



ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY COUNSELLING STRATEGIES IN RURAL AGRIPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN GOMBE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the community counselling strategies for rural agro-entrepreneurship development in Gombe State, Nigeria. A three-stage sampling technique was used to select 186 community counselors, rural extension workers and entrepreneurs from the three Local Government Areas of the State. Data were collected using structured questionnaire and were subjected to descriptive statistics such as; the means, standard error and mean decision on a 5-point Likert scale rating for analysis. The result revealed that, majority of the perceived roles of community counselors in agro-entrepreneurship development in the study area was accepted. Implying that, rural counselors and extension workers have significantly contributed to agro-entrepreneurship and sustainable economic development in the study area. Also, the results revealed that, most of the perceived factors for effective implementation of rural agro-entrepreneurship programmes in the study area were significant. Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed the mean score of all the perceived counselling skills and strategies to be ≥ 3 ; meaning that the variables were significantly accepted. To achieve sustainable development in rural agripreneurship, the study recommends concerted efforts by the government in collaboration with various local and international agencies to provide more of agro-entrepreneurial capacity building programmes and other incentives to the rural communities.

Keywords: Agripreneurship, Counselling, Development, Programmes, Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has been the mainstay of the Nigeria's economy despite the decline in productivity especially since the oil boom of the 1970s that heralded the petro-dollar era, till date; of which greater proportion of the population about two-third of the total labour force of the nation depends on the sector for their livelihood, and as well as the rural economy is propelled by agriculture (Ugwumba and Omojola, 2013). According to Julius (2012), the country has an area covering 91.1 million hectares of land mass and 1.3 million hectares of water bodies; of this, agricultural land area (83.6 million hectares) classified as; 28.2 million hectares for arable crop production, 2.01 million hectares as *fadama* (irrigable land), 2.5 million hectares for permanent crops production, 10.9 million hectares as forest/wood and 40 million hectares as pasture, range and reserved lands. It is in view of that, the Nigerian Government put agriculture at the forefront of its economic policy (Sani, 2012). However, poverty and other socioeconomic challenges continue to grow rapidly in Nigeria, as a result of increase in population and dwindle in agricultural production both for local and international markets. Aremu and Adeyemi (2011) added that, the ever-increasing decline in agricultural production is attributed to a number of factors; one of which has been the rural-urban drift. Youths who



might otherwise been employed in agriculture and helped to maintain vibrant rural communities have continued to bypass this vocation and location in lieu of seemingly more lucrative prospects in the urban areas (Bennell, 2010).

However, in response to this, the entrepreneurship education in agriculture has risen as a viable platform to reengage these rural youths in agricultural sector of the economy and slow down the rural outmigration (Morris *et al.*, 2013). According to Duru (2011), rural entrepreneurship education is achieved through community counselling and extension service delivery; both are central in the agricultural development process, in terms of technology transfer and human resource development. The major objective of rural agro-entrepreneurship education is to teach the farmers and rural households to improve their standard of living within minimum assistance and by their own efforts through non-formal education. Moreover, rural community counselling programs are generally designed to stimulate entrepreneurship and are focused on building knowledge and skills of entrepreneurship in agriculture; also focuses on awareness and principles of financial literacy, socio-emotional skills necessary for successful entrepreneur, practical enterprise and entrepreneurial project activities (Valerio *et al.*, 2014).

According to Ojeifo (2013), rural agro-entrepreneurship could assist in employment generation, transformation of traditional to modern technology, stimulation of indigenous entrepreneurship, reversal of urban-rural migration, greater utilization of raw materials, promotion of local technology, mobilization of local savings, linkage balance by spreading investment more evenly, ability to operate profitably in very narrow markets with low purchasing power, among others. However, community counselling could be directive or non-directive; the goals may also vary depending on the individual's dispositions, and the issue or problem to be addressed. It therefore becomes imperative for trained and experienced counselors/extension workers to pursue skills to boost the entrepreneurship education in rural agriculture, particularly at this time of need.

