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Analysis of Impact of Youth Empowerment in Agriculture Programme on Graduates in South-West Nigeria

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Abstract:

This paper analyses the impact of youth empowerment in agricultural programmes on graduates in South West Nigeria. The paper worked on four critical objectives of the programme to determine its impact on the graduates. The analysis shows that the illiterates and aged farmers who apply crude and traditional farming methods are gradually being replaced with younger and productive population who are conversant with modern and innovative practices in agriculture to promote paradigm shift from subsistence to commercial farming practices through the incorporation of e-wallet mobile driven agricultural practices. The analysis further shows that the programme creates robust agricultural market value-chain to support the growth of the economy. The limitations farmers face in the past to get real value for their products due to the ridiculous prices and exploitative attitudes of their buyers significantly improve due to market value-chain arrangement, which positively affect pricing, purchasing and income generation of farmers making farming more attractive and rewarding. The youth empowerment in agricultural programme has also awakened agricultural institutions' capacity to propel and drive expansion and development in agricultural sector. Most agricultural institutions and institutes have been reinvigorated to function in line with the mandates of their establishment with entrants of youths into agricultural practices. The decline in Gross Domestic Products in agriculture over the years due to lip-service accorded agriculture as a result of crude oil income to service the economy has improved significantly due to improved agricultural products for export and supply to local industries. It is recommended that a wider, well coordinated and directed opportunity should be provided for the teeming unemployed graduates to key into the programme to mitigate the social economic challenges confronting the nation. It is also recommended that the core components of YEAP such as e-wallet, value chain, institutional capacity building and financial stimulus desire proper articulation and improvement to further strengthen, sustain and consolidate on the achievements recorded in the programme to provide an alternative economic landscape for the nation.

Keywords: Youth empowerment, agriculture programme, e-wallet, value-chain, institutional capacities, exportation and home industries

1. Introduction

Youth empowerment in agriculture programme is an initiative generated by federal and state government in recent time to address the professional and career gaps in the labour market to engage the teeming youths who are confronted with myriad of survival and empowerment challenges after graduating from various institutions of learning. The youth empowerment in agricultural programme is part of efforts to stem-down youth unemployment rate which accounts for over 70% of the national employment rate of 23.9% in the country (National bureau of statistics, 2018). Some of the agricultural initiatives of the governments on youth empowerment for sustainable development are; Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture (YISA). Which serves as an Agro-knowledge based organization of youth graduates of agricultural discipline and other youth between the age of 15 and 40 years with genuine interest in agriculture and agro-allied business. The Youth Employment in Agricultural Programme (YEAP) funded by German Bank to empower 750,000 Nigerians with an investment of over 15 million dollars is also a golden opportunity for youths to become beneficiaries. The FADAMA-GUYS initiated in 2017 through World Bank to support maximum food production is also part of youth empowerment in agricultural programme which aimed at engaging 6000 youths. The FADAMA-GUYS was established to boost food production, create jobs and employment opportunities for the youths to serve as good foundation for sustainable development in agricultural sector is yet another youth empowerment in agricultural programme. The crash in the crude oil prices in the international market is a wake-up call to diversify the economy to agriculture. These youth agricultural initiatives are to boost non-oil sector which has been abandoned since 70s as a result of oil boom to oil the economy.

In Nigeria, successive government at various levels have embarked on quite a number of youth empowerment programmes in their developmental and rolling plans to cushion the effect of unemployment among school learners and graduates who constitute the array and loads of saturated employment market. The efforts and concerns of the government at various levels to change the perspectives of the youths from seeking white-collar jobs and embrace productive ventures, and enterprises which guarantee self-reliance and independent living have not yielded the desired results on the dramatic increase of youth unemployment in the labour market. The developmental challenges posed by youth unemployment in recent times is quite enormous that the present government had course to step-up pragmatic actions focusing majorly on agriculture as the best alternative to reduce youth unemployment as well as to rescue the bleeding Nigerian economy through agriculture.

