



ADDRESSING RURAL POVERTY IN NIGERIA THROUGH YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture has been an important sector in the Nigerian economy in the past decades. According to World Bank 2020 report, Agriculture has provided over 30% employment for the entire population. This makes agriculture to be a branch of the economy in Nigeria and remains the major source of livelihood for most people. A country that is richly blessed with abundant natural and human resources that if properly handled can feed its people and export the surpluses to other countries is still wallowing in poverty till date. The rural area has been the highest sector of the economy with largest poverty rate in Nigeria. Even though Nigeria has the highest number of youths in the world with massive resource in the area of agriculture sector but unfortunately, youth participation in agriculture is declining, youth are not interested in joining agriculture because they see agriculture sector as an unattractive area to work. To increase agricultural production and solve the problem of rural poverty, the youths must be involving in agricultural activities. Their participation is strongly needed for agricultural reform so that it can keep pace with changing global economy. Therefore, this paper presents the importance of youth participation in agriculture as a way of reducing poverty in Nigeria. The findings revealed that the provisions of vocational guidance to the youth will expose them to vocational guidance through incorporating all aspects of the agriculture in schools' curriculum at a young age. The use of innovative agricultural technology to train the youths, creation of agro cities among other to encourage the youth in agricultural participation.

Keywords: Agriculture, youth, participation, poverty, food security, rural area

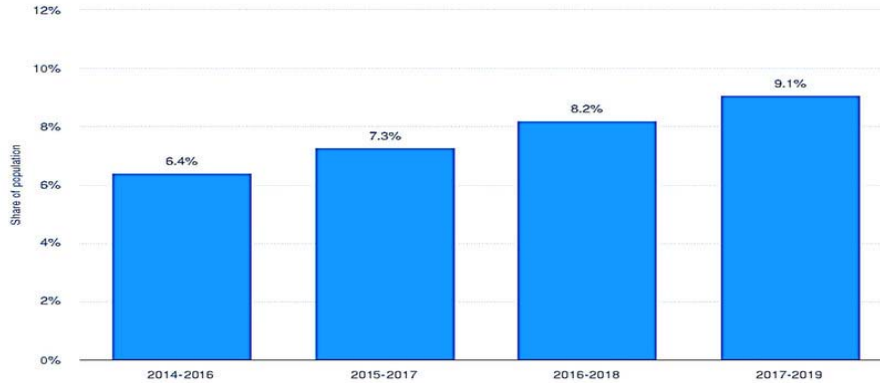
INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is defined as the production, processing and distribution of food, fish, forest products and fiber (Baharudin, Ibrahim, Abdan, and Rashidi, 2018). It is the sector from which most of the rural poor derive their income. Agriculture has been an important sector in the Nigerian economy in the past decades (Norman, 2019), and is still a major sector despite the oil boom. Basically, it provides employment opportunities for the teeming population, eradicates poverty and contributes to the growth of the economy (Bryceson, and Jamal, 2019).

In Africa, agriculture provides a livelihood for most of the 75 percent of the people who live in rural areas (Tomich, Kilby, and Johnston, 2018). In Nigeria, it provides livelihood for most of the 75 percent of the people who live in rural areas which have the largest concentration of poverty and food insecurity Ayinde, Otekunrin, Akinbode, and Otekunrin, (2020). Approximately 70 percent of the population engages in agricultural production at a subsistence level (Bawa, 2019 and Iimi, Adamtei, Markland, and Tsehaye, 2019). According to Ayodele, (2019) Agriculture contribution to GDP growth in Nigeria is in a stable manner. The sector accounts for 65 percent of Nigeria's total exports

(Uduji, Okolo-Obasi, and Asongu, 2019). According to Lawal, Saheed, Anfofum, Ato, and Adeshina, (2023). Agricultural sector is a branch of Nigeria economy that is providing employment for about 35% of the population. Agriculture growth creates income opportunities for the poor both farm and non-farm economy, thus lowering food prices for both rural and urban poor consumers.

Therefore, the agricultural sector is not only the driver of Nigeria's economy but also the means of livelihood for most Nigeria people. According to Food and Agriculture Organisation, (2020) agriculture remains the foundation of the Nigerian economy. By 2050, the world population is estimated to exceed 9 billion people, and to fulfill the additional demand for food, agricultural production will need to expand by 60% from its current levels. However, there has been a downward trend in productivity which has persistently lead to food crisis in quantity and quality. The drop in productivity is attributed to a number of reasons which included the subsistence level of operation of our ageing farmers, their cold embrace to innovative ideas of modern farming, poverty of farmers among many others.