Rural youths who acquired skills through agro-entrepreneurship education could get gainful employment and thus help to reduce social vices such as robbery, cattle rustling, drug abuse among others. In addition to that, the acquisition of entrepreneurship skills does not only provide youths with financial benefits, but also provided them with psycho-emotional security. Generally, the acquisition of appropriate entrepreneurial skills in agriculture enables individuals to develop their intellectual, physical, social, emotional, spiritual, political and economic capabilities. Despite these profound benefits, the agro-entrepreneurship education is still not fully propelling in Nigeria. The major bottlenecks to that include; i) political instability, bureaucracy and corruption in conjunction with the absence of social consensus on importance of micro/macroeconomic policy issues; ii) poor vocational/skills training toolkits; iii) data for agro-entrepreneurship education has been lacking; iv) there is little or limited programme design for agro-entrepreneurship education in the rural communities; v) the presence of administrative and trade barriers that curtail capacity building and inhibit access to technical support; vi) significant infrastructural deficits (especially with regards to roads and electricity) and systematic irregularities inimical to small businesses; vii) absence of proactive regulatory environment that encourages innovative enterprise development in the rural communities; viii) poor access to capital; ix) higher infrastructural decay; x) high rate of poverty; xi) inflation; xii) technological infraction and xiii) insecurity.

Moreover, the poor societal attitude to rural entrepreneurship education is very much a problem tendency; in spite of the efforts made by the governments at all levels to provide youths with job creation opportunities in the rural communities, the goals were not optimally achieved. It is a challenge to entrepreneurship education in the rural communities, because of the kind of attitudes of the youths; the laudable programmes in agro-entrepreneurship education



will not achieve its set objectives meant to ameliorate the unemployment situation in the country. In view of the above, the community counselling is seen as the enabling process which could encourage self-reliance as people make choices and decisions or show an inner burden. To this effect, the study was made to provide answers to the following research questions: what roles did community counselors play in agro entrepreneurship education in Gombe State? What are the factors for effective implementation of agro entrepreneurship programmes in rural Gombe State? What counseling skills and strategies are required for rural agro-entrepreneurship education in Gombe State?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Study Area

Gombe State is one of the six states of the North-east geo-political zone of Nigeria. It covers an area of 20,265 km² with human population of 2,587,159 million, of which 1,296,166 (50.1%) were males and 1,290,993 (49.9%) were females; with population growth rate of 3.2% per annum according to the Gombe State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy [GOSEEDS] (GOSEEDS, 2007). According to Gombe State Government [GSG] (GSG, 2015), Gombe State shares common boundaries with Borno State to the east, Yobe State to the north-east, Bauchi State to west, Taraba State to the south, and Adamawa State to the South-east. The climatic condition of the State is typical of the Sudan savannah zone characterized by long dry season lasting between October and April and short rainy season that lasts from May to September; with an average (850 mm) amount of rainfall received per annum. The climate is characterised with a warm condition, having a mean diurnal temperatures of 35°C – 40°C during the hottest months of (March – May) and to about less than 30°C during harmattan (GSG, 2015). Gombe State is a multi-ethnic state comprising majorly of Fulani, Tangale, Waja, Tera, Bolewa, Tula, Cham, Dadiya and Hausa (GSG, 2015). The location of Gombe State in the centre of major trade routes which made it important commercial hub in the north-east region that linked to other parts of the country by road, air, and rail networks. The people of the State are mostly farmers, cattle-herdsmen, traders and other non-agricultural services (GOSEEDS, 2007). Crops produced and marketed in the study area includes; maize, millet, sorghum, cowpea, groundnuts, Bambara nuts, rice, vegetables and fruits; as well as livestock and fisheries are also raised. Industrial and other agro-business activities in the study area are in the form of large, medium, small and cottage scales which include; ginnery, oil seeds milling, rice milling, table water production, leather works, fish and meat processing etc. (GSG, 2015).

Sampling and Sampling Techniques

A three-stage sampling technique was used to select respondents for the research population. Gombe State was purposively selected in the first stage, because it is known for agribusiness opportunities and as well as there was notable records of rural entrepreneurship education initiatives. In stage II, three Local Government Areas (*Akko, Balanga and Funakaye*) were purposively selected for their notable extension service delivery and community counselling in the State. In stage III, a disproportional and simple random techniques were used to select a total of 186 respondents to ensure every member of the target population (extension staff, guidance-counselors, farmers and rural entrepreneurs) had equal and independent chance of being selected (Mubirigi, 2016).

Method of Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from the primary sources using structured questionnaires and supported with schedule interview that allowed for generation of qualitative information which was not captured in the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of coded questions that guided the respondents to freely express their perceptions on the variables given.



