



Realising Sustainable Development Goals in Rural Delta State through Youth Empowerment Programmes

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Abstract:

This paper examined the realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in rural areas in Delta State. The paper argued that achieving sustainable development goals in rural areas in Delta State can be feasible through deliberate and robust implementation of youth empowerment programmes. Rural Delta State grapples with a high poverty rate, high unemployment rate and environmental degradation, limited access to quality education among others which affect both the youth and the rural areas. The sustainable development goals (SDGs) put in place by the United Nations in 2015, provide a global blueprint for addressing crucial issues as poverty, health, education etc. by the year 2030. Achievement of these goals require deliberate policies and programmes including youth empowerment of the youth in rural areas. The paper noted that despite the implementation of different youth programmes towards achieving and driving sustainable development goals in rural areas in Delta State, the needed optimum results have not been achieved and this is a concern. The paper relied on secondary sources of data while data was analyzed using content analysis. The major findings of this paper among others are that despite the successes, the youth programmes in Delta State face unique challenges including poor road network, poor health care, and limited access to electricity and inadequate educational facilities etc. The paper concluded that while challenges remain, continued investment and strategic improvements in the implementation can enhance the impact of these youth programmes thereby ensuring a brighter future for the youth of Delta State. The paper recommended among others, increase in funding, strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of youth empowerment programmes, collaboration and partnership. These measures if implemented will transform the lives of the youth in rural areas in Delta State thereby making lives more meaningful.

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Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established by the United Nations in 2015, provide a global framework for addressing critical issues such as poverty, inequality, health, education, and environmental sustainability by 2030. Achieving these goals requires targeted interventions, particularly in regions facing unique socio-economic challenges. Delta State, located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, exemplifies such a region. Predominantly rural, Delta State grapples with a high poverty rate, limited

access to quality education and healthcare, environmental degradation due to oil exploration, and high unemployment rates, especially among its youth.

Youth empowerment is widely recognized as a crucial element in fostering sustainable development. Empowering young people involves equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and opportunities necessary to contribute meaningfully to their communities and the broader economy. In Delta State, youth empowerment programmes can play a pivotal role in advancing the SDGs by addressing the multifaceted challenges that the region faces. Such programmes can help alleviate poverty, reduce inequality, enhance educational outcomes, improve health, and promote environmental sustainability. And so, youth empowerment is critical for sustainable development, as it not only addresses the immediate challenges faced by young people but also contributes to the long-term prosperity of the state.

This paper examines the potential of youth empowerment programmes to drive sustainable development in rural Delta State. By focusing on specific initiatives aimed at education, vocational training, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement, the study explores how these programmes can contribute to the achievement of various SDGs. The paper also considers the barriers to effective implementation of youth empowerment initiatives and proposes strategies to overcome these challenges.

The discussion begins with conceptual clarification, an overview of the socio-economic landscape of Delta State, highlighting the key issues that hinder sustainable development in the region. This is followed by a detailed analysis of existing youth empowerment programmes and their alignment with the SDGs. This study offers policy recommendations to enhance the impact of youth empowerment programs on sustainable development in Delta State.

Conceptual clarification

Sustainable Development: Sustainable development provides a window or an avenue through which the global community can interact with the environment in such a manner that will not be detrimental ecologically or economically to the future generation (Abubakar, 2017). Sustainable Development is seen as an approach geared or centred towards development such that it manages resources so optimally or prudently that the resources are not exhausted but continuously exist for the tomorrow (Mohieldin, 2017). Sustainable Development is viewed as a paradigm and a concept put together, which advocates for greater improvement in the standards of living of humanity on one hand, and at the same time, consciously not compromising or decreasing the earth's ecosystems nor causing environmental degradation, damage or challenges such as water and air pollutions, deforestation, climate change and animal extinction (Benaim & Raftis 2008; Browning & Rigolon, 2019).