Prevalence of severe food insecurity in the total population % in Nigeria
Source: Aliyu., Ozdeser, Çavuşoğlu, and Usman (2021)

The innovative massive youth population who walks up and down the streets seeking white collar jobs who would have come to the rescue have not seen agriculture as the way out. Ifeonu, Chukwuemeka, and Agwu, (2019), reported that Nigeria recorded the highest number of youths in African with massive resources to offer to the agricultural sector. Youthful populations present a significant opportunity for many nations, as their innovative drive can help revitalize and improve food security. This is particularly true in the agricultural sector, where innovative agricultural technology can be used to train the youths to enhance the sector's productivity and effectiveness. Following the evidence generated from the research by Dodo, (2020) the agricultural sector has the potential for addressing food insecurity among the youth. Yet only few youth see a future for themselves in agricultural sector. This paper, therefore, addresses rural poverty in Nigeria through youth participation in agriculture. It examines the importance of youth participation in agricultural sector and rural poverty in Nigeria; describes challenges facing youth in agricultural sector and provides the strategies for reducing rural poverty through youth participation in agricultural sector in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study uses documentary analysis to address rural poverty through youth participation in agriculture in Nigeria as a manageable social problem within the context of the social networks.

Importance of youth participation in agricultural sector in Nigeria

Youth participation in the agricultural sector is very important to the development of Nigeria because next generation of farmers in Nigeria and those who will ensure food security are the youths (Etim and Thompson, 2020). Youths are any country's hope for the future. (Boytemirova, 2020). They have the latent energy needs, the ability, and the capacity to engage in any agricultural sector.

They also have propensity to pick up and utilise new information and new ideas. Youth can accept the latest technologies required to boost agricultural productivity and improve rural area. Youth participation in the agricultural sector will help to reduce the problems of unemployment in rural area, increase national economic growth and there will be hope for food security in Nigeria and indirectly this will significantly decrease the likelihood of youth engaging in criminal and unlawful activities because of lack of productive job. This is in line with Igbolekwu, Arisukwu, Rasak, AkeandOnireti, (2020) that the massive involvement of youth in agriculture is crucial in finding solutions for issues like unemployment and food insecurity.

Youth participation in agricultural sector will help to overcoming some of the major obstacles to increasing animal production, such as pest control, feeding, genetic improvement, and protection against predators. Because they are frequently more open to new ideas and practices than older farmers. Youth are energizer and active member of society therefore they can adopt the new technologies required to boost agricultural productivity (Branca, Cacchiarelli, D'Amico, Dakishoni, Lupafya, Magalasi, and Sorrentino, 2021). Modern agriculture gives youths professional prospects in research, environment, financial management, engineering, and technological fields so they can realize their potential beyond only tilling the soil and raising animals. (Duckett et al., 2018).

Challenges faced youth in agricultural sector in Nigeria

Some of the greatest challenges impeding youth participation in agricultural sector includes:

- 1 **Rigors involve in agricultural sector:** Subsistence-based lifestyle of working on the family farm has made agricultural activities difficult. As a result, youth may view agriculture as a backup option or something they will involve in while looking for an alternate employment



- 2 **Poor returns in agricultural investments:** Young people do not consider farming to be a lucrative career. This understanding is furthered by the seasonality of planting and harvesting, as benefits from farming can be realized weeks or months after significant financial investments in labor, equipment, or inputs are made at the start of the season. The exuberant youth also have the attitude of get-rich-quick and will be impatient to undertake agriculture which is associated with low profits margins when undertaken on small scale. Moreover, Carlisle, De., DeLonge, Calo, Getz, Ory, and Press, (2019) reported that the low participation of youth in agriculture could be traced to insufficient agricultural insurance and low returns on investments in agriculture, unprofitability of the occupation and inadequate access to credit facility.
- 3 **Inadequate access to agricultural insurance for farm produce:** Youth access to farm insurance is restricted by number of problems, including the high cost of farm insurance, lack of knowledge about the need of insuring agriculture products, and difficulty contacting insurance companies. (Kwenye, and Sichone, 2018).
- 4 **Losses during farming season due to poor basic farming knowledge:** lack of ready market for perishable agricultural products and inability to stock agricultural products in suitable storage facilities. Johnson, Bloom, Dunning, Gunter, Boyette and Creamer, (2019) also recognized that the lack of knowledge regarding good farming practices is a driver of the poor harvest and low profit margins in the sector. The low levels of agricultural participation can be attributed to a lack of basic farming knowledge among farmers, a lack of markets for perishable agricultural products and insufficient access to tractors and farm materials. Similarly, Bahati, Martiniello, and Abebe, (2022) stated that the lack of scientific agricultural knowledge among farmers, continued use of traditional farming tools and methods, as well as non-lucrative and energy-consuming practices, could all be blamed for the low participation of youth in agriculture.
- 5 **Inadequate access to credit facilities:** Financial resources are required to undertake meaningful agriculture because of the need to acquire piece of land, purchase of farming equipment and other input while access to credit facilities for youth in financial institutions is frequently dependent on the availability of collateral security which the youth do not have and therefore preventing them for accessing credit from a bank. Youth access to finance is thus typically limited to family or community resources. In Nigeria most youth do not get access to enough funds to start agriculture on a scale they desire and even if they start and desire to expand their production to maximize profits, they are limited by their low-income levels. Also, Martinson, Yuansheng, and Monica, (2019) identified that there is low participation of youth in agriculture because of the constraints such as inadequate financing facilities and subsidies. High initial capital is required to undertake meaningful agriculture because of the need to acquire piece of land, purchase of farming equipment and some cases the need to purchase fertilisers to undertake agriculture involving the cultivation of crops .It has been validated by Twumasi, Jiang, Danquah, Chandio, and Agbenyo, (2020) that access to credit facilities in rural financial institutions is often tied to the availability of collateral security (usually land) with which the youth do not have and consequently limit their access to loans and their resulting low-participation in agriculture.
- 6 **Lack of passion:** Young people are usually not interested in agriculture due to their perception of agricultural as a low-status, outdated, rural, illiterate, and therefore demeaning job. Some see farming activities as old-fashion, hard-dirty, work with very little self-esteem, labour intensive and unprofitable. Believing that, participation in agricultural activities is not appropriate for an enlightened youth. Therefore, prefer quick money and white-collar job that pay well and create rapid cash instead of long-term investments like agribusiness since they make people impatient and encourage them to lose patience.
- 7 **Problem associated with access to agricultural lands under customary tenure:** Youth's access to agricultural lands is constrained by high cost of accessing land, competition for land by residential developers, unwillingness of traditional authorities to release agricultural lands and growing shortage of productive family agricultural lands. The challenges regarding access to agricultural land has been aggravated by large-scale land grabbing and the commoditization of

