

Nigeria's Socio-Economic Factors and Ekiti State's Youth Involvement in Agriculture

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DOI- <http://doi.org/10.37502/IJSMR.2022.5420>

Abstract

Out of many other options to increase sustainable production of foods to feed its teeming population, Nigerian academics now focus on the possibility of motivating the youths into action in a labour intensive drive; finding reasons why Nigerian youths are not taking to farming. It is well known that a lot of young college and university graduates left the shores of Nigeria only to be engaged by strangers in cultivating plantations in foreign lands as a mean of livelihood. The shame of their discovery and the inability to raise adequate funds with which they would return home eventually keep them in long servitude abroad. Moreover, a lot of studies have ensued in regard of this, but none has been done or reported on Ekiti youths. This study fills the gap. A sample of 300 respondents from the population was drawn using multistage sampling method. Five focal questions were raised in the study and two hypotheses were generated and tested (at 0.05 level of significance) using the chi-square inferential statistical method. Data were collected using a well-structured questionnaire; the research design can be best described as a descriptive survey. Study unveiled that what youths really need most in Ekiti to encourage them in taking on agriculture include finance, awareness, training, fertile land, loan facility, power supply, improved seedlings, fertilizer/agrochemicals availability, and machinery among others.

Keywords: agriculture; youth; agribusiness; farming

Introduction

Out of many other options to increase sustainable production of foods to feed its teeming population, Nigerian academics now focus on the possibility of motivating the youths into action in a labour intensive drive; finding reasons why Nigerian youths are not taking to farming. Youth has been defined by Djurfeldt et al (2019) as young people that have not attained adulthood and independence. In the words of Rasak et al (2019), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (2013) recognizes the fact that this group of people constitute a large share of the population in many less developed countries. Yet, only few of this huge proportion partake in agriculture (Essiet, 2014). Despite the fact that many of these young

people were trained with money earned via farm practice, many of them after graduation detest farming. Some see it as very degrading. Some that take to it complain of the low rate of returns accruable from farming. They fail to see how rewarding cash cropping and agro-business could be.

It disheartens that a lot of young college and university graduates left the shores of Nigeria only to be engaged by strangers in cultivating plantations in foreign lands as a mean of livelihood. The shame of their discovery and the inability to raise adequate funds with which they would return home eventually keep them in long servitude abroad. Conversely, expatriates are here establishing agro allied ventures and making their million dollar rewards fast here in Nigeria. Hence, correcting the anomaly is so imperative.

For Africa to develop agriculture, the youth must be duly recognised and given adequate attention (Kelly, Singh and Zvenyika, 2017). They are catalysts in developing countries. It is well known that African youth are very talented, energetic and passionate in their commitments. If these attributes are diverted to agriculture, the youth can surmount whatever problems facing agriculture and thereby achieve food security. Kelly et al (2017) asserts that the youth is critical to agriculture development and must be accorded special attention.

Moreover, a lot of studies have ensued in regard of this, but none has been done or reported on Ekiti youths. This study fills the gap. There is dearth of empirical data on the determinants of youths' participation in agriculture in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Yet, agricultural development remains one of the most powerful trappings to end poverty and boost prosperity (World Bank, 2016). Moreover, Ekiti State comprises about 151 communities in 16 local government council areas. The economy enjoys tropical climate with substantial rainfalls every year. Moreover, the land yields bountifully in agricultural resources with a lot of food and cash crops. It is well known that Ekiti land constituted over 40% of the cocoa products of the famous old Western Region. Food crops like yam, cassava, and grains are grown in large quantities. Other notable crops such as kola-nut and various fruits are also cultivated in commercial quantities (Wikipedia, 2018). The State, which was created in 1996, has a total population of about 2.4 million (2006 Population Census) and covers a land area of about 6,353KM². The state has a per capita income of US\$1,169.

Nnadi and Akwiwu (2008) investigate the rate of youth's participation in agriculture, agro ventures participated in and the factors that determine their participation in Imo State, Nigeria. Data were generated from 230 youths from the three agricultural zones of the state using questionnaire and interview schedule. These were analysed with the aid of frequency tables, simple percentage counts and logit regression model at 0.05 level of significance. The results show about 84% participation in land clearing, planting, fertilizer application, collection of fodder for livestock etc. The participation was determined by their ages, education, marital status, parents' income, parents' occupation, household size and youths' dependence status. Study recommends institutional support services to the youths in agriculture and intervention strategies for youths' agricultural activities to be guided.