Rural: Rural refers to those areas with low population density, small size, relatively isolated and the main economic activity is centred or concentrated in agricultural occupations wherein the people are more or less homogenous in their values, attitudes and behaviour (Moromoke, et al, 2017). Rural is more often than not associated with agriculture, farming and people from outside or outskirts of the city areas or of open-areas- those outside cities, country or countryside. In other words, references are made between people living in rural areas and the land itself (Atkinson 2017). Elsewhere, Owusu (2009) stated that rural areas or rural livelihoods involve one or series of activities which respectively provide food, cash and other goods that ultimately satisfy a wide range of human needs. These human activities include hunting, herding, cultivation, gathering, wage labour, reciprocal labour, hawking and petty trading, artisanship-weaving, carving, processing, begging as well as theft. It was further noted that rural residents generate their income through multiple sources which include 'farm income' – income from livestock, crops and includes both consumption – in kind of personal farm output and cash income from the output marketed; outside farm income – which include wage or exchange labour on other farms – within agricultural sectors; non-farm income – that is non-agricultural income sources, including non-farm rural wage or salary employment, non-farm rural self-employment,

rental income which could be obtained from leasing land property, and remittances. There are huge disparities in rural areas vis-a-vis urban areas, thus demarcating the two sides. Accordingly, these rural characteristics and disparities can be located for instance in personal income between urban and rural residents, lack of clean water, substandard housing, low level of education, local government as service providers at rural levels are at a disadvantage comparatively, costly highways and hospital bills, lesser income generated and lesser taxes and increased rate of personal income tax. (Friedland 2002). Additionally, it was posited by (Woods, 2011) that rural areas possess a rich history and peculiar identity of their own, even as they share certain aspects in tandem with urban areas.

In the views of Olisa and Obiukwu (2022) some of the attributes of the rural area include depression, miserable livelihood, degradation and serious deprivation. As a result, a good number of rural dwellers and villagers are poverty stricken so much so that the lifestyles of penury are dotted across the length and breadth of the rural areas and rural populace. It was noted further that in most rural communities in Nigeria, there are lack of general basic infrastructural facilities and wherever it exists, it is too minimal to the detriment of the people and for tangible development. This goes to show that the rural setting suffers mainly because of the absence of almost all the basic necessities of life such as good and accessible roads, qualitative health and medical facilities, electricity, portable water supply, nutritious food and mechanized agriculture. As a result, their occupation in some instances include subsistence agriculture, low or minimal standard of living, low income and thus highly susceptible to all manner of illnesses.

Elsewhere, Sibiri and Uzobo (2020) noted amongst others that majority of rural dwellers especially within Rivers State, Delta State, and Bayelsa State are struggling obviously with the issues of low or inferior medical and educational facilities, low or inferior electricity supply, low or inferior communication system/network, perennial flooding, total environmental degradation, lack of skill acquisition programmes to engage the teeming unemployed youth and the huge unemployment level. Also, Ashley and Maxwell (2001) posited that rural constitutes a little area where-in both the dwelling of humans and infrastructure occupy infinitesimal space or landscape so to say, while other spaces occupied mainly by grasses, fields, trees, water, deserts and mountains.

There are some features that are generally linked to rural settings that separate it from urban settings. According to Ekong (2010) these include as follows:- The size of most rural areas seems to be smaller vis-à-vis – urban areas, and the composition as well as the density of the population of the rural communities is usually smaller unlike the urban areas as the rural population exhibit more homogeneity than the urban areas; the occupational base of the rural populace is majorly on agriculture at its primary level of production as it supplies food as well as raw materials for greater number of the population within and without unlike the urban areas wherein commercial and industrial activities are at its optional level; the rural dwellers are close to nature and natural resources as the ecosystem guarantees higher and direct interaction to such natural provisions like wind, vegetables, rivers, springs, forests and son on. Social interactions at the rural areas are based on primary group level as there exists direct contact with rural dwellers unlike at the urban areas wherein interactions are based on secondary contacts; as a result of the primary and direct interactions, there is in existence lesser or minimal social stratification, segregation, or class cum class struggles and antagonisms in a rural setting unlike the urban dwellings; further more in a rural setting, social mobility is at its lowest ebb as compared to the urban settings; rural setting operates a low level of division of labour cum specialization or expertise as they are relatively independent or engaged on sole proprietorship as against what is obtainable at the urban setting; social values, cultural values, societal norms and ethics are imbibed, imbued, internalized, and adhered to the letter in rural setting than in urban areas, hence there is internal cohesion and orderliness in the former than in the latter; the level and quality of living is relatively low, poor and negatively affect the health conditions of the rural dwellers due to lack of qualitative infrastructure unlike the reality in the urban areas.