Method of Data Analysis

In this study, the descriptive statistics such as means, standard error and the mean decision on a 5-point Likert scales were used to answer the research questions of the study. The rationale for using these tools is relevance since they provide more complete and accurate information (Kessy, 2001). They were also used to present and show the distribution of the respondents' perceptions on agro-entrepreneurship education in the study area. The standard error of the mean (SEM) was used to measure the dispersion of sample means around the population mean. It measures the accuracy and precision with which the sample represents the entire population. The smaller the value of the standard error, the more representative the sample will be of the overall population. However, to achieve the objectives of the study; the perceived variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scales as follows; - strongly agree (SA) = 5; agreed (A) = 4; undecided (UD) = 3; disagreed (DA) = 2; and strongly disagree (SD) = 1 point. The five responses were added to obtain 15, which were then divided by 5 to get 3; which was regarded as the decision mean. Therefore, variables with mean score < 3 were perceived as rejected response, while variables with scores ≥ 3 were perceived as accepted response.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: What are the roles of community counselors in rural agro-entrepreneurship education and sustainable economic development in Gombe State Nigeria?

Table 1 shows means rating of the perceived roles of community counselors in rural agro-entrepreneurship education in the study area. However, the results revealed that, items 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10 have mean scores range of 3.38 – 3.85; meaning the variables were agreed and accepted that, creativity and motivation; the provision of meaningful guidance and as well as the provision of vocational, psychological potentials to the rural communities etc. were perceived as key roles of community counselors in the study area. The results also revealed that, items 1, 4 and 8 were rejected; meaning that, the variables were not key roles of rural community counselors in the study area. The result implies that; rural community counseling is a helping relationship where rural communities are in contact with counselors and extension workers who have been trained to help them get out of their socio-economic problems. This is in line with the findings of Anamaeze (2002) who admitted that counseling is a relationship between counselor and counselee in whom the former helps the latter learns more for satisfying attitude and behaviour, necessary for solving socio-economic problems. However, to achieve positive impact on the roles of rural community counselling for agro-entrepreneurship development; the counselors and extension workers should utilise best administration, training programmes, action research skill, orientation, planning, time management skill, use of practical skills among others (Ifelunni, 2003; Onyilofofor, 2010).



Table 1: Roles of Community Counselors in Agro-entrepreneurship Education in Gombe State

S/No.	Perceived roles of community counselors in rural agro- entrepreneurship education in Gombe State	\bar{x} -score	S.E	Decision
1.	Transfer of technology and innovation packages is the key role of community counselors in rural agro-entrepreneurship education in Gombe State Nigeria	2.90	1.58	Rejected
2.	Creativity and motivation is another role of community counselors in rural agro-entrepreneurial education and economic development in Gombe State Nigeria	3.67	1.73	Accepted
3.	Training of rural youths and school leavers in agro-entrepreneurship education is also the role of community counselors in Gombe State Nigeria	3.39	1.68	Accepted
4.	Industrial and small-scale rural economic development is influenced by the roles of community counselors in Gombe State Nigeria	2.82	2.46	Rejected
5.	Provision of meaningful guidance for rural youths which could make them self-reliance and to make them drive profit is also the role of community counselors	3.85	0.77	Accepted
6.	Solving of rural community problems is also important role of counselors in agro-entrepreneurship education and sustainable economic development in Gombe State	3.19	1.64	Accepted
7.	Community counselors provide rural youths with enough training that will make them creative and innovative in identifying new business opportunities in agriculture	3.48	0.70	Accepted
8.	Ability to procure formal loans for agro-entrepreneurship by rural youths is influenced by the roles of community counselors in Gombe State Nigeria	2.79	1.36	Rejected
9.	Supportive counselling in career choice is one of the important roles of community counselors in agro-entrepreneurship education in Gombe State Nigeria	3.38	1.67	Accepted
10.	Community counselors provide vocational/psychological potentials to rural communities for agro-entrepreneurship and economic development in Gombe State	3.71	1.74	Accepted

Source: Field survey data, 2018

Research Question Two: What factors influenced effective implementation of rural entrepreneurship programmes in Gombe State Nigeria?

Table 2 shows the respondents' perceptions of the determinants for effective implementation of rural agro-entrepreneurship education programmes in Gombe State Nigeria. However, the results revealed that, items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 10; have mean scores range of 3.02 – 3.94; meaning that, the variables were strongly agreed and accepted, meaning that these variables were very important factors for effective implementation of rural agro-entrepreneurship education programmes in the study area. The results also revealed that items 7 and 9 had mean scores range of 2.01 – 2.94; implies that, the variables were not important factors for effective implementation of agro-entrepreneurship programmes in the study area. The result is in line with Ojeifo (2013), who opined that, poor infrastructural network has been proved as a major setback to rural agro-entrepreneurial development. Basic infrastructural network such as good electricity supply, good road networks, standard health care facilities, accessible portable water and quality education among others are in gross shortage of supply



in most of rural communities in Nigeria thereby affect agro-entrepreneurship development. These to a large extent have resulted to continuous out-migration from rural to urban regions (Oni and Daniya, 2012). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2013) also, viewed rural infrastructures have long been neglected in Nigeria, and this justifies shortage of manpower in the rural communities. Governments' investments in amenities such as; electricity, health care facilities, road networks, education and water supply have focused largely in the cities; as a result, affect the implementation of agro-entrepreneurship programmes in the rural communities.

