

The Gendered Challenges Faced by Rural Nigerian Adolescents (15 to 17 years) in Agriculture and Vocational Education

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Abstract: The global gender discourse has placed more emphasis on women empowerment. However, when issues concerning adolescents are raised, both boys and girls should be integrated. This is because the same power that patriarchy is believed to have given men, hurts men as well, especially adolescent boys. In rural Nigeria, adolescents between the ages of 15 to 17 years have faced many challenges that prevent them from taking up agricultural employment and agricultural vocational education. This review shows that adolescent girls get less education than boys due to early marriage, and are less likely to visit farms due to the insurgency. On the other hand, the drudgery that is associated with agriculture and the passion for an urban life have made adolescent boys more likely to migrate to the urban areas, thus, placing vocational agricultural education as a fallback option for them. The study also reveals that unemployed youths can engage in socially unacceptable behavior. Fortunately, the youth empowerment programs available in the country provide opportunities for the government to include them in economic activities. It is therefore recommended that the government should recognize this age group as an economic member of the society, and take a strong stand against the insurgency, thus treating security as a real issue that continues to deny young women of empowerment. Nevertheless, more research is being called to find ways to mobilize adolescents for agriculture engagement.

Keywords: Gender, Agriculture, Vocational Agricultural Education, Adolescent, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

The debate on gender equality has lingered considerably over the past decades favoring the women. The feminists believe that women face several challenges in patriarchal societies and should be given more recognition, as they suffer various domestic and social violence such as rape, physical attack, marginalization in decision-making, etc., yet the society has a way of blaming them for such attacks (Verveer, 2011; Ogunlela and Mukhta, 2009). Renown scholars like Abhijit and Duflo (2011); and Todero and Smith (2012) are of the opinion that girls are less likely to get a better education when households face financial burden and need to make a decision on who goes to school. They receive fewer skills, job training, and health service when compared to their male counterparts (ICRW 2001). Amartya Sen (1990) asserted that women are perceived to have less economic value than men since parents believe that a male child is more responsible for catering for them after retirement. This implies that the girl child could likely get less medical attention than the boy and she is more likely to be aborted if the family desires fewer children. This perhaps has necessitated a global gender debate that tilts in the favor of women.

Furthermore, in agriculture, studies have shown that women typically achieve lower yields than men. However, the lower yield does not share a correlation with the level of physical effort put into farming by this group since in many developing countries, women comprise the majority of small holder farmers: they serve as the backbone of the economy, they do strenuous farm work, yet they do not have equal access to resources as the men do (Verveer 2011). The difference in productivity can be associated with the difference in input use, education and extension services (Damisa and Yohana,

2007). Other researchers also point out that women could earn a lower income than men in agriculture due to the meager economic value of crops they trade. For instance, Adekanye (1984) observed that women in Nigeria are rarely connected with agricultural export crops such as cocoa, cotton, and groundnuts, and there is a restriction on certain culture and religion on women to take up food production and marketing. In agreement, Sahel (2014) concluded that the key constraints affecting women in agriculture that often lead to their lower yields and income compared to men are: access to finance, land, input, information and training. These and many more instances showcase the potential socioeconomic challenges faced by the 21st-century adolescent girl in agriculture. Therefore, to enable more women empowerment, there is a justification for incorporating gender balance in any policy or program establish for national development.

However, in recent times, the gender discourse is gradually taking a new dimension. Many anti-feminist writers observed that there is little written about 'men as men' (West 1999). Furthermore, due to the emphasis on the women empowerment, the male folks are opining that they are getting victimized (Devbarman, 2014). An aggressive movement that backlash gender equality, the Men's Right Activist (MRA) in its social media page argued that the traditionally suppressed groups have taken away their rights, usurped their power and taken away what it means to be a man. According to Friedman (2013), the over-emphasis on women's rights has led to educational discrimination against adolescent boys, thus reducing the economic opportunities available to them (including in agriculture). Therefore, for social justice and a balance in national development programs, it is imperative not to deny the rights and roles played by the men in lieu of empowering the women.

