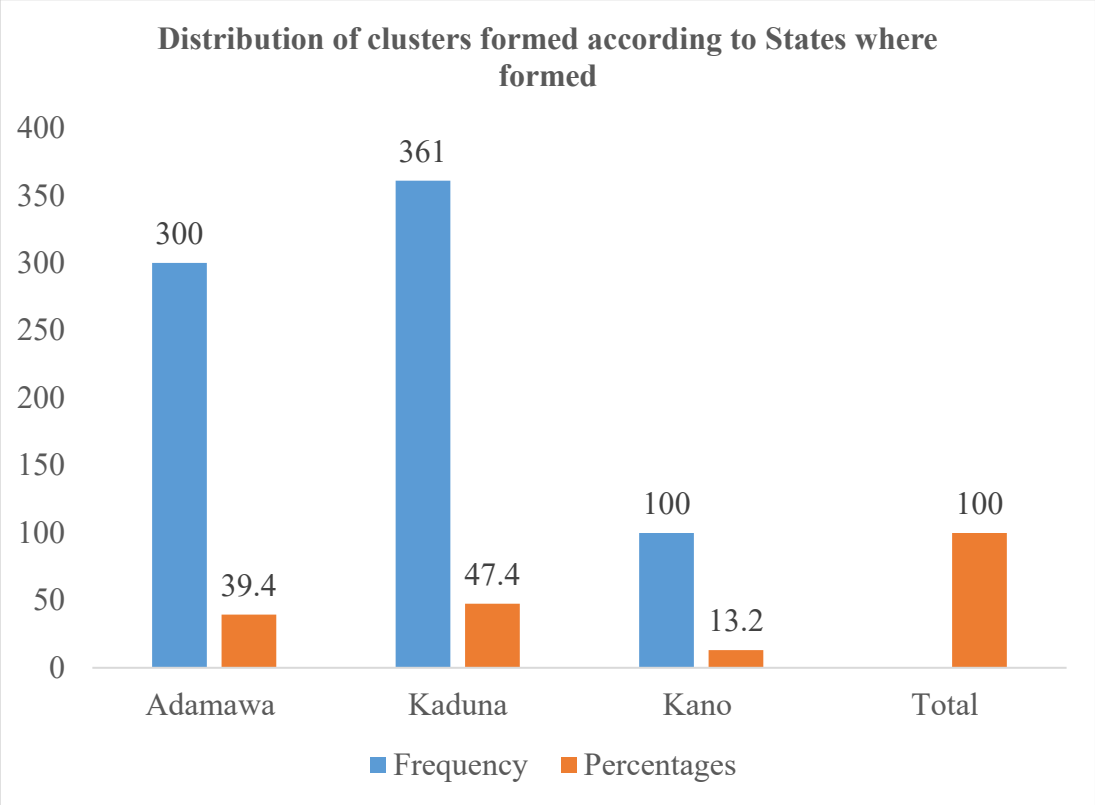
Source: Field Survey, 2024

Beneficiaries were mobilized into clusters in three of the project States. These States include Adamawa, Kaduna and Kano. Figure 2 shows that about 47 percent of the clusters were formed in Kaduna State, while the least clusters formed was in Kano State (13.2%). Decision to form beneficiaries into clusters in the States is informed by ease of project' delivery and support to the beneficiaries. This therefore underscores the importance of clusters or cooperative groups formation in project administration and support to project' beneficiaries, particularly the IFAD Agrihub project. Grouping of farmers into clusters in these States enabled them to access project' support including agricultural technology, quality and less expensive production inputs and better markets for their farm produce/products.

Formation of farmers into clusters is not peculiar to Nigeria alone, it is global (Endalew et al., (2024); Goni et al., (2023); John A.O (2018)). In their studies of

the impact of cluster farming initiatives on small and socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers and forestland owners in the southern region of the United States of America, Karki et al. (2021) emphasised the importance of grouping farmers into clusters and the benefits therein. They reported that 190 producers received access to farm loans, mobile and stationary cold storage facilities, and marketing materials while 930 farmers strengthened their knowledge and skills, and changed their behavior due to the implementation of the cluster farming approach.

