

**FARMERS MULTIPURPOSE CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES AS
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF STIMULATING JOB
CREATION AND SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN
NIGERIA**

Dr. E. O. Aruma

*Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education,
University of Port Harcourt,
Port Harcourt, Rivers State*

Abstract

The main focus of this paper is to explore the potentials of farmers' multipurpose co-operative societies as a community development process of promoting job creation and sustainable national development in Nigeria. The formation of farmers multipurpose co-operative societies becomes very obvious now that the rate of unemployment is terribly unbearable in a richly endowed country like Nigeria. The highlights of the paper include the concept of co-operative society, the objectives of cooperative societies, the concept of sustainable national development, the concept of sustainable development as well as the processes of using farmers' multipurpose co-operative societies to stimulate job creation and sustainable national development. The paper equally highlighted efficient management of co-operative agro-based small scale industrial establishments, employment creation and efficient management of co-operative-oriented community development enterprises among others as some of the recommendations.

Introduction

The Nigerian policy on development primarily focuses on human resources, natural resources and infrastructural development in the country. Sadly enough, the policy does not seem to have favoured the rural sector of Nigerian economy reasonably in the country. Consequently, high rate of unemployment and lack of drive for sustainable national development are common features of the rural sector of Nigerian economy. An important strategy of addressing these problems is to explore the potential of

using Farmers' Multipurpose Co-operative Societies (FMCS) to stimulate job creation and sustainable national development. Swantz (1979) rightly noted that in rural sector, this can be achieved through an intense programme of planned communal services and a production system based largely on communal cultivation.

Indeed, the majority of the rural poor who are already living in organized rural setting of villages can clearly understand the enormous potential of working in traditional co-operative groups, especially in their group members' farms.

This, undoubtedly, enables them to maximize the economy of scale in production of goods and services in the participating communities of the society. The choice of community development projects to establish in order to stimulate conscious efforts in promoting job creation, community development initiatives and sustainable national development is entirely the responsibility of the co-operative grouping. Swantz (1979) warned on the dangers of exerting some pressure on the project participants, but rather suggested that they should be allowed some degree of freedom of choice of projects. This indicates that imposition of ideas or projects on co-operative members for community development should be avoided.

The Concept of Co-operative Society

The concept of co-operative society can be defined as a recognized association of people who agree to come together in order to address a common interest. Aruma (1998) described a co-operative society as an association of people who willingly agree to come together so as to achieve a common interest for the ultimate objective of improving the living conditions of people in the participating community. In his own view, Ijere (1992a:3) defined a co-operative society as:

An association of persons who have voluntarily joined together to achieve a common end through the formation of a democratically controlled organization, making equitable contributions to the capital required and accepting a fair

share of the risks and benefits of the undertaking in which the members actively participate.

The interesting thing in this definition is the voluntary nature of joining a co-operative society which is basically focused on people who share common interests.

In the context of this paper, Farmers' Multipurpose Co-operative Societies (FMCS) can be viewed as a kind of co-operative society whose membership is open to people who share common interests. The FMCS is perceived as a type of co-operative society which ideally provides open membership to people who for certain obvious reasons share common interests (Aruma, 1998). A case in point of people who have shared common interests that may lead to co-operative formation can be seen in the farmers who voluntarily come together so as to be able to benefit from the economy of scale such as the provision of agricultural machinery, credit facilities, fertilizer and other agricultural chemicals in order to boost food production in the participating communities.

The Objectives of Co-operative Societies

The formation of co-operative societies is objective-driven. Among the objectives of co-operative societies according to Ihimod. (1989) and Ijere (1992 b) are:

- To help small-scale producers, consumers and businessmen to buy and sell with the economies of

scale and bargaining power as their large scale competitors.

- To help small-scale producers, consumers and traders to process their agricultural goods to add value using the same economies of scale.
- To promote mutual understanding and education among members in particular and in the long run, among the people in general.
- To raise capital and grant loans at reasonable interest rate
- To prevent exploitation of weaker people in specific situations in the community.
- To do any other thing to improve the welfare of people

In, Aruma (1998) stated the objectives of co-operative societies as follows:

- To establish functional small-scale community development projects in certain priority areas which will certainly help the people of the participating communities.
- To assist in the development of communities through the provision of certain development projects which will help to improve the poor living conditions of the people.
- To create employment opportunities and raise the income of people in communities.

The Concept of Sustainable National Development

The term “national development” simply refers to the development initiative that is executed in a country for the utmost benefits of the people in the country. Aruma and Aruma (2009) defined national development as the changes and development that actually take place in a country. Indeed, national development focuses on physical infrastructural provisions which certainly stimulate effective service delivery in the society. Aruma (2007) identified physical infrastructural provisions like roads, railways, educational development, improved health services, energy development, improvement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) industry, buildings, improved agricultural production, improved industrial and commercial establishments including development of economic resources such as exploitation and exploration of oil and gas industry as well as other mineral deposits as specific areas of focus of national development.

Essentially, national development focuses on improving the living conditions of people in a country. Aruma (2007) rightly stated that the concept of national development is viewed as a development that has a national outlook which ultimately affects lives of people in a country. The ultimate goal of national development is to enhance people’s living conditions in a country.

The Concept of Sustainable Development

The term “sustainable development” simply means a type of development which guarantees future generations to enjoy an opportunity as much as the present generation enjoys in the society. Aruma (2010) defined the concept of sustainable development as a kind of development that helps future generations to live as much as the present generations can enjoy. Todaro and Smith (2009) in their study perceived sustainable development as a type of development that permits future generations to live at least as much as the current generations in the society. Therefore, the main focus of sustainable development is to take adequate care of both present and future generations.