In traditional agriculture, there are usually gender specific roles. The specificity of these roles is reflective of strength and power associated with gender. For instance, land preparation, mechanization and certain animal husbandry practices like cattle rearing are regarded as men's jobs; while food crop cultivation practices, such as weeding, harvesting, and processing are often associated with women in Nigeria (Ogunlela and Mukhta, 2009). In the rural society, while the boys are expected to engage in more muscular economic activities, the girls are preferred to do domestic jobs (Machimu and Minde 2010; West 1999). As their powers and roles differ, so are the challenges they face, not only in agriculture but also in the society at large. These gender differences are critical issues to bear in mind in the discourse of adolescent participation in economic activities and a call to include both sexes in any academic or policy analysis involving them.

In Nigeria, the growing population of the adolescents and shortage of food supply, call for adolescent active participation in agriculture. The United Nation categorized adolescent into two groups: the early adolescent 10 – 14 years and the late adolescent 15 -19 years. Adolescents in this study, therefore, refer to those between 15 to 17 years who have completed their high school. The International Labor Organization (ILO) encourages this age group to participate in work that does not affect their health and personal development or interfere with their schooling. The ICRW (2001) considers them as an important asset for the economic, political and social life of their communities. In the rural areas of Nigeria, many adolescents of this age group have completed their basic education and are waiting for university admission or paid employment which are often available in urban areas (NPE, 2014; IFAD 2016). They constitute a greater percentage of the population and about two-third of them are unemployed (Akande 2014).

To buttress this point, statistics have it that the median age in Nigeria is 18 years and about 52% of the people live in rural areas (Worldometer 2016). Rural poverty is as high as 80% and they mostly depend on agriculture for food and income (IFAD, 2016). Owing to the limited supply of food and the alarming rate of youth unemployment in the rural area, it is, therefore, rational and ethical to engage the adolescent in rural areas in agricultural employment in order to check rural-urban migration, boost food production and attain national development. The adolescents can also be enrolled into the Vocational Agriculture Education (VAE). The VAE in Nigeria was established to develop skills, scientific knowledge, competence and satisfaction required in agricultural production, and to help students to understand and appreciate the career opportunities in agriculture (Ogba 2014). It is expected to produce on – farm, skilled and practical oriented young farmers who are capable of carrying out specific farming activities to earn a living, by mobilizing youths possessing a high school certificate (NBTE 2007). Studies have shown that when properly mobilized, adolescents in rural areas are willing to participate in agriculture-related activities (Lyocks et al 2013).

However, these opportunities are yet to be effectively harnessed in Nigeria. The lack of data on the number of adolescents involved in agriculture or enrolled in VAE is an evidence of their discrimination and exclusion in national development discourse (Nnadi and Akwiwu, 2008). Consequently, this could contribute to limiting their future and increasing societal threat. Unemployed adolescents could engage in risky behaviors such as crime, prostitution, political thuggery and violence. Pauwels and De Waele (2014) observed that the lack of social integration, legal legitimacy, and perceived discrimination have strong effects on adolescents' involvement in politically and religiously motivated violence. ICRW

(2001) perceived that for the global spread of HIV/AIDS, poverty, and political instability to be addressed, adolescents should be supported to contribute to the well-being of the society. Likewise, studies carried in Nigeria suggest that both poverty and unemployment among the rural adolescents must be reduced in order to solve the ethno-religious violence that continually threatens the Nigerian democracy (Abdullahi and Saka, 2007). In general, engaging adolescents in agricultural employment or VAE could reduce unemployment, increase food production, reduce social vices, promote peace thereby leading to overall national development.

