

Research Application Summary

**Enhancing undergraduates competitiveness in agribusiness to strengthen  
University-Agribusiness Industry linkage**

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**Abstract**

This study aimed at enhancing undergraduates' competitiveness in agribusiness to strengthen university- agribusiness industry linkage in Nigeria. The study was conducted at the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Participatory method was employed to solicit for information from 35 participants who are members of the agribusiness enhancement partnership in the University. Findings revealed that Undergraduates competitiveness can be enhanced through strong policy framework and concerted efforts to involve them in practical oriented endeavours in real life situations. Based on the findings, it is recommended that efforts be directed at fostering viable training and mentorship programme, intensification of linkages with other relevant establishments, special agribusiness-industry attachment be integrated into the University curriculum, and establishing an Entrepreneurial Fund Scheme to facilitate the special agribusiness-industry attachment, and for piloting agribusiness innovations.

Key words: Agribusiness, entrepreneurship skill development, Nigeria, students, University of Port Harcourt

**Résumé**

Cette étude visait à améliorer la compétitivité des étudiants de premier cycle dans le secteur agroalimentaire pour renforcer la liaison université-industrie agro-alimentaire au Nigeria. L'étude a été menée à l'Université de Port Harcourt, au Nigeria. Une méthode participative a été utilisée pour solliciter des informations à partir de 35 participants qui sont membres de la société d'amélioration de l'agro-industrie à l'Université. Les résultats ont révélé que la compétitivité au niveau du premier cycle peut être améliorée grâce à un cadre politique solide et des efforts pour les impliquer dans les tentatives pratiques orientées dans des situations de la vie réelle concertée. Sur la base des résultats, il est recommandé que des efforts soient dirigés à favoriser la formation viable et programme de mentorat,

l'intensification des liens avec d'autres établissements concernés, l'attachement agro-industrie-industrie particulière soit intégrée dans le programme de l'université, et la création d'un programme de Fonds entrepreneuriaux pour faciliter l'attachement spécial à l'industrie agricole, et pour le pilotage des innovations agro-industrielles.

Mots clés: Agrobusiness, le développement des compétences entrepreneuriat, Nigeria, étudiants, Université de Port Harcourt

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## **Introduction**

The bulk of the food produced in Nigeria is by rural dwellers whose efforts are not sufficient in ensuring food security for the country. It is in the light of this that the Federal Government of Nigeria through the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, over the past years, made intensified efforts in sensitizing farmers to see agriculture as a business rather than a project. This campaign was geared towards empowering farmers to ensure sustainable agriculture production in the country. Taking agriculture as a business will no doubt stimulate youths who have abandoned agriculture in the rural areas and migrated to the urban centres for other jobs, to take up agriculture as sustained means of a profitable business which would in turn improve food production and reduce rural-urban migration.

Agriculture as a business requires market oriented approach. However, to foster the goal of making agriculture a business in developing nations, youths need to be appropriately empowered. If the youths' innovation proneness and high energy are adequately tapped, they can easily interpret innovative agricultural practices and take up agriculture as a business and source of livelihood. In so doing, the potential of the youths to contribute towards nation building would be harnessed.

The focus on youth in recent times is to ensure that a renewed interest is sustained in agribusiness. Agumagu *et al.* (2006) had reported that youth have interest in generating both agricultural and non-agricultural livelihood activities in their communities. This calls for the need to empower them with practicable skills for life-long endeavour. Adesope *et al.* (2013) noted that there is neglect of practical agriculture in secondary schools in Nigeria. This obviously has implications for higher education. At the University level, the youths' capabilities can be built in this regard. The University is saddled with the responsibility of nurturing students to be worthy in character and leadership. For universities to produce quality graduates that are skilled in experiential learning and for them to serve as future employers and boost production in the agricultural sector, there is the need to empower undergraduates in the Faculties of Agriculture to competitively engage in agribusiness activities. As part of this endeavour for African Universities (Egerton University in Kenya, Gulu University in Uganda, Mekelle University in Ethiopia, and University of Port Harcourt in Nigeria) and one European University (University of Copenhagen in Denmark). Agribusiness Enhancement Project (European Union funded project) embarked on a study to enhance undergraduates' competitiveness in agribusiness to strengthen university- agribusiness industry linkage.

As part of the above project, the University of Port Harcourt is strengthening its own capacity by partnering with private and public institutions in the business of agriculture to develop students' skills in agriculture. This paper examines the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of partnering with some agro based industries and institutions in Rivers state who are in collaboration with University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Specifically, the paper identifies some agribusiness institutions in rivers state collaborating with University of Port Harcourt; and also identifies the strength, weakness, opportunities and threats in the collaboration with identified institution.

