

COMPARISON OF YOUTH FARMERS' UTILIZATION OF AGRICULTURAL FARM LAND IN BENUE AND ABIA STATES, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study was conducted to compare youth farmers' utilization of agricultural farm land in Benue and Abia States, Nigeria. Specifically, it described the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and level of utilization of farm lands in the States. Multistage random sampling technique was used in selecting 240 respondents for the study. A structured questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion were used in eliciting data from the respondents. Descriptive and inferential (Regression) statistics were used in analyzing the data. The result of the socio-economic analysis revealed that large proportion of youths were males which shows that they are more productive in the farm, large proportion of the respondent in Benue State were married while their counterparts in Abia were single, farming was the primary occupation in both States. The respondents in Benue State had more of secondary education compared to that of Abia that had more of tertiary education, which means that they are literate and can interpret agricultural packages. The results revealed a general grand mean of high utilization of agricultural land in Benue State than in Abia State. Also, youth farmers in Benue State use their farmlands more for cultivation of vegetables, cultivation of arable crops, livestock and other nonfarm business while that of Abia State were for the production of arable crop, livestock farming and other non-farm business. The researcher observed that, inheritance, availability, gender and cultural beliefs were the major inhibiting factors to the use of farm land in Abia than Benue States. Again, high cost of land and poor orientation in the use of farm land contribute immensely to the utilization of farm land across the study areas. In conclusion results indicated that youth farmers in the study areas highly utilized their farmlands in order to improve their economic status. This entails that farming enterprise needs active, productive and relatively young farmers who are energetic to participate actively to raise the enterprise. The study therefore recommended that, youth farmers in Benue State should be encouraged to undertake tertiary education through short term programmes, and early marriage should be encouraged in Abia State among youth farmers in order to have more hands on agricultural production.

Keywords: Comparison, Youth Farmers, Utilization, Agriculture and Farm Land

Introduction

Any nation that wants to develop must look inwards towards agriculture and identify areas where the youths can be developed in the Agricultural sector. Youth is the constituent of a potent agricultural development. The youth of any Nation make up a greater percentage of its population and account for the work force (Ozobu, Sofolu and Omale (2011). Ani, (2007) opined that in Nigeria, youth formed a very significant proportion in rural communities where their existence and potentials are well known. Youths are also the life-blood of their communities. When these youths are forced to leave their homes in search of work, their villages start to degrade when they could have made a good living at home if, their energy and creativity were channeled into agricultural production in their villages. Nigeria needs the youths to double their food production by 2050 and to meet projected demand. It is also imperative to create vibrant rural economies that offer attractive opportunities to youth farmers. Therefore who are these youths fall within the age range of 15-35 years (Onuekwusi, 2015) while the specific age range that constitutes youth vary but according to field experience and field trip, youth age is from 18 - 40 years (Kanu, 2016). In the context of this work, youths are men and women between the ages of 20 – 40 years.

We need the youth to be the farmers and food processors of tomorrow, not just to feed themselves and their villages, but to feed the growing population in urban areas in developing countries. Investing in youth farmers is simple and an elegant solution to some of our most pressing problems. It helps eliminate poverty and hunger, it curtails migration to cities and abroad and it lays a solid foundation for national, regional and global security. Youth farmers with prospects will build the foundations for their future and youths without prospects have a lot to lose as they are more easily swayed by extreme rhetoric. In addition to improving rural economies, youths farmers must change their perception of farming so that they stop escaping from the farm and instead look at farming as an attractive option; something that is as appealing as a career in high-technology, in fashion or industry. This means affording dignity to all wage-generating work, whether tilling the fields, production, processing and utilization. When the youths are given range of income-generating opportunities to choose from, more will decide to stay in the villages and resist the call of often dead-end futures in the cities, abroad or in extreme religious or political movements. In light of the importance given to these issues, we certainly demand the attention of our youths as the country seeks to discuss the challenges and opportunities that exist in agriculture.