However, this is more so in the less developed world than the developed nation-state.

Youth empowerment: Youth empowerment is a process whereby the young people are motivated to take control or take charge of their lives. This is accomplished by addressing their situation and thereafter take immediate action so as to enhance their access to resources as well as transforming their consciousness through their character, values, self-worth and belief. The purpose of Youth empowerment is to enhance the quality of the life of the youth and this is accomplished by active participation and involvement in youth programmes. The United Nations views youth empowerment as initiating as well as supporting conditions whereby young people can make meaningful contribution to the social, cultural and economic advancement of their respective societies on one hand and be self-fulfilling at the same time. These include education, knowledge, information and skills, access to health, social services and employment opportunities. There are eight different dimensions of youth empowerment and they are interdependent. These dimensions are economic empowerment, educational empowerment, community empowerment, political empowerment, psychological empowerment, organizational empowerment as well as social and cultural empowerment (Umezulike, 2020). Kielsmeier (1988) defines youth empowerment as when and where young people moves further as a matter of urgency to begin to perceive themselves as powerful. This is feasible through tutored or guided involvement or participating actively in acts of governance, leadership, community service as well as citizenship. As soon as young people come to the knowledge that they have the wherewithal to making constructive impact upon the environment and others, it becomes easier, and achievable for them to feel being empowered. After all said and done, it is indeed, powerlessness, not power which corrupts.

The Importance of Youth Empowerment

Youth empowerment involves equipping young individuals with the skills, knowledge, and resources necessary to actively participate in the development process. It has been widely recognized as a catalyst for achieving sustainable development, fostering economic growth, and promoting social inclusion (UNDP, 2017; World Bank, 2020). Currently, the globe is home to at least 1.8 billion young people. The youth are more interconnected now more than ever and the United Nations acknowledges that the youth are positive agents of transformation as they represent an enormous and viable potential which governments and institutions at all levels should appreciate, motivate and invest in. Also, the United Nations recognizes that the youth are facing terrible crisis, risks and challenges across the globe. Thus, the quest for the provision of empirical policy guidance, programme support, the promotion of active participation of youth in all areas of human endeavour in the pursuit and realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (UNDP, 2024).

- i. **Economic Development:** Empowering youth is essential for economic development. Young people constitute a significant portion of the global population and represent a vital resource for economic growth. When youth are empowered, they can contribute to the economy through entrepreneurship, innovation, and a skilled workforce. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), investing in youth employment can boost economic growth and reduce poverty levels (ILO, 2015).
- ii. **Social Inclusion:** Youth empowerment promotes social inclusion by ensuring that young people from diverse backgrounds have equal opportunities to succeed. It helps bridge social and economic disparities and fosters a more inclusive society. Programmes that focus on empowering marginalized youth, such as those from low-income families or minority groups, can reduce social inequalities and promote social cohesion (UNICEF, 2018).
- iii. **Political Participation:** Empowering youth encourages political participation and civic engagement. Young people bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to the political arena. By involving youth in decision-making processes, societies can ensure that policies and programmes address the needs and aspirations of the younger generation. The United Nations

emphasizes that youth participation is crucial for the development of democratic governance and the promotion of human rights (United Nations, 2013).

iv. Health and Well-being: Youth empowerment is linked to better health outcomes. Empowered youth are more likely to make informed choices regarding their health and well-being. They are better equipped to resist harmful behaviours and advocate for their health rights. Programmes that focus on sexual and reproductive health education, mental health awareness, and substance abuse prevention contribute to the overall well-being of young people (WHO, 2014).