Additionally, the concept of sustainable development can also be defined as a system of development initiative which, indeed, lasts for the ultimate benefits of contemporary generations and future generations in the society. In the words of Aruma (2008), sustainable development is development initiative that lasts for the main benefits of both present and future generations. While commenting on the same subject, Segynola (2003) viewed sustainable development as development that lasts; and which does not in any form endanger the environment for both the present and future generations. Consequently, the main concern of sustainable development is to ensure that the environment is not hampered in any way for the benefits of people and other creatures both presently and in future.

Indeed, the main focus of sustainable development is to promote an enabling environment for both the present and future generations.

The Processes of Using Farmers Multipurpose Co-operative Societies to Stimulate Job Creation and Sustainable National Development

The processes of using farmers multipurpose co-operative societies to stimulate job creation and sustainable national development are the followings:

1. Knowledge and Skill Acquisition for Job Creation and Sustainable National Development: The relevant knowledge and skills acquired by members of Farmers’ Multipurpose Co-operative Societies on management of co-operative farms and agro-based industrial establishments will obviously help them to be able to face the challenges of life in the contemporary global environment. The trainings and skills acquired will greatly help the recipients to be economically empowered to manage income generating projects. Commenting on a similar subject, Okpoko and Otuka (2008) stated that the trainings and skills acquired from co-operative education empower the co-operative members economically and liberate them from problems of ignorance and dependency in the society.

Indeed, teaching members of FMCS to acquire the relevant knowledge and skills to enable them establish and manage income generating projects is economically rewarding to the people of participating communities. The

acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills will certainly help to stimulate opportunities for job creation and sustainable national development in Nigeria. Essentially, non-formal education focuses on acquisition of specific knowledge and skills which are needed in the society (Ngwu, 2006). He stated very categorically that non-formal education programme is suitable enough for teaching-learning process of promoting income generation projects, because the methods it employs are dynamic, flexible, problem and learner-centred as well as practical and pragmatic in approach. Indeed, the obvious challenge for the recipients of co-operative education is to practice what they have learnt just as advocated by Dewey (1938) in his theory of learning by doing in the society.

Interestingly, acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills through co-operative education will guarantee co-operative members access to the followings:

- Improved information on healthcare and nutritional values of food in-take by people in the participating communities.
- Efficient management of co-operative farms
- Efficient management of co-operative agro-based industrial concerns among others.

2. The Process of Integrating Education with Living and Working:

The integration of education with living and working is another strategy of

promoting co-operative job creation for sustainable national development in Nigeria. This is a good innovation for socio-economic transformation of a developing country like Nigeria. In this circumstance, therefore, lifelong education which starts from birth and ends at death is an important element of integration of education with living and working in the society. Hinzen (1979) stated while quoting Nyerere that there is need for lifelong integration of education, living and working in the society. He concluded by saying that education and working are both parts of living and should, therefore, continue from birth until death. In the words of Nzeneri (2002) lifelong education must be part of life, integrated with and inseparable from life; and it must involve change. Indeed, change is inevitable in lifelong education through teaching and learning process in the society.

3. Empowerment of People for Job Creation and Sustainable National Development:

Essentially, empowerment, undoubtedly, provides good opportunities to help to address a number of socio-economic problems in contemporary society. It must be stated that efforts directed at increasing people's access to improved living conditions will be a waste of resources and time if inadequate attention is paid to empowerment of people in the society. Apparently, there is lack of strong political will in Nigeria to promote real empowerment of people in the country. Aruma (2006) emphatically stated that the government of Federal Republic of Nigeria should not fail to provide adequate

plan of action for mobilizing strong political will and solicit adequate involvement of all the relevant stakeholders in order to provide adequate financial and human resources required to promote effective service delivery in the country. This must be driven by the collective resolve of the relevant stakeholders to have a well articulated plan of action in place in the country.

Fundamentally, there is obviously an urgent need to provide a comprehensive plan of action for empowerment of people for job creation and sustainable national development in Nigeria. National Planning Commission (2004) noted that the cost of failure to achieve sustainable national development in terms of lost opportunities for poverty reduction, active participation in politics, community development, national development, economic development and other things in accordance with the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) will certainly be very enormous in the country. Indeed, deliberate efforts must be made to avoid this situation.

Conclusion

The simple fact still remains that the fragile Nigerian economy is seriously being threatened by incessant high rate of unemployment by the productive workforce in the country. Essentially, this high rate of unemployment of the productive workforce is also a serious threat to sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Ideally, the only way to tackle this socio-economic problem of high rate of

unemployment of the productive workforce in Nigeria is to encourage the formation of co-operative groupings, especially Farmers' Multipurpose Co-operative Societies with specific mandate to stimulate job creation for sustainable national development in the country.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion, the following recommendations are made:

- 1) Appropriate co-operative education should be provided to the members of Farmers' Multipurpose Co-operative Societies in the participating communities. This will certainly enable such members to acquire the necessary managerial knowledge and skills that will obviously help them to manage co-operative farms very efficiently in the participating communities.
- 2) Adequately organized co-operative education is highly imperative for efficient management of co-operative agro-based small scale industrial establishments. This will, undoubtedly, help such co-operative agro-based industrial concerns to be consciously profit driven based on efficient management.
- 3) The integration of well structured education with living and working is considered appropriate to stimulate co-operative job creation and sustainable national development in Nigeria. This innovative academic enterprise

will be good enough to stimulate socio-economic transformation of Nigeria.

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