Hence, youth farmers' activities go a long way in shaping the developmental height of the nation (Idrisa *et al*, 2006). Their involvement in food production will therefore not only boost the much needed narrowing gap of demand and supply of food in the Nigerian markets, improve the socio-economic life of the rural people but will also encourage development of vocational agriculture among the rural youths. Although rural youths in Nigeria contribute significant development efforts but their contributions are usually undervalued and their economic potentials not fully utilized (Nwachukwu, 2013). In recognition of this, drastic steps need to be taken to integrate the physically and mentally active youth farmers in the revitalization of the agricultural sector, if food stuff must be available to all and sundry tables. The category that is capable of making such contribution is the youth farmers, who are unfortunately seen as national burden and in-fact remain untapped rural resources, as Akpabio, (2012) described Nigerian youth agricultural production as still being carried out through the use of physical strength, which declines with age. This, according to him has been observed as one of the major constraints to agricultural production in Nigeria. So in order to achieve the goal of agricultural transformation it is important to encourage youth farmers' utilization of agriculture land. Other constraints in youths utilization of farmland in agricultural production are; inefficient market and sales promotion paralyzes the effort of the youth embarking on maximum production. More so inadequate education is a weakness to youths' involvement in the utilization of farmland. Also large sections of the youth population are un-trained but modern agriculture requires trained personnel. Inadequacy and control of land limit the control of input into their roles. Furthermore, the perception of youth farmers' utilization of farmland based on inheritance, gender and being a youth need to be changed as the youths are the ideal catalysts to changing the way agriculture is practiced and perceived in agricultural production. The energy that youths possess and the fact that their numbers are significant provide tremendous opportunities for increasing agricultural productivity (Kanu, 2011). Also their utilization of farm lands can play a significant role in eradicating youth unemployment and reduction of unemployment generally in the region since youth unemployment is 40-60% and about 70% of the youths live in the rural area of the region (Tobin, 2011). Increased utilization of farm lands is necessary and vital to facilitate nutrition and food security. This is proper since, there is compelling evidence of an ageing farmer population in Abia and Benue states which must be addressed. Therefore, there is need to examine and compare youth farmers' utilization of agricultural farm land in Benue and Abia States, Nigeria. Specifically, it described the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and level of utilization of farm lands in the States, and socio-cultural factors affecting utilization of farm lands in the study areas.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Abia and Benue State, Nigeria. Abia is one of the States in South Eastern ecological zone in Nigeria. The population is predominantly rural (62.25%) with only 37.75%, urban population respectively (NPC, 2007). Abia State is made up of 17 Local Government Areas. They engage in petty trading while majority of them are subsistence farmers. Benue State is in North-central part of Nigeria. It is a rich agricultural state. Agriculture forms the backbone of the State economy, engaging more than 70 per cent of the working population (Ajaero, 2007). This has made Benue the major source of food production in the Nation. The sample size was two hundred and forty (240) farmers. Three local government areas were purposively selected from each of the State. Two farmer groups were randomly selected from the list of the farmer groups in each selected Local Government Area. Then, 20 farmers were randomly selected from each of the 2 selected farmer groups given a sample size of 240 farmers. A Structured Questionnaire, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were adopted in eliciting information. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages and mean score. The level of utilization of land was analyzed using mean score of three point Likert-type scale of 1-3 which was determined as follows; Not often =1, Often =2, Very often=3. Decision rule: $\bar{x} > 2.0$ indicates high utilization, $\bar{x} < 2.0$ indicates low utilization. Socio-cultural factors affecting utilization of farm land was analyzed using mean score of four point Likert-type scale of 1-4. The mean utilization score was computed by dividing each score by the number of respondents and the grand mean obtained by adding the means and dividing by the number utilized and strongly, agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree =1. Decision: $\bar{x} > 2.5$ indicates influencing factor, $\bar{x} < 2.5$ indicates not influencing factor.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Economic Characteristics of the youth farmers' utilization of farm lands in Abia and Benue States

The result of the socio economic analysis showed that majority of the youth farmers in both States are males. This shows that male youth farmers are deeply involved in agricultural production in the study areas. Further result revealed that educational status in Abia was more of tertiary education compared to Benue that was more of secondary education, this shows that youth farmers' utilization of farmlands will be more because they can interpret agricultural packages on the effective ways of farmland utilization. Result also revealed that more youth farmers in Abia were single and that of Benue were married. Marital status means that farmers' utilization of farm lands will be more to handle risk and uncertainty. Also as the respondents marry, they utilize more lands; this can be attributed to the synergetic effect of the two, in handling risks. This is in line with Fakeya, (2000) who said that married life add labour to agriculture. In addition to that, results revealed that primary occupation in both Abia and Benue are farming, this means more food to feed the growing population.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their socioeconomic characteristics