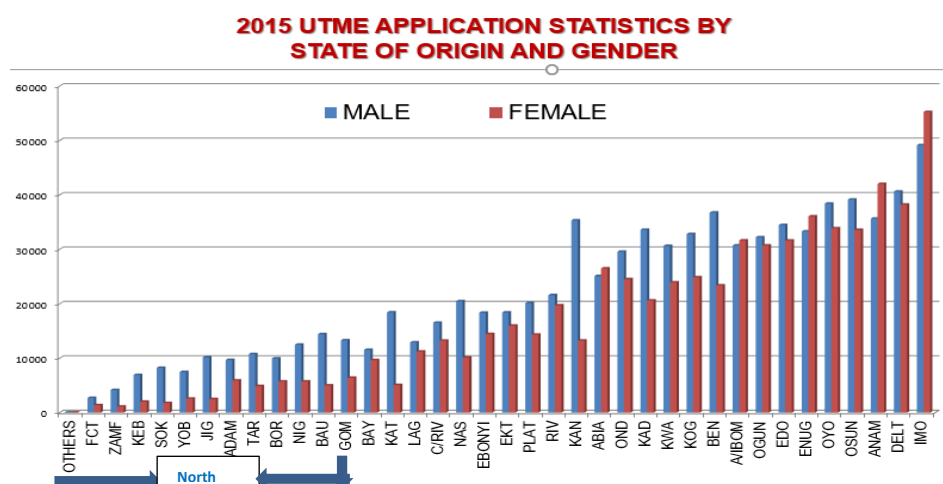
Ironically, in the presence of so many opportunities, why are the adolescents (15 to 17 years) not yet integrated into agricultural activities in Nigeria? The background of this study has shown that among other adolescent categories, most of this age group is comprised of a recent high school graduate, they are idle and unemployed but legally and physically capable of participating in agricultural activities. Many studies have been conducted on the challenges faced by youth in agriculture in Nigeria (Ajani et al, 2015; Akande 2014; Ogba 2014; Lyocks et al 2013; and Nnadi and Akwiwu, 2008) yet none has addressed the specific gender challenges faced by this particular adolescent age group (15 to 17 years) in accessing agriculture employment and VAE. A gap in research often leads to poor policy targeting, perhaps this might be the reason why the adolescents have been neglected in national development policy discourse. In order to stimulate more research and better policy in this direction, this study reviewed several studies conducted on youth in agriculture and carefully deduced the specific gender challenges faced by rural adolescents of 15 to 17 year from accessing agricultural employment and VAE in Nigeria. It also highlighted some already established youth empowerment programs where the government could integrate this adolescent group. Finally, the study offers a suggestion for further research and policy direction.

2. CHALLENGES FACED BY RURAL ADOLESCENTS IN AGRICULTURE

In the discourse of gender issues, more attention is usually paid to women, but when matters involving adolescents are concerned, both girls and boys are victims. In a rural area, many challenges are simultaneously faced by boys and girls; however, some are gender specific. The literature on this area showed that while early marriage, poor access to information, the insurgency and poor government program targeting are specifically faced by the adolescent girl, drudgery, lack of interest, migration inclination, lack of incentives and poor program linkages are the peculiar challenges faced by rural adolescent boys in accessing agricultural employment and VAE. This section will present these issues in detail.

2.1 Challenges Faced by Adolescent Girls:

The practice of early marriage in some regions of Nigeria can prevent adolescent girls from participating in agricultural employment or VAE. This often occurs in northern Nigeria, where the cultural obligation has impeded young girls' access to education and employment. The graph below shows the statistics of Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) and the Nigerian University entrance application by state and gender.



Source: National University Commission (2015)

From the graph above, the northern region of Nigeria recorded low entries, and the applications by girls are far below that of the boys. The obvious difference between the north and other regions of Nigeria like the south is enshrined in culture

and religion. Nigeria has a dominant Muslim population in the north and a predominantly Christian population in the south. Consequently, it is customary for adolescent girls in the north to marry as early as 15 years, and in extreme cases, they are not allowed to partake in economic activities. Action Health Incorporated (2011) in their study to broaden the understanding of the context of early marriage and girls' education in northern Nigeria observed that the majority of the girls who engaged in early marriage are locked up in the house and never return to complete their education nor learn a trade, or acquire vocational skills that would economically empower and make them self-reliant. The practices of early marriage and a disregard for formal education, result in social exclusion and inferiority complexes among rural adolescent girls. This is, in fact, the single most important challenge that restricts their engagement in agricultural employment and VAE.

Poor access to information could limit rural adolescent girls' access to agricultural programs or education. Information on government agricultural programs or calls for admission into vocational agricultural schools in Nigeria are often advertised on television, radio, newspaper, and application are made through the internet (Okeke *et al* 2015). These processes of information dissemination are adopted across all areas irrespective of prevailing issues such as lower usage of modern communication facilities in rural areas compared to urban area. For instance, to assess the fertilizer subsidy scheme, farmers need to register in a government database which requires an active phone number (Adesina, 2012). However, a study conducted by Ebikabowei and Endouware (2013) revealed that many rural people, unlike their urban counterpart, are not yet subscribed to a mobile network due to issues relating to network failures, absences of power supply to charge phone batteries and the high cost of the subscription. Important to this study, it would be deduced that many rural adolescent girls are often prohibited from having smartphones by overprotective parents. Secondly, those who are allowed to have these facilities are constrained by finances to subscribe to a data plan. Thirdly, the inability to communicate effectively or read English sentences as a result of lesser education attainment reduces their chances of participating or being selected for agriculture-related employment or VAE. The implication of this is that youth empowerment programs are hijacked by rural boys or urban youth who are otherwise better off (Ojonemi and Ogwu, 2013).