Table 2: Determinants of Rural Agro-entrepreneurship Implementation Programmes

S/No.	Perceived factors for effective implementation of agro-entrepreneurship programmes in Gombe State	\bar{x} -score	S.E	Decision
1	The available alternative resources and the behaviour of entrepreneurs in choice and decision making is a factor for implementing agro-entrepreneurship programmes	3.02	1.06	Accepted
2	The attitude of the society (interest in sharing and releasing their assets for productive and profitable activities),	3.85	0.77	Accepted
3	The motivational tools and techniques available to the rural entrepreneur, that is, technology in use,	3.51	2.70	Accepted
4	Political reformation, religious tolerance, security, adequate and appropriate social amenities, etc.	3.13	0.63	Accepted
5	The rewards system in the rural society (the higher the reward system, the greater the achievement of the rural entrepreneurs),	3.94	1.79	Accepted
6	The economic growth rate (the greater the growth rate, the higher the agro-entrepreneurship development),	3.18	1.64	Accepted
7	A free and democratic society, free enterprise economic system and the opportunity costs of developing private initiatives	2.94	2.59	Rejected
8	The infrastructural networks to a large extent contributed to the rural agro-entrepreneurial development	3.20	0.64	Accepted
9	Process of creating self-awareness and the development of individual capacity for creative and innovative thinking, decision making and action implementation	2.01	1.04	Rejected
10	The remoteness of a rural location has its effect on different aspects of business innovation and consequently on rural agribusiness growth and the creation of employment	3.62	1.39	Accepted

Source: Field survey data, 2018

Research Question Three: What are the counseling skills and strategies for rural entrepreneurship education in Gombe State?

Table 3 shows the respondents' perceptions of counselling skills and strategies in agro-entrepreneurship education for sustainable development in Gombe State Nigeria. However, the results revealed that, all items (1 – 10) have mean score range of 3.03 – 3.90; meaning that, the variables were strongly agreed and accepted as the best counselling skills adopted by the rural community counselors in agro-entrepreneurship education in the study area. However, the



finding is in line with the counselling skills identified by Laura (2005) and Marsan (2009). By examining their own personal strengths and weaknesses and comparing these with those of the typical counselor; the community counselors are expected to work closely with the people; this is where it is critical to be able to build great relationships with their clients. They need to develop ability for optimistic thinking that will help a person get through tough times and create a compelling vision of the future, and then inspire other people to engage with that vision. They also need to acquire the instinct to start problem-solving or business improvement projects and develop ability to lead others and make decisions even when facts are uncertain. Creativity is perceived a skill that a community counselor can develop if he/she invests the time and effort. This is in tandem with the findings of Howkins (2001), that agro-entrepreneurship education is the creative industry which needs to possess the ability to prioritize ideas over data. Rural community counselors need to come up with fresh ideas, and make good decisions about opportunities and potentials of agribusinesses in the rural communities.

Consequently, evidences abound in the Nigerian rural societies that there is abundance of both human and material resources; yet the population increases in this era of trials and turbulences need tremendous attention. There is little doubt that oil driven economy in Nigeria could hardly sustain any meaningful development. It is often said that Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, but the promises and opportunities are yet to be adequately and timely explored and exploited. The teeming youths, especially cry out for employment opportunities. Little do they understand that the labour market is already saturated, particularly for those hopes and yearnings are for white-collar jobs. Agriculture on a more general note if diversified, and given the required encouragement and support, especially through realistic and viable entrepreneurship education, could go a long way in drastically reducing unemployment scourge, criminal tendencies, and assuaging the debilitating effects of poverty under the current economic depression in the country. However, the counselling strategies could be employed in variety of ways and forms to fast-track the rural agro-entrepreneurship education, brings about change in mindset and modify behaviours, so as to encourage Nigerians, especially the rural youths to delve into; and eventually recap the practical benefits of agro-entrepreneurship education and its attention skills for better citizens and sustainable development. Some of the communities counselling strategies that may be thought reasonable and helpful include;