Echono (2016) declared that the country's dependent on oil as single economy propelled by the discovery of oil in 50s has forced various administration to evolve one programme or the other particularly in agriculture sector with a view to shifting focus away from oil whether such policies or programmes yielded the desired result or not. Investigations however revealed that the first national policy on agriculture was adopted in 1988 and was extracted to last for about fifteen years. In 2001, a new policy document on agriculture was launched, with the new policy document encompassing most of the features of the old ones but with more focus direction and better articulation. Various agricultural developmental programmes were put in place for sustainable growth in the sector. Some of these programmes include: Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), River Basin Schemes, Integrated Rural Development Programme, National Accelerated Food Production Scheme, the establishment of Agriculture and Cooperative Banks, Green Revolution Programme (GRP), National Accelerated Food Product Project (NAFPP), Agro Service System, National Seed Multiplication Programme, Agricultural Credit and Agricultural Transformation Agenda among others.

The new agriculture programme and policy tagged 'Youth Empowerment in Agricultural Programme (YEAP) has taken centre stage at the national and state levels which require critical analysis to determine its sustainability, ability to empower the youths (graduates) in terms of earning a living, creating employment opportunities, self-reliance, propelling industrialization, food production and other value chains, such as processing, storage, production and marketing (Abubakar, 2016).

It is an indisputable fact that the graduates in Nigeria are faced with unemployment challenges due to lack of requisite skills to create job for themselves and raise their living standards. Most of the young graduates from the Nigerian tertiary institutions storm the saturated labour market without adequate knowledge and skills to guarantee self-employment, self-reliance and independence which is responsible for the acute unemployment situation plaguing the nation.

Babatope (2013) reported that agricultural industry is a very large industry employing crops of skilled and unskilled labour throughout the world. It comprises several money-spinning business opportunities for serious minded investors to make future. Hence, empowerment programme in agriculture for graduate is highly germane to guarantee graduates employment opportunities.

The young graduates in Nigeria require empowerment programme in agriculture to discourage them from seeking employment opportunities in any establishment aside agriculture to acquire requisite skills for sustenance and self-reliance. This thinking gives these young graduates the opportunity of contributing their quota towards the development of the nation without necessarily depending or relying on the government and other people and cooperate entities for survival. Ogunfowoke (2007) reported that India and China once embarked on ossification of education to empower their youths. Today, these Asian countries have skilled manpower with low cost labour as the main driver of their economic boom.

The federal government in its determination to reduce the level of youth unemployment plans to empower 740,000 market oriented young agricultural producers in rural areas under youth employment in agricultural programmes (YEAP). This initiative is to encourage all the states in the federation to key unto the agricultural programme as a measure to reduce youth unemployment rate in the country. The programme will also serve as an alternative economic drive for the country to step over-dependent on oil as a major source of revenue drive for the country (Ahmed, 2016). There is need to examine the mode of selection of the youth as well as the impact of the programme on the participants and the community, hence, the objective of this programme was to assess the impact of youth participation in agricultural programme.

2. Research Questions

- Does the youth empowerment in agriculture programme have any impact on graduates on the basis of e-wallet innovative agricultural enterprises?
- Does the youth empowerment in agriculture programme have any impact on graduates based on agricultural market-value-chain?
- Does the youth empowerment in agriculture programme have an impact on graduates on the basis of agriculture institutional capacities?
- Does the youth empowerment in agriculture programme have any impact on graduates based on product exportation and home industries?

3. Establishment of E-wallet Innovative Agricultural Enterprises to Improve Agro-Business Skills

The youth empowerment in agricultural programme have led to the establishment of innovative agricultural enterprises to improve agro-business skills. The programmes have brought about innovative agricultural practices such as

'e-wallet agricultural scheme' which provides communication network that delivers needed agricultural information to farmers involved in agribusiness using social media to organize extensive training for youths. This innovation promotes agricultural programme due to regular interaction and compliance to social media opportunities for agro-businesses. The e-wallet scheme guarantees registration of farmers to e-wallet vouchers to use electronic system for the purchase and distribution of agricultural inputs. The scheme guarantees registered farmers to use e-wallet vouchers to redeem fertilizers, seeds and other agricultural inputs from agro-dealers at half the cost. The other half being borne by the federal government of Nigeria following the implementation of the e-wallet to reach fourteen million and five hundred thousand (14.5 million) farmers among which are youths. Ninety percent of farm inputs had reached 7.1million farmers in 2014 as the government could now deal directly with farmers to distribute fertilizers and seed subsidies to them as a result of the income for every farmer eligible for financing. Approximately six million dollars was created as lending and micro financing opportunities. Upon implementation of the 2nd phase of the project, the food import bill dropped by 75% as farming had contributed over \$30 billion to the country's economy. To date, a total of over one billion dollars in government subsidies has been distributed through the e-wallet scheme (Agriculture in Africa, 2019).

