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The Problems of Bulk-Selling Yams in Harvest and Poverty of Farmers in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the problem of instant sale of yams in bulk during harvest and poverty of yam farmers in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The main objective of this study was to examine the purpose of clearance sale of yams in harvest in Ekiti State. The study is a descriptive survey. The study population are all yam farmers in 16 (sixteen) Local Government Areas of Ekiti State. The study sample are the farmers and yam marketers in three local Government Area one each from Senatorial district. The reveals instrument are two types of quantities. The sample size of 300 yam farmers and yam business men and women. Simple percentages and frequency tables were used in analyzing the data. Results from this study show that poor storage facilities, poor marketing strategy, problem of income and culture of

the people account for the bulk-selling of yams in the study area. The study recommends that there is need for the provision of modern yams storage facilities, provision of credit facilities to farmers, the organization of agricultural education and yams operation enlightenment programmes for farmers annually by the appropriate and relevant agencies in the study area.

Keywords: Bulk-selling, Farmers, Poverty, Problems and Yams.

Introduction

In Nigeria today, agriculture is still the most important sector of the nation's economy in terms of large number of people who earn a living from it, and because, it is the main source of food and raw materials for manufacturing industries (Agumagu, 2008). Ekiti State in the Southwestern region of Nigeria is an agricultural region. Ekiti State is a major producer of staple food crops, this is due to the vast land, good soil fertility and favourable climatic condition of the state (Ekiti, 2008).

Majority of the people living in the rural areas of Ekiti State are farmers. For example, the ebira farmers in Ilokun, Shegere Irasa camp, Ebira Oriokuta along Iworoko road, Ebira Samaritan Camp, Ilawe, Omuo, Aramoko, Ikole and Ijesa-Isu etc. These farmers are involved in agricultural activities such as, planting, harvesting, drying and storage activities of both cash and food crops. The agricultural products include crops grown for domestic markets and those grown expressly for export. Those grown for domestic markets are food crops mostly the staple food, such as yam, cassava and maize etc. The two most essential staple food crops cultivated, harvested and marketed in Ekiti state are yams and cassava (Ekiti, 2008).

Savile (1995) observed that yam (*dioscorea spp*) is a root crop found in the tropical rain forest zone, which need at least 1150 mm of rainfall for proper growth. Yam tuber must be harvested when matured and provided with special storage facilities to avoid large scale deterioration, loss of weight, rotting and sprouting caused by damage or attack from pests and diseases.

Yams are among the most important root crops in West Africa. They are also grown in other parts of the tropics but there is some evidence that some yam species originated from West Africa. He further stated that yams are grown mainly for food, and one particular type, the white yam (*Dioscorea roundata*) is highly popular among Nigerians. It can be boiled and eaten with stew; yam chips can be prepared and in some parts of West Africa, especially amongst

the Yorubas, it is boiled, pounded and eaten with stew. The white yam can also be cut into pieces, dried and processed into yam flour. Although rich in carbohydrates, it has not been widely used as an animal food, probably due to the facts that supply have generally been somewhat limited. Local domestic animals however, feed on the skin and pieces thrown away in kitchen refuse.

Allexandrators (1995) noted that favourable conditions for yam cultivation occur in areas where the soil is loamy and well drained. He further observed that rainfall must exceed 100 cm per annum, most of which should fall within the five months grown season. Nigeria today produces more yams than any other West African countries, mainly in the Southern Kaduna, Kwara, Ekiti, Oyo, Edo, Anambra and northern Cross River States due to high intensity of rainfall received in the country (www.onlinenigeria.org 2009).

Many types of yam are found in Nigeria, but only six of them are of importance. The white yam (*Dioscorea rotundata*) matures early and produces tubers of various sizes and shapes. It is the most popular of yams grown in Nigeria and is considered to be of the highest quality.

Yellow yam (*Dioscorea cayenensis*) matures in about 12 months from planting. It has a yellow fleshy but is not widely popular and is prepared in a similar manner to white yam. Water yam (*Dioscorea alata*) is not very popular for human consumption, but it is used to supplement the supply of white yam. These three types of yam are very important food crops in many parts of Nigeria in general and Ekiti State in particular.