The Challenges of Rural Areas in Delta State

Rural areas in Delta State face unique challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Youth in these areas often experience unemployment, poverty, and lack of resources, hindering their ability to contribute meaningfully to development efforts (NBS, 2019; Delta State Government, 2021).

i. Poor Road Networks: One of the most significant challenges in rural Delta State is the poor condition of road networks. Many rural roads are unpaved, making them impassable during the rainy season. This affects the transportation of goods and services, limiting access to markets and essential services such as healthcare and education. According to a study by Adegoke et al. (2018), the lack of good road infrastructure is a critical barrier to rural development in Delta State, impeding economic activities and increasing the cost of transportation.

ii. Limited Access to Electricity: Electricity supply is another major issue in rural Delta State. Many rural communities either lack access to electricity or experience frequent power outages. This limits economic activities and affects the quality of life for residents. For instance, businesses that rely on electricity for operations face significant challenges, leading to reduced productivity and income (Ebegbulem et al., 2013).

iii. Inadequate Educational Facilities: Rural areas in Delta State suffer from a lack of adequate educational facilities. Many schools are poorly equipped, with insufficient classrooms, learning materials, and qualified teachers. This situation leads to overcrowded classrooms and a high student-to-teacher ratio, adversely affecting the quality of education. A report by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) highlights that rural schools in Delta State are in dire need of infrastructural improvements and more trained teachers (UBEC, 2019).

iv. Low School Enrollment and High Dropout Rates: Low school enrollment and high dropout rates are prevalent in rural Delta State. Economic hardship and cultural factors often force children to drop out of school to support their families through farming or other labour-intensive activities. This trend perpetuates the cycle of poverty and limits opportunities for social mobility (Okeke, 2017).

v. Poor Healthcare Infrastructure: Healthcare facilities in rural Delta State are often underfunded and poorly equipped. Many rural health centers lack essential medical equipment, drugs, and trained healthcare personnel. This results in inadequate healthcare delivery and poor health outcomes for residents. For example, maternal and infant mortality rates are higher in rural areas due to the lack of adequate prenatal and postnatal care (Nnamani et al., 2020).

vi. Limited Access to Healthcare Services: Access to healthcare services is further limited by the poor transportation infrastructure, which makes it difficult for residents to reach health centres. In emergencies, the time taken to reach a healthcare facility can be critical, often resulting in preventable deaths (Ebigbo, 2014).

vii. Dependence on Agriculture: The economy of rural Delta State is predominantly based on agriculture, with most residents engaged in subsistence farming. However, agricultural productivity is low due to factors such as poor access to modern farming techniques, lack of credit facilities, and inadequate storage facilities. These challenges limit the income of rural

farmers and contribute to persistent poverty (Osuji, 2015).

viii. Unemployment and Underemployment: Unemployment and underemployment are significant issues in rural Delta State. The lack of industrial and commercial activities means there are few employment opportunities outside of agriculture. This has led to high rates of youth unemployment, contributing to social problems such as crime and rural-urban migration (Ogbeide, 2018).

ix. Flooding and Erosion: Delta State is prone to environmental issues such as flooding and erosion, which are exacerbated by climate change. Flooding destroys homes, farmland, and infrastructure, displacing residents and disrupting economic activities. Erosion also poses a threat to arable land, reducing the land available for agriculture and further impacting food security (Adeleke, 2020).

x. Oil Pollution: Oil exploration and production in Delta State have led to significant environmental degradation, particularly in rural areas. Oil spills and gas flaring have contaminated soil and water sources, affecting agriculture and fishing, which are the primary livelihoods of rural residents. This environmental pollution has also led to health problems and reduced quality of life (Uyigue and Agho, 2007).

Youth Empowerment Programmes in Delta State and their Impacts

There are catalogues of youth empowerment programmes put in place by Delta State government over the years for the empowerment and employment generation of and by the youth. Among the various youth empowerment/employment programmes undertaken in Delta State in the recent past are: Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP); Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP); Graduates' Employment Enhancement Programme (GEEP); Information and Communication Technology – Youth Empowerment Programme (ICT-YEP); Girl-Child Entrepreneurial Skill Training (GEST); Rural Youth Skill Acquisition (RYSA); Tertiary Institutions Entrepreneurship Programme (TEP); and Community Business School (CBS).