In the past, agricultural sector has been dominated by the aged and illiterate populace who apply crude and traditional way of farming. Most of the practicing farmers were contented with the organic farm inputs they recycle from their farms which make them to produce at subsistence level. Farmers of old enjoy less subsidies from government to boost their agriculture. The farm inputs that were available were being accessed by non-professional who probably sell them to enrich themselves without having direct contact with practicing farmers. In the past the mode of communication which serve as link between the farmers and government was through town hall meetings and not through modern means of communication. There was wide gap between the practicing farmers and government which was a serious barrier for the farmers to secure support and assistance from the government to boost agricultural productions. The communication gap which served as serious impediment due to non-existence of e-wallet scheme to draw the farmers closer to the government to derive maximum benefits created negative impact on empowerment programme that were generated to support the farmers and attract the younger generation into farming profession. The e-wallet increases youth participation in food self-sufficiency, reduce poverty, create employment, and promote youth integration into the main stream of productive ventures. The e-wallet agricultural programmes encourage mobile payments services to farmers anywhere to enhance efficient distribution, running of mobile registration and validation system. The e-wallet system guaranteed distribution of improved seeds, agrochemicals and good farming practices to farmers by transferring money directly to farmers' mobile phone. The system enables banks to lend farmers monthly to encourage farmers to increase yield to promote a paradigm shift from subsistence to commercial farming. The e-wallet put farmers in mobile driven agricultural track to manage resources for local and export for Growth Enhancement support Scheme.

4. Creation of Agricultural Market Value Chain to Support the Growth of the Economy

Farmers in the past sell their farm produce in local markets within their localities at ridiculous prices which do not justify the labour they have invested in farm products. This limitation does not stimulate the interest of the youths most especially the graduates to get attracted into farming profession. Farming was regarded as a profession for the poor and illiterates who are destined to remain perpetually at the base of social strata economically. The introduction of agricultural market value chain under various agricultural schemes has change the trend in agricultural practices on harvesting, pricing, and purchasing and income generation to make farming more attractive and rewarding. Value-chain is a modern agricultural process for farmer to add value to production, marketing and sales, provide catalyst for accelerated change network in the physical and cyber world through distribution chains, production chains and marketing chains. The farmers are provided with logistics, operations, marketing and sales services to add value to their products.

Taiwo-Oguntuase (2017) wrote that agriculture was the mainstay of Nigeria's economy before the discovery of crude oil from 1960-1969. The sector accounted for an average of 57.0 of GDP and generated 64.5% as export earnings. Nigeria economically shift to crude oil after the civil war which made the farmers to produce, market and sell their products with peanut as income. This scenario made farming less attractive. The younger generations were always not attracted into farming profession. The school leavers equally detest farming because they saw farming as a debasing and demeaning work meant for the illiterates and the aged who reside in country side or rural areas. The school leavers and younger generation drift towards urban centers to secure white collar jobs which were perceived as befitting source of employment. However, the current situation in the labour market across all sectors of the economy shows an index of saturation of labour market creating a chaotic unemployment condition. The graduates are severely affected with the unemployment situation, how much more of school leavers who have thin employment opportunities in the labour market. These precarious situations and conditions make professions that can guarantee self reliance and independence the only option for survival and employment creation. The spinning business is farming which has been abandoned for decades and left in the hands of the aged and illiterates. The recent initiatives established in the agricultural sector by the government and the abundant opportunities available for literate younger generation can attract the literate and younger generation into farming to become successful in life.

Value-chain initiative in agriculture currently is a potent strategy to ensure that agriculture continues to be fundamental instruments for sustainable agricultural development and poverty reduction. It enables producer to strictly compete with other producers and also builds competitive advantage by adding significant value to their products. Value-chain in agriculture describes the range of activities and set of actors that bring agricultural products from production in the field to final consumption wherein at each stage value is added to the production. The agricultural value is added to the product. The agricultural 'value-chain concept' has been used since the beginning of the millennium by those who

participate in business transactions across sectors of the economy but it is now featuring prominently in agricultural sector.