The three other types of yam, which are of lesser importance in terms of human consumption are: the three leaved or bitter yam (*Dioscorea dumetorum*). As the name implies, it has an unusual type of leaf formation. The tubers are large and bitter in taste. It is not popular, but may be eaten after long boiling. The Chinese yam (*Dioscorea esculenta*) produces a large number of very small tubers. It is not popular and is found growing mainly in school gardens. Finally, there is the aerial yam (*Dioscorea bulbifera*), this produces swellings from the stems which are like small yams and are essentially above ground storage organs. This type of yam is of poor quality and is not generally cultivated (Safwat, 2000).

Land preparation for yam cultivation is a more complicated operation, than it is for most other food crops. The ground must be thoroughly cleared, and mounds or hills are made at a distance of 1 metre apart. Native hoes are mostly used for this operation in Ekiti State. Ridges are seldom used for yam

planting but in the future, this may become a general practice, if mechanized methods of harvesting are developed.

MDGs Report (2008), noted that most farmers in the developing countries, engage in bulk selling of their farm produce, e.g. yams, immediately after harvest due to the problems of storage facilities and eelworm (*Angilluina bradys*) which is a common disease of yams. Eelworm attack tubers in the ground and during storage. The eelworms eat their way into the tubers and thus provide an entry for the fungus, which causes the rot. Affected areas become brown and soft, damage tubers have little market value control measures include the planting of clean, uninfected sits and crops rotation also help to keep eelworm in check.

Proverty in the Agricultural Sector

When an economy undergo/recession, one area which it affects most is agriculture which in turn will further compound the initiative of Agriculture is the main source of income for the worlds' poor. The poorest set of farmers are found in rural areas, and their livelihood are linked to farming.

Rilwani and Osayande (2008) noted that within the agricultural sector, there are two groups of poor; the self employed and wage labourers. The poor are concentrated in traditional industries, with low income and high capital requirements and low labour productivity. Their products are usually intended for home consumption or for local market. Non farm employment is particularly important in providing work in slack seasons for landless labourers and women from poor households. Thus, poverty may well be perceived in relationship to contemporary living standard of an entire society. Farmers and individuals alike are in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities, which are customary in the society to which they belong.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The general aim of this study is to examine the satisfaction, which the farmers derive from the bulk-sales of their proceeds and the end-points of their yams outside Ekiti State.

The Specific Objectives of this Study were to:

- (i) Find out why Ekiti Farmers bulk-sell their yams immediately after harvest

- (ii) Determine the market spots for yams within Ekiti and the factors favouring the market location
- (iii) Find out the nature of the farmers in Ekiti, whether they are aboriginal farmers or itinerant farmers.

The Study Area

Ekiti State is located between latitude 7° 30' and 8° 15' north of the equator and longitude 4° 47' and 5° 40' of the Greenwich meridian.

Ekiti State was created on the 1st of October, 1996 and named Ado-Ekiti as her administrative headquarter.

The estimated population figure of Ekiti State released by the National Population Commission (NPC) stood at 2,353,082 (NPC, July, 2006).

The relief of Ekiti State consists of undulating plains. The highest contour line of 540 m above sea level is found around the north eastern limit of the state. The rocks are dominated by the crystalline rocks, which form parts of the basement complex geology of the South Western Nigeria.

Ekiti State has a total annual rainfall of about 1,400 mm with a low coefficient variation of about 30% during the rainfall peak months, and with an average of about 112 rainy days per annum, Adebayo (1993).

The development of Ekiti State spread towards the routes of communication. Put differently, the settlement evolutionary structure and growth is a replica of Homer Hoyt's Sector theory of 1939, which posits the sprawl of physical development in the direction of transportation routes (www.ekiti.net, 2009).

Conceptual Framework/Literature Review

The concept of Sustainable Development is applicable to this study. The concept was propounded by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987. This concept noted that Sustainable Development is a development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs.