Nwaogwugwu and Obele (2017) studies the factors that limit youth's participation in agro-allied ventures in Eleme local government area of Niger Delta, Nigeria. Data were collected from a sample size of 112 respondents selected from a population of 1,895 (one thousand, eight

hundred and ninety-five) youths in the 17 registered youth associations in the study area using 2-stage random sampling technique. 64% of the respondents are males; about 39.0% falls within the age of 26 and 30 years; about 54.0% of them are single. Data analysis was by the use of frequency, percentage, mean and factor analysis. The predominant Agric based activities identified in the study area includes: crop farming, livestock farming, fish farming, fuel wood gathering and sales, farm labour services, agriculture product processing. Factor analysis result showed seven major factors that limit youth participation in agriculture as poor social values, poor agriculture support services, environment related land degradation factors, poor agricultural policies, industrialization, inadequate arable land and poor health conditions. The study recommends that credit facilities should be made available through micro-credit agencies and banks to whichever capable youth that wants to take on agriculture.

Prosper et al (2015) finds that age, sex, marital status, education level, family background, availability of rural credit facilities, land, agricultural knowledge, lack of job alternatives and perceptions are important factors associated with rural youth's participation in agricultural activities. The study set out to find the role played by agriculture to rural youth socioeconomic needs, types of agricultural activities which are engaged by rural youth and the factors which influence youth's participation in agriculture. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Study found that majority of the respondents were attracted to invest more in their own farms rather than being employed as labour or involved in family farms. The study also reveals that rural youth in Kahe are provided with their socioeconomic needs through their participation in agriculture.

Cheteni (2016) uses a binary logistic model to analyse the determinants of youth participation in agriculture in the Nkonkobe Municipality, South Africa. A total of 140 youth were purposively selected for the study to complete a survey. The results show that the variables; youth programmes, programme availability, and resources were statistically significant in explaining the factors that affect youth participation in agricultural activities. Based on the study findings, it is recommended that in order to influence youth participation, they should be provided with youth programmes and resources.

2. Research Methods

The research design for the study is field survey and exploratory in nature. The study was conducted in Ekiti State, Nigeria. To address the specific objectives of the study, using Cochran's (1977) formula for selecting sample size, a sample of 300 respondents from the population was drawn using a Multistage Sampling method (purposive, accidental sampling stratified sampling method). Data were collected with the aid of a well-structured questionnaire spread across three of the sixteen local council areas that constitute the state. Three local government council areas (Oye, Ido/Osi, and Moba local government) of the state were selected for this study. It was believed that this would enable a rich harvest of the inherent peculiarities of the target population relative to agriculture. Cogent focal research questions were raised in the study and two hypotheses were generated and tested (at 0.05 level of significance) using the chi-square inferential statistical method.

Analysis results

Econometric model

$$\Psi = \hat{a} + X_1 + X_2 + X_3 + X_4 + X_5 + X_6 + X_7 + X_8 + \mu$$

Where:

\hat{a} = Constant

X_1 = Age (years)

X_2 = Gender (0=Female, 1=Male)

X_3 = Marital status

X_4 = Education (1=primary, 2=secondary, 3=tertiary)

X_5 = Fund (1=personal, 2=private, 3=government)

X_6 = Occupation (years)

X_7 = Religion (1= Christian, 2= Muslim, 3= Traditional)

X_8 = Perception (average score) o

μ - Random error term

Age

Age is a crucial factor to reckon with in farming. Labour intensive farming requires vigour and vitality; such that are found in African youths. In the words of Djurfeldt, et al. (2019), youths are perceived within the villages to be hardworking, capable, strong, and eager to improve their farms. Even when grown, the ‘older farmers are expected to make sound farming decisions, ensuring sustainability of their projects; forecasting and guarding against risks’ (Douglas et al, 2017). Ekiti State can be described as a growing economy. As Table I below indicates, 67% of responses classifies under age 20. Study found the highest frequency between 15 and 20 years old. The remaining 31% constitute the youth. Only 2% is above 55 years of age.