Figure 2: Distribution of clusters formed according to States where formed



Source: Field Survey, 2024

In Table 3, all the enterprise value chains in States where clusters were formed were linked with quality inputs sources and were supported with production items. These enterprise value chains include dairy production in Adamawa State, maize enterprise in Kaduna State and groundnut enterprise value chain in Kano. The supports to the enterprise value chains seems to be in conformity with or in consideration of comparative advantage in each State of production.

Kano and Kaduna States are known to have comparative advantages in the production of groundnut and maize, respectively while dairy production seems to be an enterprise of more economic value in Adamawa State (Nairaland Forum, 2024). According to Nairaland Forum (2024), the States in Nigeria that are most engaged in Maize value chain are Kaduna, Niger, Taraba, Plateau and Adamawa, while Niger, Kano, Jigawa, and some other States in Northern Nigeria were most engaged in groundnut; with Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe and some other States in Northern Nigeria identified as being mostly engaged in cattle (dairy) value chain.

Table 3: Distribution of enterprise value chains linked with inputs and support items

State	Enterprise value chains	Frequency	Percentage
Adamawa	Dairy production	300	39.4
Kaduna	Maize production	361	47.4
Kano	Groundnut production	100	13.2

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The number of direct and indirect jobs; self-employment and wage employment created by the IFAD Agribusiness hub project was about 3, 579. This is an indication that the project's plan to achieve increased self-employment and wage-employment opportunities among Nigerian youth was attained. So many beneficiaries of the IFAD Agrihub project have good stories of success to tell. Rosemary Adeoti and Akinbiyi Michael are among those beneficiaries.

Rosemary Adeoti is a graduate of Economics who participated in IFAD-Agrihub training in Oyo State. She recently shared her experience as a trainee at the Oyo Agrihub located in Awe, Oyo state, Nigeria, where she received comprehensive training in screen house and open-field vegetable production, as well as biogas production, poultry, goat farming, and garri processing value chains. In the words of Rosemary, "The hub exposed me to agriculture in all its beauty and opportunities. I learned about environmental and climate change issues". Rosemary applied for employment with Farmsquare and was employed as an agronomist with Farmsquare, an agricultural e-commerce organization. "The fact that I applied for the post of an Agronomist and got the

highest mark among other candidates who graduated in Agronomy from Nigerian universities was evidence that the training I acquired through the IFAD-Agrihub project was in-depth." Rosemary has also started her own agricultural business under the name SR Farms. The farm specialises in vegetable, cassava and catfish production.


Akinbiyi Michael - was trained as a solar photovoltaic installer (SPVI) through the training provided by the IFAD-Agrihub project. Upon successful completion of the training, he registered for and passed the examination that earned him a certification from the Council of Registered Engineers of Nigeria (COREN). This certification has remarkably enhanced his employability within the private sector in the renewable energy industry. However, driven by his passion and expertise, Michael has taken a bold step to establish his own business in the renewable energy sector under the name "Light Up Solar".

Project challenges

Despite the success recorded by the IFAD Agrihub project in terms of the quality of training, number of beneficiaries reached and employment created, the project still faced some challenges. It is challenging to effectively link the trained entrepreneur to financial support. This may be due to the unavailability of credit records of the beneficiaries. It may also be due to stringent lending processes and high interest rates being charged by financial institutions in Nigeria. Consequently, beneficiaries still struggle to access the financial resources needed to start or expand their agribusinesses. With high youth unemployment rates in Nigeria, it's still a challenge to create enough employment opportunities for the growing youth population. Many

applications were received from potential youth participants, but few of the applicants could be considered for fund constraints. Despite the number of youth employment created, many youth are yet to be employed in the country. Oftentimes, many paid job opportunities are available, but in urban areas that requires the movement of youth away from their original place of residence. This oftentimes makes it difficult for youth to take advantage of these opportunities. This has been constraining many youth, especially those in rural areas, as they lack the financial resources or support networks to move and settle in new locations.

What worked well

Despite the myriad of challenges, some factors are known to contribute to the success of the IFAD Agrihub project in Nigeria. The onboarding of beneficiaries into the agribusiness hubs after the training for continuous engagement in chosen enterprise value chains, and for starting their agribusinesses enhances the technical knowledge and creditworthiness of beneficiaries and stimulates the success of the project. Targeting youth for sustainable employment is the right strategy adopted for project success. Despite limited space for youth training, very many applications were received indicating that youth are unemployed and are the right target for the project. Moreover, partnership with the private sector actors in the agribusiness industry resulted in high number of job placement recorded during project implementation.