Development involves the purposeful change of the inherently complex environmental factors, human needs and other natural resources are independent. Thus, a system analysis or assessment of the total environment and agricultural production of yam proceeds should be part of the overall planning process.

In making adequate and sustainable productive decisions, effort to maintain or improve on the sustainable production of yams in Ekiti State, environmental quality and modern agricultural production of yams should be given sufficient weight.

MDGs Report (2008) stated that in the developing countries like Nigeria, Benin Republic, Togo and Ghana etc, fifty (50) to Eighty (80) percent of households are dependent on agricultural employment, private and commercial suppliers of seed, agricultural chemical, tools and spare parts are often absent. MDGs Report (2008) further noted that agricultural programmes and production activities are affected by low income and poverty level in-which the farmers are most affected.

Agumagu (2002) opined that in agricultural productive activities, the burden on rural farmers are much and yet they have limited access to advice, from Agricultural Extension Programmes and other forms of support, such as institutional credit and improved technology for production, processing and transportation services.

Davies and Bruton (2009), stated that poverty alleviation in the agricultural sector can be tackled in so many ways, most of which exhibit an intricate web of inter-relationship. This can be via policy areas as macro-economic planning, job creation (direct employment ventures) provision of credit facilities, transport, physical and social interaction, welfare scheme, subsidies and agricultural extension services etc.

Rilwani and Osayande (2003) posited that poverty is the lack of certain capabilities, valid, necessities of life and the inability to participate with dignitaries in the society. This implies that poverty is a state of deprivation (good education, proper health care and good housing units etc) and is therefore multi-dimensional and not limited to income level.

Onayemi (1983) reported that over 50% of yam tubers produced and harvested are lost in storage. Adding that, yam diseases and pest constitutes great problem to yam production.

Amusa *et al.* (2003) identified two types of yam diseases namely; field diseases and storage diseases. The field diseases, according to the researchers, includes, yam anthracnose disease, yam mosaic virus disease and water yam virus disease. The storage diseases include dry rot, soft rot and wet rot.

Methodology

The yam farmers in Ekiti State were the subjects of the study and as such all farmers who engaged in the cultivation of yam constituted the study population.

Ekiti State is divided into three senatorial districts namely South District (which has 6 local Government Areas) Central District (which has 5 Local Government Areas).

For the purpose of this study, one Local Government Area was selected from each senatorial districts and from each local Government area two communities were selected purposively. The communities were selected based on the observation that they were high producers of yams. The communities included Ilesa Ekiti and Ayebode Ekiti (in Ekiti South) Irasa and Ori-okuta (in Ekiti Central) and Odo-oro Ekiti and Oke –Ako (in Ekiti North).

Two sets of structured Interviewers questionnaires were developed. One of the set was a 30-item questionnaire designed to capture information from the rural farmers and the other set was a 20-item questionnaire designed to elicit information from yam workers namely yam traders, tam transporters and yam loaders within the study area. A total number of 300 hundred questionnaires were administered altogether.

The questionnaires were translated into Yoruba and Ebirá languages to ensure maximum comprehension in the respondents. A total of 284 questionnaires were successfully retrieved from the field and analysed.

The respondents were selected using random sampling technique.

The rural farmers were domiciled in the locality, though many of them were itinerant farmers who left their place of birth to do ‘commercial’ farming in the area due to availability of fertile land. The traders, transporters and loaders on the other hand were largely strangers from Lagos, Abuja and other urban areas coming to bulk purchase yams. A category of local traders emerged from among the indigenes who operate as middle persons between the farmers and the external traders.

Descriptive method of data analyses using frequency table and percentages was adopted to analyse the data.