Abdulsamad (2018) observed that realizing the potential of Africa agriculture, innovations and market access for smallholder farmers is an essential process to justify progress in agriculture. Over the past two decades, the structure of agriculture value chain has changed significantly to create impact on agricultural development and to stimulate the interest of the productive group in the population. In order to stimulate farming activities policy liberation, privatization, rising income and urbanization and innovations in communication and transportation technology value chains are among the main drivers of restructuring in agricultural.

Stark (2017) describes agricultural value-chain as the set of actors and full range of activities required to bring an agricultural product from production in the field to its final consumption. It examines industry-and- location of specific input- output structures and related technologies standard, regulation, process and dynamics thus provides a systematic analytical lens that allows top down and bottom up assessment of industries. Therefore, value-chain arrangement has changed production and purchase of agricultural products from the exploitative model to liberalized model which goes a long way to promote confidence in those on the field of agriculture to get the right value for the products in the market thereby encouraging the youths to see agriculture as a money spinning venture.

5. Awakening Agricultural Institutions' Capacity for Better Performance

The youth empowerment in agricultural programmes have impacted positively on the performance and expansion of agricultural institution capacity in the area of capacity training programmes to further consolidate on exportation of agricultural products to boost the nation's economy and reduce dependent on crude oil. In the past, most agricultural institutions have relied on theoretical output which has little significant contribution to the nation's economy in practical terms. Some agricultural institutions have even become docile and unproductive as far as their mandates of establishments are concern. These events and developments have rendered most agricultural institutions insignificant in propelling economic development of the nation as a viable sector of the economic drive. The youth empowerment programmes in agriculture which has caught the attention of the government as a viable tool to attract the idle and jobless youths most especially the graduates to awakened the capacities of agricultural institutions to practically operate according to the specific mandates, vision and mission of various institutions to support the interest of the youths who have been attracted into farming profession.

There are specialized agricultural institutions established across the country with the intention of producing professional graduates into the labour market to independently operate without seeking for paid jobs but unfortunately most of the graduates posses skills and competences theoretically without enabling environment and financial support to practice their profession. There are universities of agriculture, colleges of agriculture and conventional universities, polytechnics, schools and departments producing graduates with mentality of seeking for white collar jobs after graduation. There are no designed programmes to encourage them operate independently after graduation with all the professional skills and competences they have acquired during training. There are also graduates of other disciplines who possibly might develop interest in farming profession because of the unemployment situation in the country but the poor financial state of most agricultural institutions to organize and drive self employment programmes to encourage the youth to key into agricultural sector affect the performance of these institutions to deliver on their mandate to attract the youth into agricultural sector. However, the youth empowerment in agricultural programme has been able to change the trend positively.

There are also agricultural institutes established across the country operating at various capacities on diverse components of agricultural sector over the years without adequate funds and facilities to deliver on their mandates which the youth empowerment programme had impacted positively to be able to operate according to their mandates. Agricultural institutes in Nigeria began operation since 1924 with Institute for Agricultural Research, Institute for Agricultural Research and Training 1956, Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria 1964, Lake Chad Research Institute 1960, Nigerian Institute for Oil Palm Research 1939, National Store Product Research Institute 1977, National Agricultural Extension Research and Liason Services 1975, Agricultural Rural Management, Training Institute 1980, and National Center for Agricultural Mechanization 1990 and others with various mandates. These institutes were established to provide support for agricultural growth and development. The institutes are to provide training, consultancy and advisory services and supply technological facilities to farmers to increase farm productivity and prepare farmers for efficiency and higher income generation. These institutes have been operating in isolation to farmers needs and integration in practical terms because most of the farmers are starkilliterates who could not approach these institutes to derive maximum support and assistance from their mandate due to lack of exposure to their rights and privileges.