land leading to the fragmentation of lands making it difficult to large tracts of land to be acquired for meaningful mechanized agriculture for those with ready capital. MulumeBonnke, Dontsop, Nyamugira, Jean-Jacques, Manyong and Bamba (2022) corroborated and confirmed that poor access to agricultural lands is a giant factor accounting for the low-participation in agriculture.

Strategies of reducing rural poverty through youth participation in agricultural sector in Nigeria

- 1 Provision of vocational guidance to the youth; exposing them to vocational guidance through incorporating all aspects of the agriculture in schools' curriculum at a young age and in partnerships with schools and universities. Vocational guidance is an effective tool for teaching agricultural skills and providing capacity-building trainings for the youth. The modern practices of agriculture and agribusiness should be taught to youths during their education, and those who choose to start their own businesses should be supported financially and encouraged to do so while those who are actively involved in agriculture are motivated to do more and honored so as to draw the interest of others in following this way.
- 2 Using innovative agricultural technology to train the youths: Agricultural technologies such as mass-produced tractors, agricultural robots, driverless tractors, agricultural aircraft, genetically modified crops, improved drip irrigation, and soilless farming techniques such as hydroponics, aquaponics and aeroponics should be deployed to encourage youth participation in agriculture.
- 3 Creation of Agro-cities or farm settlements: This creation of agro cities can be allocation of land to the youth in an agricultural estate. The infrastructure should be made available and avoidable, organise workshop and seminar to encourage the youth to come with their own ideas.
- 4 Supported training, skill acquisition and skill development: Non-governmental Organisations and association should support the youth with the self-improvement program like the programme that will update their knowledge.
- 5 Government support for buying back of produce from youth farms: Government agent should purchase the product of the youth farmers at competitive price than what is obtainable in the market. This will encourage the youth to participate agricultural sector.
- 6 Youth inclusion in governance and development policy dialogue: participating in policy discussion has to do with youth should be involve and allow to participate
- 7 It is important to educate youth about how social media, ICT can be used to enhance agriculture.
- 8 Investments in collateral-free microcredit systems that can boosts the financial requirements of youth that engage in agriculture.
- 9 The disparity between poverty rates in rural and urban areas suggests that either transforming rural areas into urban centers or promoting rural-urban mobility can reduce poverty. The latter appears to be a less difficult assignment to take on soon. The construction of a thorough rural development program; that links economic transformation between rural and urban areas, offers a more long-lasting alternative.
- 10 Also, increasing the accessibility of agricultural inputs and introducing productivity-enhancing farming practices through extension workers can enhance food security and reduce rural poverty.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The decline in youth participation in the agricultural sector has been traced to number of factors such as Rigors involve in agricultural sector, poor returns in agricultural investments, inadequate access to agricultural insurance for farm produce, losses during farming season due to poor basic farming knowledge, inadequate access to credit facilities, lack of passion, negative parental influence and problem associated with access to agricultural lands under customary tenure regime. Nevertheless, agriculture must be made lucrative so that the youth can get high income from agricultural sectors. High income can only be obtained when agricultural productivity increases, and this will, in turn, sustain food security.

It is recommended that more innovative agricultural programmes should be projected on social media to stimulate genuine interest of the youths. Governments should facilitate youth access to credit through giving of soft loans with minimal interest rates and subsidise the prices of farm inputs. Platforms must be created to develop ways to incite the youths to participate in agriculture and Government policy on agriculture should include youth and reflect their existence to address their needs. Likewise, there is a need to upsurge the number of young farmers who qualify for loans to improve their access to loan.



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