Findings and Discussions

The results on why Ekiti farmers Bulk-sell their yams immediately after harvest revealed that out of the 145 respondents of yam buyers, transporters and loaders interviewed, 51 representing 35.2% of the respondents stated poor yam storage facilities of farmers in the area, while 21 representing 14.5% of the respondents observed poor marketing strategy of farmers in the area, 33 representing 22.8% of the respondents noted the problem of income of farmers in the area, and 36 representing 24.8% of the respondents stated the culture of the people, while 4 representing 2.8% of the respondents void their response (See table 1). This implies that the problem of yam storage facilities in the area were high and the available facilities were inadequate.

The result on the poverty of farmers in Ekiti State revealed that out of the 145 respondents of yam buyers, transporters and loaders in the study area, 41 representing 28.3% of the respondents stated that poverty of yam farmers in the study area mainly results from the problem of capital, 23 representing 15.9% of the respondents noted that extravagant way of life of farmers in the area accounts for the poverty of farmers in the area, while 14 representing 9.7% of the respondents observed too many dependants on farmers in the area, meanwhile 53 representing 35.6% of the respondents stated poor farming practices of farmers in the area, and 14 representing 9.7% of the respondents voids that response. This implies that the poverty of farmers in the study area majorly emanated from poor farming practices.

The result on the month in the year, the buying, transporting and loading of yams in the study area is highest revealed that out of the 145 respondents of yam buyers, transporters and loaders in the study area, 26 representing 17.9% of the respondents stated June, 52 representing 35.9% of the respondents noted July, meanwhile 51 representing 35.2% of the respondents observed August, while 13 representing 9.0% of the respondents stated September, and 3 representing 2.1% of the respondents stated October.

The implication of this is that yam harvest and bulk-selling of yams is highest in the month of July every year in the study area.

The result on the type of labour employed by farmers in the study area on yams production (table 4) revealed that out of the 139 respondents of Farmers in the study area, 97 representing 69.8% of the respondents stated the use of manual Labour, 40 representing 28.8% respondents stated mechanization, while 2 representing 1.4% of the respondents void their response. The implication of this is that majority of farmers in the study area

makes use of manual labour, with obsolete farming implements in yams production as such investing a lot of energy and time with incomparable output of yams production in the study area.

The findings on the achievement of farmers in the bulk-selling of yams in the study area, revealed that out of the 139 respondents of farmers, 48 representing 34.5% of the respondents stated the purchase of motorcycle, 26 representing 18.7% of the respondents stated the purchase of vehicle, 17 representing 12.2% of the respondents stated the building of House, meanwhile 36 representing 25.9% of the respondents noted the training of their children and relatives, while 11 representing 8.0% of the respondents stated the purchase of household furnitures and other items and 1 representing 0.7% of the respondents noted improved business. This implies that the major achievement of Farmers in the area is the purchase of motorcycles and vehicles respectively. As such majority of the farmers in the study area were poor and engages in the driving of motorcycles (Okada) and Vehicles (Akoto) aside farming.

The survey on the major determinants of yams market spots in the study area revealed that out of the 139 respondents of farmers, 64 representing 46.0% of the respondents stated near farmers residents, 39 representing 28.1% of the respondents noted near Farmland, and 28 representing 20.1% of the respondent observed near transport routes, while 8 representing 5.8% of the respondents void their responses (See table 5). The implication of this is that, the major determinants of yams market spots and bulk-selling of yams in the study area takes place near farmers residents.

Table 6 which shows the findings on the nature of farmers in Ekiti State, whether they are aboriginal farmers or itinerant farmers also revealed that out of the 139 respondents of farmers in the study area, 80 representing 57.6% of the respondents stated aboriginal farmers, while 59 representing 42.4% of the respondents noted itinerant farmers. This implies that the level of involvement of strangers in the production of yams in Ekiti State is high, and as such contributes immensely to bulk-selling of yams in harvest in Ekiti State.

Table 7 which shows the result on the nature of yam buyers, transporters and loaders in the study area, revealed that out of the 145 respondents of yam buyers, transporters and loaders, 75 representing 51.7% of the respondents stated aborigines and 70 representing 48.3% of the respondents stated and loaders. This implies that the rate at which strangers participate and

contributes in the bulk-selling buying, transporting and loading of yams in harvest in Ekiti State is considerably high.