Table I a

Age Brackets	Count	Percent
15 – 20	199	67.46
25 – 35	79	26.78
36 – 55	11	3.73
Above 55	6	2.03
Total	295	100.00

The Table Ib below shows the perception of the population regarding the embrace of agriculture by the youth and the elderly. Out of the 250 that responded to the question on if agriculture should be left for the aged people alone, 201 did not support the idea of leaving farming to the aged people alone. African youths are very energetic and could therefore execute labour intensive farming practice that the system promotes. This figure represents over 80% of the respondents. Precisely, 84.56% responded to affirm that agriculture could make them self-employed, while 91% of the respondents believe that agriculture could turn around the nation Nigeria’s fortune.

Table I b

Responses to the question on if agriculture be left for old people alone.

Responses	Count	Percent
No	201	80.40
Yes	49	19.60
Total	250	100.00

Education

Table II below shows the level of literacy of Ekiti youths. Out of 285 respondents to the question, only 7 (2.46%) did not obtain or complete formal education. Probably, these seven respondents took to trade apprenticeship very early in life; or that they attended Islamic schools. The table shows that the youths in Ekiti are of the elite class. Approximately 80% attended higher institutions, with 67% already with their certificates obtained. This is out of the entire population of 285 respondents, 97% of which has formal education. It should be noted that despite their chosen professions and mandatory education, the tendency is very high that these personalities still practice farming. They are better enlightened on modern farm technology that improves production. This is contrary to the opinion of Ahaibwe et al (2013) that the agriculture sector employs the least educated labour force.

Table II

Education	Count	Percent
No school	7	2.46
Primary school	4	1.40
SSCE	50	17.54
NCE/OND/Diploma	82	28.77
Undergraduate	31	10.88
HND/Degree	72	25.26
Postgraduate	39	13.68
Total	285	100.00+

Gender

Table III and Table IV below display data collected on the gender balance of respondents and their religious affiliations. Even though male youths are more energetic in the fields, Ekiti women are known for animal husbandry, bees and poultry keeping. Among the 295 respondents, 153 (51.87%) are male, while 142 (48.14%) are female. Out of these, 249 (83.56%) are not married. Even though there are Muslim youths and youths from other religions, Christian youths dominate the survey. 238 (80.13%) Christian youths partook in the survey. While 16.50% were Muslims, 8% were traditional worshipers; and others atheists. Religion has nothing to influence Ekiti youths' participation in agriculture. The youths were seen to be more concerned with their economic relevance to their households and the society

at large rather than to religious affiliations. In their common parlance, affluence propels a gratifying heart.

Table III

Gender	Count	Percent
Male	153	51.87
Female	142	48.14
Total	295	100.00

Table IV

Religion	Count	Percent
Others	2	0.67
Traditional Worshiper	8	2.69
Islam	49	16.50
Christianity	238	80.13
Total	297	100.00

Marital status

Moreover, majority of the respondents were not yet married. This is shown in Table V. Out of 298 respondents, only 36 (i.e. 12.08%) were married. What a growing population Ekiti has. This is an indicant of a bright future for food security in Ekiti, if the youths' conscience could be captured now and convinced to take up lucrative career in agriculture.

Table V

Marital Status	Count	Percent
Single	249	83.56
Married	36	12.08
Divorced	9	3.02
Cohabiting	4	1.35
Total	298	100.00

Social economic factors of influence

In consideration of the key social economic factors that we believe could influence youth participation in agriculture, we put forth a question on what youths really need most that could encourage them to engage in agriculture. The responses obtained are as presented in Table VI below.

Table VI

Responses to the question on what youths really need to make agriculture interest them

Responses	Count	Percent
Awareness	84	28.67
Training	69	23.55
Fertile Land	39	13.31
Loan facility	53	18.09
Power supply	4	1.37
Improved seedlings	10	3.41
Fertilizer/Agrochemicals availability	11	3.75
Machinery	21	7.17
Others	2	0.68
Total	293	100.00

The factors as shown in the table include youths' awareness of government backing them up to involve themselves in agriculture. Others include special trainings organised to enlighten them on various modern techniques to handle the different areas of farming; availability of fertile land that they could cultivate; finance; power supply; provision of improved seedlings; provision of fertilizers and other agro-chemicals; and the provision of requisite machinery and other farm implements that can make agriculture less risky and more appealing to take up as a career. 293 respondents attended the question, among whom 84 (i.e. 28.67%) affirm that the awareness that government want them in agriculture would boost youth partaking in agriculture.