These programmes are meant to meaningfully engage the teeming Delta state rural youths in productive and useful ventures through entrepreneurship, skill development and acquisition as well as acquiring a balanced mindset and acceptable value and reoriented ideology. For instance, the core objective of the Rural Skills Acquisition (RYSA) programme was geared towards improving the economic status of youths in their rural communities across the state. It was targeted at the youths who had earlier acquired skills but were unable to kick-start their own businesses. Not less than 1,564 youths were beneficiaries of the Rural Youth Skill Acquisition programme (RYSA) from the Batch A and B of the programmes. On the other hand, the Community Business School (CBS) was meant for the youths in the state who had already owned businesses, but needed to be further equipped with vital business skills in order to enhance their productivity. A total of 1,250 youths from different rural areas of the 25 local government in the state have benefitted therefrom (Onabu, 2022). The idea of skill acquisition programme as a vehicle for youth empowerment, is to ginger, mould and equip the youths with requisite and needed skills that will be useful and beneficial to them in future. An ideal skill acquisition like the Rural Youth Skill Acquisition Programme (RYSA) has the capacity of guaranteeing and ensuring value re-orientation among the youths and remoulding them into inventors of wealth and employment instead of job seekers. No, doubt, the invention of wealth and employment opportunities will lead to the reduction of poverty at the rural areas as well as enhanced the welfare status of rural individuals in the state (Idoko, 2014). Let's consider briefly the skills training and entrepreneurship and youth agricultural entrepreneurs programmes of the Delta State Government.

i. Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (STEP): Delta State Skills Training Programme, STEP, has since inception trained rural beneficiaries in the following skill programmes: Fashion design, Hairdressing, Catering, Make-up, Decoration and event

management, Electrical installation and repairs, Welding and fabrication, ICT, Farming and Fishery. STEP activities involve the training of youths in different trades/skills and assisting them to setup their own enterprises for self-employment and thereby becoming employers of labour. The target of the STEP programme includes: a) to train youths in different kind of skills/trades; b) to assist beneficiaries to establish their own businesses so as to be self-employed; and c) to aid beneficiaries to become employers of labour.

Holistically, STEP covers the following skills: Computer Hardware Repairs; Electrical Installation and Repairs; Catering and Confectionary; Barbing; Bead-Making; Hair-dressing/Make-Over; Decoration and Event Management; Fashion Design/Tailoring; Tiling; Plaster of Paris (POP); Vulcanizing; Welding and Fabrication; Painting; Block Moulding; Furniture-Making/ Upholstery; Carpentry; Electronics Repairs; Plumbing; and Cosmetology. In 2015, at the inauguration of the programme, a total of 1,073 participants, known as STEPpreneurs benefited therefrom as they were trained and distributed among the various trade areas. However, the number has grown to a total of 5,650 beneficiaries (Ajaino, Odili, Ossa, 2023; Office of the Chief Employment Generation Officer, 2021).

Majority of STEPpreneurs have been able to establish their own independent businesses, an indication that the goal of putting in place the STEP empowerment programme which amongst others is to train and equip the unemployed youths, between the ages of 18-35 years, in diverse vocational skills, has been accomplished. Also, most of the STEPpreneurs have become employers as they have recruited other young men/women after acquiring the skills and equipped therefrom. This indicates that the main goal of the programme, which is to generate employment, has been met. For example, assuming a youth who is trained and empowered by the Delta state government can create job opportunities for ten more youths, it goes without saying that one million empowered youths can also engage or recruit 10 million people within and without the State (Ajaino, et al, 2023). By so doing the realization of sustainable development goals in rural Delta through youth empowerment can be achieved. This is perhaps the mind of the Delta State government, when it initiated various youth empowerment programmes for sustainable development in the State. Acquisition of skills and training of the youth has the wherewithal and capacity to empower the youth despite their social, cultural and academic background.

ii. Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP): Proliferation of educational institutions across the country and in Delta state in particular, has led to the production of litany of unemployed and unemployable youngsters and the accompanying ugly circumstances. Joblessness breeds poverty. Poverty leads to penury and underdevelopment. These two abound in rural areas of Delta as earlier pointed out. Underdevelopment and sustainable development are parallel lines. To make the youth useful and their lives meaningful and to enhance the lives of the rural lives in Delta State, the government in 2015, initiated the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) amongst others as job creation platforms for youths, so as to reduce unemployment (Ijaiya, 2007; Tibi, Olueh, and Kifordu (Undated)).