In recent time most of the research and training institutes across the country have been spurred into actions and alive to their responsibilities due to various youth empowerment programmes initiatives which require practical inputs and output in training and research. For instance, National Center for Agricultural Mechanization claimed that agricultural revolution has finally arrived. Kasali (2017) also declared that NCAM have all categories of equipments that meet the need of small-scale farmers. NCAM as a government owned center has the mandate to research into and produce machines for producing and processing of crops. Going through the line story of science and technology innovations of modern tools and machines available for the mitigation of drudgery always encountered by farmers in the agriculture productivity. NCAM mandate is to ensure availability of these tools and machines for the use if farmers with less stress. It was emphasized that NCAM has been able to make impact in recent time more than ever before to alley this drudgery in farming and agricultural production to attract both youths and women into farming in Nigeria.

Olufemi (2018) claimed that agricultural and rural management training institute (ARMT) mandate includes dissemination of relevant Management Information that can further enhance efficient and effective management practice in the agricultural and rural sector to fulfill their mandate ARMTI from time to time, publishes information from special studies, researches and annual lectures for the benefit of operators as policy makers in the agricultural sector ARMTI is saddled with the responsibility of managing information dissemination to contribute to policy formation for agricultural and rural development in Nigeria where farmers constitute the bulk of the population. ARMTI organize seminars on tropical issues towards influencing policy formation of the agricultural sector. It also conducts applied management research on special and diagnostic studies to contribute to policy development to enhance better management of agricultural and rural sector in Nigeria. These functions and responsibilities are heightened with the recent development in youth empowerment programme in agriculture to provide logistic support to policy makers and professional on the field for robust agricultural practices and better performance.

FAO (2018) reported that an agricultural extension service offers technical advice on agriculture to farmer and supplies items with the necessary inputs and services to support their agricultural production. It provides information to farmers and passes to the farmer's new ideas developed by agricultural research sections. Agricultural extension service centers provide job opportunities for graduates of agricultural extension that exist in both the public and private sector such as state and federal ministries of agriculture. Agricultural and commercial banks, private agricultural companies, research institutes such as National Products Research Institute (NSPRI), Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria (CRIN), International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Faculties of Agriculture and Schools. Agricultural extension helps in adoption of innovations. It helps in studying and solving the rural problems. Extension services assist to increase farm yields and improve the standard of living of farmer to make the communities better and progressive. The agricultural extension services across the states in Nigeria are to handle issues that are related to youth empowerment programs to achieve success. In recent time most of the agricultural extension service centers that have been idle and unproductive have come to live with the youth in agricultural empowerment programmes initiatives to coordinate and monitor the performance of the programmes and nurture them to success.

6. Promotion of Increase in Agricultural Products for Export and Protection of Home Industries

In Nigeria, agricultural products contributed 64% to the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) before and after independence in 1960. But during 1970s the contribution of agricultural products to the total Gross Domestic Products declined to 48%. The decline continued in the 1980s to 20% while in 1985 specifically the decline went to 19%. In the 1990s the contribution of agricultural products to total Gross Domestic Products increased due to the shift of emphasis to agricultural development by the government (Ukeje, 2009). The physiocrats then laid more emphasis on agriculture in the development of economy. Economic development depends on the growth of the agricultural sector. It was also observed that the source of national wealth was essentially agriculture. Tomboga (2004) also pointed out that the basis for the world's great civilization in the past was the increase in agricultural productivity to lay solid foundation for industrial growth in any economy. This theory created significant impact in the industrial revolution in Britain, America, China, and Japan through the reinforcement of agricultural sector with irrigation facilities, institutionalization of credit facilities, supply of quality output to the industries, agricultural education and adequate supply of farm inputs.

Nigeria is blessed with human and natural resources with great materials to promote exports and industrialize the country through agricultural sector. The lip service paid to agricultural sector in the past coupled with lack of the youths' encouragement to develop interest in agriculture is gravely responsible for over dependent on oil as the mainstay of the economy which has adversely affected export trade and poor industrial growth. The evolution of youth empowerment in agricultural programme in recent time is capable of rejuvenating agricultural sector to increase export trade and promote industrial growth to bring back the Nigeria economy to life.

In 1918, since oil price started declining and Nigeria slides into recession. Many Nigerians have begun to look inward for the best alternative through the great potentials in agricultural sector for survival and wealth generation. The saturation of the labour market which has greatly reduced the available opportunities for graduate paid jobs assisted significantly in the repositioning of agricultural sector as the best alternative to cushion the effect of poverty and create employment opportunities for the teeming youths who roam the streets looking for unavailable jobs. Agriculture remains the only sector of the economy that can easily promote exportation and industrial growth. The Nigerian economy that is at low ebb due to low exportation of agricultural products and the ailing industries that have suffered acute set back due to inadequate supply of raw materials can begin to promote finished products for Nigerian market and exportation to reawaken the sinking economy of the nation.