Furthermore, the insurgency has played a role in reducing adolescent girls' engagement in paid agriculture-related employment or VAE. For instance, Boko-haram, a terrorist group based in Nigeria, have carried out several attacks in rural areas which have generated a lot of tension and caution among the farming community (Shuaibu *et al* 2015). The unpopular adoption of school girls has caused rural dwellers to take the necessary precautions to protect their adolescent girls, such as keeping a constant watch on them, restricting them from going to school, or taking up any paid employment, etc. (Ekereke 2013). In a similar instance, Fulani herdsmen who travel from the north to south with their cattle due to climatic changes sometimes run into conflicts with local farmers (Okeke 2014). These conflicts escalate when the cattle graze on farmland or trample on crops. The quarrel and fighting that ensue often claim the life of many and result in the destruction of farmland and building. The most recent attack by the Fulani herdsmen in southeast Nigeria in April 2016 raised a lot of issues pertaining to girls' participation in agriculture. One of the local leaders was reported to have said that they no longer allow their adolescent girls to go to the farms for fear of being defiled by Fulani herdsmen (Vanguardngr, 2016). Therefore, in responses to these attacks, many young girls have been kept indoors thereby making them less available to take up agriculture-related jobs or any attaining schools.

Finally, another issue limiting rural adolescent girls to access agriculture employment is the poor targeting of government agriculture-related programs. For instance, The You Win Program (Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria) launched in 2011 aims to encourage and support young aspiring entrepreneurs through an innovative business plan competition. It was commissioned to provide loans to youth between *18 to 35 years* to start up a new business or expand an already existing one (Oseni *et al* 2012). Invariably, the program naturally excluded the adolescents (15 – 17 years) from participating. More so, the second phase of the program was unveiled to encourage more women participation and boost female beneficiaries who were only 17 percent in the first phase of the competition (Olanrewaju 2012). This implies that gender equality was not considered in the design of the program. With the coming in of a new administration in 2015, the continuation of the program is threatened following the tradition of successive Nigerian governments, that is, scrapping out predecessors' programs (Obi 2016).

2.1 Challenges face by Adolescent Boys:

In rural Nigeria, the drudgery associated with agricultural practice makes it undesirable for economically viable activities among adolescent boys. Agriculture in Nigeria is still underdeveloped, notwithstanding the claim by the former Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Adesina, 2012) that agriculture has been elevated as a business and has taken the position of income generating activity for rural farmers. Ajani et al (2015) observed various challenges facing farmers in rural areas. According to them, agriculture is practiced with crude implements and the distance from home to farm is usually very far. There is a lack of tractor hiring services or transportation to convey young people to and from the farm. The land holding is low and this is exacerbated by the communal land holding system that is still being practiced in most parts of Nigeria. The lack of property rights to land reduces incentives to produce and limits land access to rural adolescents. There is still no proper marketing channel of agricultural products in rural areas and most products are sold in raw form, thereby reducing the income of farmers. Furthermore, there is limited capital, poor extension contact and lack of credit facilities. These characteristics make agriculture uninteresting and discouraging to adolescent boys. The government's failure to improve the agricultural sector and rural areas creates an incentive for rural to urban migration (IFAD, 2016).

Secondly, the rising propensity of rural adolescent boys to migrate to urban areas after high school is gradually becoming entrenched in Nigeria. When young boys migrate to the city, they are more likely to get a proper education which is lacking in rural areas, or get jobs in the service sector which are often socially desirable. They would enjoy good social amenities which make them better off than the left behind in the rural areas (Olurunsanya et al, 2011). In the southern part of Nigeria, many adolescent boys migrate to the cities after high school to work as an apprentice for some family members or get a university education (Akaolisa, 2012). The factors perceived to cause rural-urban migration among youth in southern Nigeria is highlighted in the table below.