As shown in the table, 23.55% responses chose that trainings (organised) are needed to boost their interest in agriculture. Trainings in this regard have to do with being able to read the reasons for planting and for harvesting profitably. It involves being trained to efficiently handle each crop and the farm implements with which the crops are produced.

Next to this is the issue of agriculture finance. The unwillingness of banks and finance houses to advance credits to farmers is on the increase due to the inherent risks involved. The youths in Ekiti, as shown in the collated data, preferred that adequate provision of agriculture loans would grossly encourage them to go into agriculture. Such funds could be used to go into agro-business, purchase fertile lands, purchase the necessary farm implements and obtain requisite agro-chemicals.

The relevance of fertile land to farming, as preferred by the respondents, is further stressed by 39 respondents that chose fertile land as the most needed factor to engage the youths in agriculture. That is 13.31% of the 293 respondents. The other influential factors include the provision of requisite machinery to aid cultivation, weeding, and harvesting. 21 (7.71%) respondents desired this. Then, is the provision of improved seedlings, fertilizers, and agro-chemicals, which the respondents believed could be bought individually if they have the means.

The provision of electricity to farms they believed would enhance farm settlements, and promote irrigation systems on the farms.

Challenges faced by youths in farming

The study traced out the problems that Ekiti youths face in agriculture to include paucity of funds and non-profitability of farming, others include lack of access to fertile lands and inherent stressfulness of farming; dirtiness and low market demand for farm produce. Equally added to these the fact that they lack the financial capability to possess modern machinery and poor farm yield. All these are captured as reported in Table VII below. These claims are further buttressed in Table VIII.

Table VII

Responses to the question on why youths abstain from agriculture

Responses	Count	Percent
Stressful	31	13.48
Dirty	17	7.39
Unprofitable	51	22.17
No land	35	15.22
No access to fund	62	26.96
No access to farm machinery	9	3.91
Low market demand for agriculture produce	12	5.22
Poor yields	4	1.74
All of the above	4	1.74
Others	5	2.17
Total	230	100.00

As shown in Table VIII, from 292 responses to youths' impediment to agriculture, 90 responses indicate lack of finance. That is about 31% of the total responses. 22.26% claims no access to land, and about 23% responses claim lack of interest in farming. Only 5% of the respondents claimed low profitability as their challenge in farming.

Table VIII

Responses to further question on why most youth refuse to engage in agriculture

Responses	Count	Percent
No access to land	65	22.26
Lack of interest	67	22.95
Lack of finance	90	30.82
Laziness	50	17.12
Low profit prospects	16	5.48
Others	4	1.37

Total	292	100.00
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3. Conclusion

With the above results, one could conclude that Ekiti youths can improve involvement in agriculture if some factors are properly considered and appropriately taken care of by the right quarters. Ekiti youths need to be encouraged by the government. Socio-economic factors that pose challenges to them are not insurmountable. It seems that paucity of funds and access to arable lands pose great challenges to the youths. This reveals that successive government in Ekiti have not been really determined to assist in driving youths to agriculture. Equally, it can be deduced from the study that no financial institution has been drifted to assist in financing agriculture in Ekiti. Neither is any forum put in place to promote this among the youths.

4. Recommendations

Study found out that what youths really need most in Ekiti to encourage their taking on agriculture include finance, training, and fertile land. Added to these are improved seedlings, fertilizer, agrochemicals, modern farm equipment, and regular supply of electricity to power their gadgets. In view of this, we would recommend that government should design the appropriate policies and create such structures that can contain all the identified challenges.

A well standardized market structure could be arraigned by the state and the local governments tailored towards buying agricultural produce in huge quantities from farmers. Not only buying them for standardized storage, the state government could harness these products and process them for industrial consumption and for exportation if found excessive. Doing this would not only encourage more production, it would improve industrial growth, create more jobs, and generate progressive employment. Moreover, in the words of Rybakowa (2013), as cited by Bedna říkov a et al. (2016) government support is not enough to motivate people to agriculture (Rybakowa, 2013)

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