Agriculture has great potentials to increase exportation to generate foreign reserve and promote industrial growth through many items produced mainly for exportation out of Nigeria. These products are highly profitable and also yield good return for investment of locally made products. Nigeria can produce cashew nuts which has great potential for exportations in international markets. Nigeria earn about 144.7 billion naira from the exportation of cashew nut to other countries. Rice production locally can also be a source of spinning business for exportation and local consumption. Nigeria saved 216 billion naira from importation of rice annually in recent time through locally grown rice. Nigeria also has the potentials to produce melon, ginger, garlic, plantain, cocoa, coffee, and cotton, kola nuts for nutrition and health values. Nigeria is rated 1st in terms of top cola nut producing countries with 52% of the market producing value. The country produces over 143,829 metric tons yearly. The production price is estimated to about \$8 billion. Nigeria also produces bitter cola which treat bacterial infections such as tuberculosis and diarrhea needed in Great Britain, America, china, India, and other Asian countries (Edoumiekumo and Audu, 2009). These products could also be used to promote Agro-Based

industries locally to serve as special incentives to farmers. It could also be used to stimulate and encourage economic cooperation among regions and states to create market for agricultural output and provide extension services to farmers and provide adequate funding.

Bankole (2018) reported that the power and strength of a country is estimated by its wealth and the strength of its industries. An economically weak country will definitely produce weak societal components and systems. Different societal components have different functions, though their functionally overlap. The surprises of crude oil had disappeared. Agro based industries possesses the potentials to replace the contributions of crude oil to national economy. Ogbe (2019) declared that agro based industries created 6 million jobs for rural populace as a result of increase in production of local rice. Bankole further claimed that agro based industries play a prominent role in Nigeria economy through the provision of raw materials from the farm. Agro based industries provide raw materials for consumer goods, supply workers of other industries with food products, purchase goods produced by other industries, cause consequential growth of agriculture dependent industries, provide numerous jobs and stimulate expansion of agricultural industries. The local industries that expansion in agriculture productivities could protect for industrial growth are beverage industries, detergent and soap industries, feed mill, tyre industries, tobacco industries, textile industries, canned fruits industries, oil mill, sugar industries and so on. The strengthening and consolidation in youth agricultural empowerment programme to attract the Nigerian youths into farming business no doubt promote increase in exportation of agricultural products and prevent the collapse of local industries

7. Conclusion

The youth empowerment in agricultural programme as a lofty initiative of the government on agriculture to confront and combat the high level of youth unemployment rate in the country and provide an alternative to monolithic economic nature in existence in Nigeria over the years has the potentials to mitigate the socio-economic hardship confronting the nation. Agriculture continues to be a driving force and fundamental instrument for sustainable development of many nations who have developed agricultural empowerment programmes for the youths who constitute vibrant, energetic and productive group to assist in driving the economic landscape for the diversification of the economy to agriculture. This paper has been able to provide critical analysis on the positive impact of youth empowerment in agriculture programme with the establishment of innovative agricultural enterprises to improve agro-business skills, creation of agricultural value-chain market to support the growth of the economy, awaken agricultural institutions capacity for better performance and promotion of increase in agricultural products for export and protection of home industries.

8. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- That the innovative agricultural enterprises to improve agro-business skill should be reinvigorated and sustained to provoke the interest of the youths in agricultural enterprises.
- That agricultural value-chain programme which serves as integrative approach to marketing purchasing and distribution of goods and services of agricultural products further streamlined to make agriculture a lucrative and rewarding sector for farmers who have suffered series exploitations over the years.
- That the agricultural institutions that have been inactive in the delivering of key mandates of productive their capacities should be adequately funded, energized and empowered to maximally contribute to agricultural development through capacity training programmes, supply and production of machineries and farm inputs to practising farmers
- That adequate incentives and linkages should be provided to farmers to export their products and supply home industries with varieties of agricultural products to increase foreign reserve earnings, protect the home industries to grow and generate income for farmers to expand their agric-business.

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