Table 1: Factors Perceived to Cause Rural-Urban Migration

Perceived factors	Yes	%	No	%
Advancing in Education –related opportunities	93.3		6.7	
To Avoid the boredom in Agriculture	74.4		25.6	
Apprenticeship in various vocations	72.2		27.8	
In Search of Employment	71.1		28.9	
Absence of Industries/Companies	68.9		31.1	
Inadequate social amenities	62.2		37.8	
Joining a Relative in Town	55.6		44.4	
Reports of cities' condition sent by migrant	44.4		55.6	

Source: Olayiwola (2013)

The tradition of migrating to cities after high school in pursuit of higher education or apprenticeship is gradually being institutionalized in this area of Nigeria. From the table above, it can be asserted that the new institution has accredited more importance to Education, Business, Apprenticeship, and Employment before Agriculture, as viable economic alternatives for high school graduates. Coupled with the report of urban condition sent by migrant adolescent boys to the left behinds, the implication is that the boys have developed an ideology that rural area is not suitable for living, and agriculture is not a viable income generating activity. This has led to the migration inclination among high school graduates, thereby preventing them from taking up agriculture-related employment or VAE.

Thirdly, there is yet to be any positive incentives to attract adolescent boys to enrol for VAE. In Nigeria, for example, the minimum entry qualification into the National Vocational Certificate in Agriculture is a Post Basic Education Certificate (Post Junior secondary school certificate). Post-secondary students who are unable to gain access to higher education or who may have less than 5 credits and those who are out of school for a long time can register for specialized courses without entry requirement (NBTE, 2007). Since it requires less effort to be enrolled and has a generally poor society's perception, VAEs are often regarded as women's courses and it only becomes a fallback option for seemingly weak adolescent boys who cannot migrate or secure admission in universities. Furthermore, although there are opportunities for internships in the vocational education system, many organizations are simply not interested in hiring agriculture student interns (Ogba 2014). The misconception that VAEs are for lazy students and the lack of interest from firms for their services, discourages high school graduated boys from enrolling.

Finally, most government agricultural or employment programs are not linked to vocational education. For instance, the Nigerian government has initiated programs such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), YOUWIN and YEAP programs. These programs aim to inspire adolescents to develop entrepreneurial skills and pursue careers in agriculture. However, these programs have no direct link with agricultural vocational schools (Obi, 2016). In most cases, each organization sets up their private vocational skill development centres, further highlighting the coordination failures associated with Nigerian rural development programs (Ojonemi and Ogwu 2013). There is totally no national policy to ensure their sustainability. Although the challenge of truncated program affects the whole population, the bulk of risks falls disproportionately on the adolescent boys who need to work hard to contribute to family income.

3. PROGRAMS THAT OFFER OPPORTUNITIES TO INTEGRATE ADOLESCENTS IN AGRICULTURE

Only a few established programs are found to offer opportunities for the Nigerian government to address the gender issues preventing rural adolescents from participating in agriculture or VAE. The first is the YouWin program. The decision to adjust the second phase of YouWin program in 2013 to be accessible only to women requires good recognition and applause. The You Win Women program was necessary due to the low participation of girls in the first phase of the program. More so, the eligibility requirement of the program was adjusted to accommodate adolescent girls with post high school qualification. This proactive decision and intervention were possibly owing to proper monitoring and evaluation. If this program is continued, more interest needs to be paid to gender balance, and eligibility needs to be extended to the adolescents of 15 years and above.

Secondly, the new administration has launched the Youth Employment in Agriculture Program (YEAP) in early 2016. YEAP has the thrust to develop a new cadre of 740,000 market-oriented young agricultural producers in rural areas. The program coordinator during the launching stated that the targets are high school leavers in rural areas (about 20,000 in each state of the federation). They will be supported with technical assistance, capacity building, finance, business and marketing skills. They will also be provided with access to land and linked to other farm businesses to provide marketing and mentorship. YEAP program has been welcomed by many Nigerians as it seems to have the potential to address the need of rural poor especially the youths. But this can only be achieved if adolescents of 15 to 17 years are given more attention.

Finally, the Nigerian Government has recognized the need to address the gendered dimensions in the design of programs launched, such as the Youth and Women in Agribusiness Investment Program in 2013. The federal government through the Gender and Youth Desk of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development established the program to organize vocational training programs for youths especially young girls in rural areas. The program was aimed at equipping them with the necessary skills to undertake an enterprise of their choice as a business in a selected value chains in agriculture (Sadiq, 2013). The overall goal of the program according to Sadiq is as follows:

1. To reduce youth unemployment by encouraging their participation in agriculture for self-reliance, food security and wealth creation
2. Productivity and strengthening women in the agriculture value chain process to increase food and nutritional security, self-sufficiency and improved income generation
3. To achieve self-employment, generate income, reduce poverty and enhance food security
4. To reduce unemployment and social ills among the youth through agriculture and agro-allied activities.
5. To encourage youth to embrace agriculture as a professional business, thus discouraging rural-urban migration
6. Capacity building in youth and women on best agronomic and raising seeding
7. To link the youth and women with relevant institutions that would provide them with the necessary support to succeed in agribusiness

However, to avoid unnecessary duplication, this program, and others should be linked with the VEA schools and incentives should be awarded to encourage more women participation.