## **Methodology**

The study was conducted in University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Qualitative research method was employed to solicit for information from the 35 participants who are members of the partnership. Participatory methodology was employed in data collection using SWOT. The participants were placed in 5 groups of 7 persons per group. The roundtable discussion comprised of lecturers and students from the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Port Harcourt (the students who were involved in a recent attachment project), staff from the public and private sectors (Ministry of Agriculture, Africa Regional Aquaculture Centre, and private farms).

## **Results**

The SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis of the outcome of the roundtable discussion of the various groups is summarised in Table 1.

**Strengths.** The strength of agribusiness in Nigeria, lies in the ongoing synergy of all the institutions in the agribusiness industry. This has led to the availability of factors of production (such as land, raw materials, quality personnel etc), infrastructure, support programmes, training opportunities, knowledge of the business environment and opportunity for expansion. This will no doubt lead to improved efficiency in the sector and transcend to availability of food, hence lead to attaining food security.

**Weakness.** Notwithstanding the strengths of agribusiness industries in Nigeria, there exists several weakness which need to be addressed. These includes: administrative bureaucracy, lack of technologies, poor funding/policy implementation, few specialist staff, low staff strength, inadequate infrastructure, poor working environment, poor staff training, limited mobilization and logistics support, limited market opportunities, lack of continuity, inadequate people oriented programmes by the government, theory oriented curriculum, etc. Importantly, the participants recommended that the academic curriculum for agriculture should be practical based to encourage experiential learning that will help to motivate students to take careers in agribusiness.

**Opportunities.** Some of the opportunities that need to be harnessed included: easy access to farm machineries, linkage to industries, high demand for agricultural produce, self employment initiatives focus on agricultural development, good employment prospects for new entrants, etc.

**Table 1. SWOT Analysis of the institutions**

Institutions	Strength	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
A2P.PH	Access to factors of production	Low staff capacity Limited mobility	Easy access to farm machineries	Inadequate funding Inadequate working tools
ARAC, ALUU PH	Training opportunities Adequate infrastructure Qualified personnel	Irregular training Non-application of enterprise curriculum in operations Absence of passion for business	Linkage to industries Staff have exposure to improved practices	Limited funding Absence of entrepreneurial projects that are sustainable
STEVE OIL MILL	Abundant raw materials	Limited market opportunities and inability to create or develop one .	Self employment initiative and development	Weather variations
MUULOG FARMS (FISH FARM)	Good knowledge of the business Opportunity for expansion	Low staff capacity Lack of hatchery technology	Large market/demand for produce	Limited access to roads Low market price for produce High production cost

**Table 1. Contd.**

Institutions	Strength	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
UNIPORT	Quality staff Good curriculum Availability of support programmes Good teaching aids	Inadequate infrastructure and learning environment Inadequate funding/policy implementation Few specialist staff Theory oriented curriculum Poorly equipped laboratories Limited linkage with agencies/industries	Good employment prospects Consultancy Large market for agricultural products	Limited funding base Ineffective policies Encroachment on university land by locals Limited practical curriculum/not experiential learning
Rivers State Ministry of Agriculture	Access to land in all the LGA's Access to graduate personnel	Administrative bureaucracy Lack of project continuum Inadequate people oriented programmes Inadequate logistics Poorly trained staff Inadequate working environment	High demand for agriculture produce Songhai farm produces avenue for self development/employment	Non continuity of administrative policies Encroachment into government lands

**Threats.** The participants also identified several threats, including encroachment into government and university lands by locals, structure of academic curriculum, limited funding, ineffective and non continuity of administrative policies, low market pricing for produce, high production cost, weather variations, poor road network, absence of entrepreneurial projects that are sustainable.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

It is imperative to strengthen the agribusiness industries and provide enabling environment for agricultural graduates and agro-based industries to thrive. This would, among others, strengthen the linkages between industries involved in agribusiness, as this would lead to better working environment and increased productivity. Harnessing this great potential in agribusiness development has been weakened by factors such as lack of technologies, poor funding/policy, high production cost, weather variations, amongst others. It is therefore pertinent that the issues raised in this analysis be addressed through strong policy framework as advocated for by the participants, whom also stressed the need to establish strong feedback mechanism amongst the actors in agribusiness. There is also need to make agricultural curriculum practical oriented as opposed to the theory oriented nature of the current one at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Port Harcourt. It is therefore recommended that students should be involved in more practical learning, more fund be sourced, organisations should constantly provide training to the personnel so as to keep them abreast with recent developments and technologies, special agribusiness-industry should be established and an entrepreneurial fund be established to facilitate this.

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