- a) Provision of information that is accurately up-to-date and useable on the different aspects of agriculture; also, knowledge and skills of entrepreneurship education should be made available to deserving citizens, especially the youths through the counselling process, and use of other effective guidance services such as orientation and appraisal, taking cognizance of individual personality dispositions;
- b) Individual and group counselling strategies could be used to cater for personal or common need of individuals. The counselor could reach out to them through variety of ways for self-disclosure and experience sharing; Cluster formation particularly in rural settlements for easy access and continuity. Conducive environment could be created for beneficial dialogue and counselling encounter. Appropriate time may also be scheduled;
- c) The counselor needs to be pragmatic in his/her approach, providing practical examples, and may use films, posters, radio, and television. Resource persons may also be engaged and opportunity for visits to sites for experience in entrepreneurship activities and skills demonstration; there is the need for synergy between the counselor, who may have rudiments of the knowledge of agriculture, sociology of rural dwellers and other experts in agricultural specialties. Evaluation of the activities and indeed the counselling process would be useful. The counselor is required to demonstrate patience, understanding, tact,



perseverance, tolerance and versatility in the light of individual differences and challenging contexts that may present themselves.

Table 3: Counselling skills and strategies in rural agro-entrepreneurship education

S/No.	Perceived counselling skills and strategies used in agro-entrepreneurship education in Gombe State	\bar{x} -score	S.E	Decision
1	Motivation is a good counseling skill utilized by rural community counselors in agro-entrepreneurship education in Gombe State Nigeria	3.57	0.71	Accepted
2	Interactive skill; is another best agro-entrepreneurship education strategy utilized by rural community counselors in Gombe State Nigeria	3.90	1.79	Accepted
3	Problem solving and confidentiality strategy are best counselling skills utilized by community counselors in agro-entrepreneurship education in Gombe State Nigeria	3.08	2.62	Accepted
4	Technological advancement strategy; is an agro-entrepreneurial education skill utilized by community counselors in Gombe State Nigeria	3.17	1.63	Accepted
5	Creativity and economic survival skill; is one of the key agro-entrepreneurial education strategy utilized by community counselors in Gombe State Nigeria	3.22	0.64	Accepted
6	Awareness and freedom strategy; is a very important agro-entrepreneurial education skill utilized by community counselors in Gombe State Nigeria	3.81	1.76	Accepted
7	Self-efficacy strategy; is one of the best counseling skill utilized by the rural community counselors in transformation and agro-entrepreneurship education	3.03	1.61	Accepted
8	Communicative skill; is another best agro-entrepreneurship education strategy for sustainable economic development in Gombe State Nigeria	3.64	1.73	Accepted
9	Divergent thinking skill; is another best counseling strategy a community counselor utilizes in transformation and agro-entrepreneurship education in Gombe State	3.47	2.69	Accepted
10	Self-expression skill; is also a good counseling strategy a community counselor utilizes in agro-entrepreneurship education and sustainable development in Gombe State	3.39	0.68	Accepted

Source: Field survey data, 2018

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study it may be concluded that; the agro-entrepreneurship education programmes is imperative; this is because it empowers the rural communities aimed at preparing youths and adults to have great positive mindset and have sharp focus to earn more for themselves and the society at large. However, if the rightful assistive package of entrepreneurial education through community counselling is provided to the people in the rural areas, then the implication is that they can be self-reliant, self-actualized and self-dependent. They can also, create employment and not wait for government to employ them but be employers of labour; hence this can check the incessant rural outmigration, thereby leads to sustainable economic development. Moreover, the various government supports in terms of capacity building and infrastructural network have a significant impact on the achievement of



rural agro-entrepreneurship development in the study area. This implies that; the more capacity building programmes and governments' efforts at providing infrastructural and financial facilities in the rural areas, the more likelihood of rural agribusiness expansion and growth. Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. Governments through schools, extension service units and community leaders should emphasize the introduction of mandatory agro-entrepreneurship education and training. Also, to re-integrate vocational training skills; build more incubator centres and arrange special training programmes for rural agro-entrepreneurs so as to encourage their motive to embark on rural agribusinesses.
2. There should be more emphases by the governments at all levels on integrated rural agro-entrepreneurship development programmes through collaboration with international development organisations such as; the United Nations, World Bank, African Development Bank, the British Council etc. Also, adequate funding of agro-entrepreneurship education programmes must be ensured to achieve the set objectives.
3. Ministries of Labour and Youth Development should partner with the National Orientation Agency to be more involved in initiating programmes that enhances rural SMEs development and general economic welfare in the rural communities through proper orientation and motivation of the youths and adults to take up agro-entrepreneurship as a career.
4. Effective counselling hinges on some settings, hence the need for government to provide conducive and supportive environment with good motorable roads, electricity, portable drinking water and good shelter in rural communities to address drift to urban centres. These will help rural dwellers to see opportunities at their levels, and be interested in undertaking agro-entrepreneurship activities using available local resources.

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