4. CONCLUSION

The challenges reviewed in this study can be summarized into two: girls' specific: early marriages, insurgency, poor access to information and poor program targeting. As it relates to the challenges facing the boys: drudgery, lack of motivation, an inclination to migrate, and poor program linkages. These challenges can fall under poor policy and social related problems., which no doubt form a breeding ground for social justice related problems in society Undoubtedly, feminists would say that these are symptoms of governance without gender considerations; while the anti-feminists could argue that shifting the focus to women in these rural spaces creates a backlash due to the overemphasis on women empowerment. However, whichever side of the debate one sits, be it pro –only women's rights being a part of the gender discourse, or anti - gender discourses because the "*gender discourse*" limits the opportunities of men, both sides can agree that society is unremittingly ageist and continues to shut adolescents of both genders out of much-needed opportunities. The neglect of the adolescents would continue to cause a lot of damage to the society, as they often fall prey to extremists or indulge in other socially unacceptable behavior. This in turns denies the government the opportunity to improve the national economy, as adolescents forms a critical core of the economy.

This is where patriarchy hurts men as the study also showed that VAEs tend to be a fallback option for adolescent boys. This operates within a wider framework, because it is a structure that institutionalizes certain beliefs such as university education being the gateway into enjoying a decent standard of living, men absorbing financial responsibilities for parents in retirement, jobs being in the city, agriculture being the *just reward* for the *not so smart* and the *university rejects* in society. Therefore, in the same way that patriarchy is believed to grant privilege to men, it also places unnecessary burdens on men, especially adolescent boys who are barred from performing full masculinity due to other intersectionality.

In this review, what has unearthed is that one's sex and socioeconomic background place them at increased vulnerability in rural Nigeria. This is in keeping with other studies of other societies, and so, does not make the Nigerian rural life a unique case. Staying in the lane of the gender discourse regarding women, it is seen that the insurgency has created a hindrance for adolescent female empowerment. Subsequently, any serious policies addressing Nigerian women and girls going into agriculture, has to take into consideration security as a serious deterrence for women, and subsequently provide solutions that allows women to be not only physically protected in agriculture, but also protected from sex crimes because various academic studies have shown sex to be a tool of war for countries and tribes in conflicts.

Furthermore, the study reveals that the government in Nigeria has initiated programs that would likely create an opportunity to integrate the adolescents in agricultural activities but these programs lack proper targeting. In many cases, the adolescents (15 to 17 years) are not eligible to participate while in other cases, they are not interested due to several challenges highlighted in the study. Ironically, it is revealed that when the adolescents are properly mobilized, they are likely to take part in agricultural activities. Therefore, the key questions to ask as a result of this literature review are:

1. *How can the adolescents aged 15 to 17 be properly mobilized to participate in agriculture?*
2. *How can the challenges faced by the rural adolescent in accessing agriculture employment and VAE be addressed?*

These questions are the gaps identified in the review and it calls for further empirical research.

Finally, this study recommends that to integrate adolescents as productive members of the society and attain national development, government and the society should work together to engage them in healthy economic activities especially agriculture-related employment and VAEs. Further policy direction should include:

1. A national policy that recognizes the status of this group as dependable, vulnerable but capable. This law or policy should create windows for them to access information, land, loans, extension services, and prepare them to engage in agricultural employment and VAE.
2. Programs for youth in agriculture should be made as sustainable as possible. These programs should be linked to the agricultural vocational education system.
3. Completion of universal basic education should be enforced in all regions of the country, irrespective of gender or culture. Incentives should be given to encourage married adolescent girls to enroll for VAE.

4. The government should brace up its efforts in the fight against the insurgency of all kinds, and should take a strong stand against Fulani herdsman conflicts in particular.
5. Tackling rural poverty and agriculture from a gendered angle through effective policy and planning.

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