Both the STEP and YAGEP are two programmes that were put in place so as to equip Delta youths with agricultural as well as other occupational expertise and entrepreneurship for them to cease from being job seekers, and graduate into being self-reliant and tomorrow's employers of labour. Thus, the twin programmes- youth agricultural entrepreneurs programme (YAGEP) and skills training entrepreneurship programme (STEP) are geared towards harnessing the production capability/capacity of the youths in Delta State via an era of quick and sustainable socio-economic development guide that would metamorphose the State into the most peaceful and industrialized State in Nigeria (Eboh, 2015).

It was noted that through the YAGEP scheme for example, the adoption of crop cultivation under collectivization, private/individual ownership of crop farm plots, employment opportunities could be created by youths in agricultural sector. The youths do believe based on their YAGEP experiences, that diversification of agricultural practices under the YAGEP scheme

could lead to more job creation than the narrow scope of cultivation of cassava and rice. YAGEP is also seen as not only viable but a sustainable job creation scheme, as is highly seen as alternative choice to public or private sector employment and it is an agricultural engagement that could be supported by their various families at all times (Tibi, et al, n.d).

Impacts of Youth Empowerment Programmes

The youth empowerment programmes in Delta State have had significant impacts on the lives of young people and the broader community. These impacts can be categorized into economic, social, and psychological benefits.

- i. **Economic Impacts:** The primary economic impact of these programmes is the reduction of youth unemployment. By providing training and resources, the programmes enable youths to start their businesses or secure employment. For instance, YAGEP has seen many participants successfully establish farms, leading to increased agricultural production and food security in the state. STEP has also contributed to economic development by creating a new generation of skilled artisans and entrepreneurs. Graduates of the programme have opened businesses that provide employment to others, thereby multiplying the economic benefits.
- ii. **Social Impacts:** Youth empowerment programmes have fostered a sense of community and collaboration among participants. The shared experience of training and starting businesses together has led to the formation of support networks and cooperative societies. These social structures provide ongoing support and encouragement, which is essential for sustaining new ventures. Moreover, the success of these programmes has helped to reduce crime rates in Delta State. By engaging young people in productive activities, the programmes have diverted them from criminal activities and antisocial behaviour, contributing to a more peaceful and stable society.
- iii. **Psychological Impacts:** Empowerment programmes have had profound psychological benefits for the youth of Delta State. Participants often report increased self-esteem and confidence as they acquire new skills and achieve personal milestones. This boost in self-confidence is critical for personal development and future success. Additionally, the sense of accomplishment from starting and running a successful business contributes to a positive outlook on life and greater aspirations. Youths who participate in these programmes are more likely to set and achieve higher goals, further contributing to their personal and professional growth.

Despite the successes, youth empowerment programmes in Delta State face several challenges. These include limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and bureaucratic hurdles.

Conclusion

Youth empowerment programmes in Delta State have made significant strides in improving the economic, social, and psychological well-being of young people. Through initiatives like YAGEP, STEP, and the job creation scheme, the state has provided youths with the skills, resources, and support needed to become self-reliant and contribute to the economy. While challenges remain, continued investment and strategic improvements can enhance the impact of these programmes, ensuring a brighter future for the youth of Delta State.

Recommendations

The paper proposes the following recommendations to enhance youth empowerment programmes in rural Delta State:

- i. **Increase Funding:** Allocate more resources to youth empowerment initiatives to expand their reach and impact.
- ii. **Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation:** Implement robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of existing programmes and inform future strategies.

- iii. Collaboration and Partnerships: Foster collaborations between government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector to leverage resources and expertise.
- iv. Tailored Skill Development: Design and implement targeted skill development programs that align with the needs of rural communities, ensuring sustainability and relevance.
- v. The government should endeavour to establish factories, industries, as well as agro-businesses in the rural areas. These industries could serve as avenues through which the primary produce can be processed into semi/ finished products.
- vi. There should be the provision of technologically advanced farm implements to enhance mass production of agricultural products by the rural youth farmers.
- vii. Sufficient loan facilities should be provided to rural youth who have already established their own businesses, so as to aid their expansion.

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