Exit strategies

The project beneficiaries had been trained in both technical and business skills and were supported to run the various enterprises at the agribusiness hubs as profitable and sustainable businesses after the project closeout. However, there are also plans to finally hand over the established agribusiness hubs to serious, hardworking, credit-worthy and committed beneficiaries. Such beneficiaries would also enjoy project support in the form of linkages to markets and finances.

Lessons learnt

By implementing the IFAD Agrihub project, it was learnt that leveraging the potential of Nigerian youth could facilitate youth employment and reduce

social vices commonly associated with youth unemployment. The establishment of agribusiness hubs has also proved to be effective in promoting the interest of youth in agricultural businesses in Nigeria. The implementation of the project has also shown that youth are ready to take up employment in agribusinesses if modern technological innovations are applied. It has also been shown that small and medium enterprises can improve youth employment prospects. Youth employment will improve if small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are willing to hire and train young individuals to have enhanced productivity and expanded businesses. For businesses owned by the youth to grow sustainably, they need assistance and linkage to good markets, credit facilities, insurance and platforms for further experience-based training. These elements play crucial roles in the growth of their agribusinesses, long-term success and enabling their ability to make valuable contributions to the economy. Youth residents in rural communities were quicker to establish their agribusinesses owing to their access to farmland, markets and other production opportunities.

Implication of IFAD Agrihub project for sustainable development

Development is an economic concept that involves the application of certain economic and technical measures to utilize available resources and initiate economic growth to improve people's quality of life. Any development that meets the needs of the people in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, therefore; is termed sustainable development (Cerin, 2006; Dernbach J. C., 1998; Dernbach J. C., 2003; Stoddart, 2011). This implies that development efforts must not only meet the economic needs of people, it must also result in the improvement of their standard of living. Sustainable development therefore must enable the citizenry to attain the basic human needs and positive change in their living standard, consistently. Achieving human needs demands that human beings must be engaged in sustainable economic activities. To facilitate this, the United Nations in 2015 adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with its seventeen indicators. This was done as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The IFAD Agrihub project leveraged the youth to promote SDG's indicators. These include SDG 1 which seeks to eradicate poverty, SDG 2 which

seeks to achieve zero hunger and SDG 5 which seeks to achieve gender equality and inclusion of female youth. The project facilitated youth employment and fostered sustainable development in Nigeria. Before the implementation of the IFAD Agrihub project, the rate of youth unemployment was high (Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO, 2019]). The project enabled and built youth capacities in agricultural and other income-generating businesses. It empowered youth to tackle agricultural production challenges; thereby contributing to the food baskets of Nigeria. IFAD Agrihub project also facilitated youth employment and promoted gender equality. It promoted improved and equal access of youth beneficiaries to participation, resources and available opportunities regardless of their sexes. Achieving all these is inviolable for fostering sustainable development in any nation (FAO, 2009). Hence, future projects with similar goals and objectives should be designed similarly to the IFAD Agrihub project, as this constitutes one of the best ways such a project can outlive its impacts.

Conclusion and recommendation

IFAD Agrihub project was designed to close the unemployment gap, provide solutions to youth unemployment, and facilitate food security and sustainable economic transformation. The project was implemented in most agro ecological zones in Nigeria and achieved its objectives, though; with some implementation challenges. The project's success could be credited to its establishment and operations of youth agribusiness hubs in Nigeria and its ability to leverage the capacities for youth training by the IITA youth agripreneurs. This is a shift in paradigm from the common public approach to project design and implementation, which yields little or no sustainable impact on the beneficiaries. Policy makers and development agencies who intend to implement projects with sustainable impacts for the citizenry and youth in particular, should adopt the IFAD Agrihub project' design. Doing this may guarantee the success of such project and the achievement of impacts that outlive the project.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest of any form among them. The work represents the thoughts of the contributors and is in no way a representation of the thoughts of the funders of the IFAD Agrihub project

Statement of contribution by authors

Aline M. Mugisho, Adenmosun Adetola, Adesanya Omotomiwa, Adebayo, Atilade Solomon, Otu, David Samuel, and Awotodunbo, Adebayo Aworeni jointly contributed to the conception/design, development of data collection instrument, analysis, interpretation of data and revised manuscript.

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