Recommendations

In view of the findings in this study, developmental activities and projects in the rural areas should aimed at uplifting the standing of living or rural dwellers and break the vicious and routine cycle of poverty of farmers in the study area.

There is need for a considerable increase in the budgetary allocation from the state and Local Government Authorities to assist farmers in the state, most especially in the area of yams production.

All the deplorable roads in the rural area should be rehabilitated and new ones constructed to enhance the free flow of yam produce between the rural and the urban centres.

There is need for the provision of more and modern yam storage facilities in the study area.

There is need for the provision of sufficient agricultural infrastructure including irrigation systems to ensure all year sustainable yams production in the study area.

Agricultural education and yams operation enlightenment programmes should be organized annually by the appropriate and relevant agencies.

There is need for farm inputs, such as improved yam seedlings and varieties, fertilizers, agro-chemicals and modern agricultural implements to be provided to Farmers to improve yam production in the study area.

There is need for farmers in the study area to be provided credit facilities.

Conclusion

The bulk-selling of yams in harvest is predominant among farmers in Ekiti State. Yet, the standard of living of farmers in the study area is considerably very low. This points to the facts that the need for a considerable adjustment, reform, and improvement in the production of yams and living standard of farmers in particular and rural dwellers in general cannot be over-emphasised. Government at all levels, planners, policy makers, researchers and farmers should therefore give adequate attention to how best yams production can be considerably improved upon, new innovations on yams

production, improvement and sustenance adopted, as well as to improve the standard of living of farmers in the study area.

Table 1: The Survey of What Respondents Perceived as the Major Reason Why Farmers Bulk-sell Their Yams Immediately After Harvest

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Valid O | 4 | 2.8 |
| Poor Storage Facilities | 51 | 35.2 |
| Poor Marketing Strategy | 21 | 14.5 |
| Problem of Income | 33 | 22.8 |
| Total | 145 | 100.0 |

Source: Author's Field Work Report, 2009.

Table 2: What is Perceived as the Cause of Poverty of Farmers in the Study Area

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Void O | 14 | 9.7 |
| Problem of Capital | 41 | 28.3 |
| Extravagant way of life | 23 | 15.9 |
| Too many dependants | 14 | 9.7 |
| Total | 145 | 100.0 |

Source: Author's Field Work Report, 2009.

Table 3: A survey on the month of the year, the Buying, Transporting and Loading of yams in the Study Area is Highest

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------|-----------|------------|
| Valid June | 26 | 17.9 |
| July | 52 | 35.9 |
| August | 51 | 35.2 |
| September | 13 | 9.0 |
| October | 03 | 2.1 |
| Total | 145 | 100.0 |

Source: Author's Field Work Report, 2009

Table 4: The Type of Labour use in Yam Farming Operations in the Study Area

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Valid O | 2 | 1.4 |
| Manual Labour | 97 | 69.8 |
| Mechanization | 40 | 28.8 |
| Total | 139 | 100.0 |

Source: Author's Fieldwork Report, 2009

Table 5: A survey on the Determinants of Yams Market Spots in the Study Area.

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Valid O | 8 | 5.8 |
| Near farmers residents | 64 | 46.0 |
| Near transport routes | 28 | 20.1 |
| Near Farmland | 39 | 28.1 |
| Total | 139 | 100.0 |

Source: Author's Field Work Report, 2009

Table 6: The Nature of Farmers in Ekiti State, Aboriginal Farmers or Itinerant Farmers.

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------|-----------|------------|
| Aboriginal | 80 | 57.6 |
| Itinerant | 59 | 42.4 |
| Total | 139 | 100.0 |

Source: Author's Field Work Report, 2009

Table 7: The Nature of Yam Buyers, Transporters and Loaders in the Study Area; either Aborigines or Itinerants.

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------|-----------|------------|
| Aborigines | 75 | 51.7 |
| Itinerants | 70 | 48.3% |
| Total | 145 | 100.0 |

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