

**A Systems Thinking Approach to Eliminating Rural-Urban Youth Out-Migration and its  
Effect on the Agricultural Sector in Nigeria**

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## Introduction

Over the years, the problem of out-migration from rural communities continues to pose serious concern to governments and development experts, as it hampers the growth and development of rural communities (Eze, 2019; Oketayo & Olaleye, 2017). This issue remains particularly common in the developing world, where the concept of *greener pasture* is notoriously used by many youths as they are consistently in search of what is referred to as a standard way of life in a promising environment (Mujinga, 2020). The quest for quality education, employment, and exposure contributed to a hike in youth out-migration and consequently resulted in the underperformance of critical sectors in rural communities (Iderawumi et al., 2019; Nnadi et al., 2012). Labor-intensive industries, like education, health, agriculture, and manufacturing, now suffer as a result of brain drain — the loss of human assets — from these communities and inadequate skills needed to develop these sectors (Dokunbo et al., 2023; Okhankhuele & Opafunso, 2013).

Scholarly consensus establishes that migration is driven by structural factors divided into push and pull factors (Dokunbo et al., 2023; Ismail, 2019; Van Hear et al., 2018). These push factors include forces causing individuals to move voluntarily in order to avoid exposure to certain risks that would occur if they remained in their current environment (Amrevurayire & Ojeh, 2016; Krishnakumar & Indumathi, 2014). Conversely, pull factors are forces that attract individuals to leave their homes (Krishnakumar & Indumathi, 2014; Van Hear et al., 2018). Nevertheless, Van Hear et al.'s (2018) work on migration extends beyond push and pull factors. They proposed that “to understand migration flows better, analysts could usefully distinguish between predisposing, proximate, precipitating, and mediating factors” (p. 927).

The problem of mass rural out-migration is a pertinent issue affecting Nigeria's agricultural and by extension, economic development (Eze, 2019). In attempts to solve the issue, government and private organizations have intensified efforts to increase the appeal of rural-living to youth; however, such efforts have yielded little progress in reducing rural-urban out-migration in the country (Abass, 2012; Okhankhuele & Opafunso, 2013). The result is an increase in inquiries on triggers and possible mitigations to rural out-migration among youth in Nigeria (Abass, 2012). Although some academics argue that there are benefits to rural-urban migration, the mass occurrence of rural outmigration in Nigeria remains a complex social problem needing a sustainable intervention (Dokunbo et al., 2023; Ismail, 2019).

To fully understand the root cause of rural-urban migration and to develop a practical and sustainable solution to reducing it, a systems thinking approach is required (Arnold & Wade, 2015). Systems thinking approaches commonly focus on the connections and interactions existing among elements relating to a particular problem; and they emphasize the studying, predictions, and influencing of associate behaviors (Meadows, 2008; Orgill et al., 2019). Imperatively, systems thinking seeks to bring a holistic problem solving approach to the issue of rural out-migration that can be applied in the Nigerian context (Orgill et al., 2019). Furthermore, a sustainable response to this problem of mass youth out-migration requires an interconnection of systematic interventions that will serve as a retention strategy for youth to remain in their local communities (Koorts et al., 2022). Hence, an agricultural focused program for youth is recommended.

## **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this presentation is to outline a systems thinking approach, in the form of an agricultural capacity building program for youth, that has the potential to eliminate the problem of rural outmigration in Nigeria and countries experiencing similar issues. The objectives are to:

1. Help the audience understand the importance of systems thinking in tackling rural out-migration.
2. Provide insights on the planning and implementation of agricultural capacity building programs for youth.
3. Provide insights about humanistic learning theory.

## **Process of Applied Program**

The applied intervention is to take place in Ido Local Government Area, Oyo State, Nigeria, and among indigenous youth. Ido Local Government Area has small-scale farmers as its primary residents and has a highly agricultural suitable land for farming activities (Victory et al., 2022). The proposed applied program would be a five-day bootcamp program focused on training and capacity building of youth in the area of agriculture (Milburn et al., 2012). The training program will sensitize youth on the emerging development in the agricultural sector, what role they can play in it, and provide hands-on training and simulation to them (Berridge et al., 2019). Overall, it seeks to close the gap in modern agricultural skills and knowledge (Berridge et al., 2019). Bootcamp programs have been described as a disruptive approach relative to traditional higher education and have the potential of expanding lifelong learning in a variety of industries (Price & Dunagan, 2019). The humanistic learning theory and pedagogy approach will be adopted in training youth with the aim of focusing on their full development and empowering them to develop the agricultural sector (Johnson, 2014; Purswell, 2019).

Participants for the program will be selected based on an open application process across the ten political wards in Ido Local Government. Formative and summative evaluation processes will be applied in assessing the training program as well as learning outcomes (Bhat & Bhat, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

It is without any doubt that the issue of rural out-migration and its effect on the agricultural sector of any country needs a sustainable solution (Nori & Farinella, 2020). However, proffering such solutions require an in-depth understanding of the root cause of the problem, and tackling them systematically (Meadows, 2008; Orgill et al., 2019). Developing an agricultural capacity development program is a sustainable approach to attracting and retaining youth to remain in rural areas and develop their agricultural sector.

## **Implications**

This oral presentation seeks to provide program planners, practitioners, and researchers with insights on the effect of mass rural out-migration among youth and its impact on the agricultural sector, and take them through the process of planning and implementing a rural-based agricultural program for youth and young adults. Considering the applicability of systems thinking (Arnold & Wade, 2015), although the presentation uses Nigeria as a case study, international development experts can apply key approaches and ideas shared to countries experiencing similar problems.

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