Socioeconomic characteristics	ABIA N = 120		BENUE N = 120	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender				
Female	36	30.0	30	25.0
Male	84	70.0	90	75.0
Age				
20-30	55	45.8	54	45.0
31-40	65	54.0	66	55.0
Mean	32		25	
Marital status				
Singe	74	61.7	38	31.7
Married	45	37.5	82	68.4
Widow	1	0.8	-	-
Primary occupation				
Civil servants	33	27.5	21	17.5
Farmer	46	38.3	73	60.8
Artisan	12	10.0	13	10.8
Trader	26	21.7	13	10.8
Farming experience				
1-10	79	65.9	74	61.7
11-20	36	29.9	46	38.3
21-30	5	4.2	-	-
Mean	10.04		14.3	
Level of education				
No formal education	-	-	12	10.0
Primary education	1	0.8	24	20.0
Secondary education	22	18.3	64	53.3
Tertiary education	97	80.9	26	16.7

Source: Field survey, 2015

Level of Utilization Farm Land in Abia and Benue States

Table 2 showed the distribution of respondents according to their level of utilization of land across the two States. The grand mean of 2.47 in Benue and Abia with grand mean 2.18 showed a general high utilization of land in the study areas. Result revealed that youth farmers in Abia State reared livestock ($\bar{x} = 2.7$), used their land for other non-farm business ($\bar{x} = 2.7$), sold their land to raise money ($\bar{x} = 5$) and cultivated arable crops ($\bar{x} = 2.3$) on their farm land. In the same vein, youth farmers in Benue State used their farmland in livestock farming ($\bar{x} = 2.9$), cultivation of vegetables ($\bar{x} = 2.8$), cultivation of arable crops ($\bar{x} = 2.8$), and used their land for non-farm business. The result implied that youth farmers who had access to land in the study area highly utilized their farmlands in order to improve their economic status. This entails that farming enterprise needs active, productive and relatively young farmers who are energetic to participate actively to raise the enterprise. This result is in tandem with the findings of Ezeh (2013) that, youths constituted the major work force than can be productive and have the ability for efficient utilization of farm lands and Michael (2014) confirmed that African farmers are young and are still active to work and represents the future of agriculture in Nigeria.

Table 2: Distribution of youth farmers according to their Level of Utilization of Farm Lands

Level of Utilization Farm lands	ABIA STATE			BENUE STATE		
	N = 120			N = 120		
	$\sum x$	Std. Dv	\bar{x}	$\sum x$	Std. Dv	\bar{x}
Cultivation of vegetables	107	0.4746	0.9	341	1.0795	2.8
Cultivation of cash crops	238	0.5980	2.0	182	0.5020	1.5
Cultivation of arable crops	276	0.4902	2.3	338	1.0689	2.8
Sold to raise money	298	0.5795	2.5	178	0.4301	1.5
Livestock farming	321	0.9056	2.7	342	1.0892	2.9
Other non-farm business	322	1.0064	2.7	288	0.7872	2.4
Grand mean			2.18			2.47

Source: Field survey, 2015. Key: Very Often = 3, Often = 2 and Not Often = 1. Benchmark = 2.0

Decision: $\bar{x} > 2.0$ indicates high utilization, $\bar{x} < 2.0$ indicates low utilization

Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting Utilization of Farm Land

The result revealed a grand mean of 2.72 in Benue and 2.00 in Abia State. Result further showed that, youth farmers in Benue State were affected by socio-cultural factors such as gender ($\bar{x}=2.9$), cultural belief ($\bar{x} =2.8$), inheritance ($\bar{x} =2.7$), availability of fund ($\bar{x} = 2.7$) and youthfulness ($\bar{x} =2.7$), while youth farmers in Abia were not affected by these socio-cultural factors in Benue. This result implied that youth farmers in Benue had high utilization of farm land more than their Abia counterparts. The researcher observed that, inheritance, availability, gender and cultural beliefs were the major inhibiting factors to the use of farm land in Abia than Benue States. Again, high cost of land and poor orientation in the use of farm land contribute immensely to the utilization of farm land across the study areas. The process of making agriculture look attractive is largely the ability to market the beauty of the lifestyle in a farming community. Therefore, if basic services like, land by inheritance, availability of funds and being a youth farmer are challenges which make most young people leave the city and settle in urban areas are mitigated, then migration to cities will be minimized and agriculture encouraged with more farm lands utilized.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents According to the Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting Utilization of Farm Inputs in the Study Area

Socio-cultural factors affecting utilization farm input	ABIA STATE			BENUE STATE		
	N = 120			N = 120		
	$\sum x$	Std. Dv	\bar{x}	$\sum x$	Std. Dv	\bar{x}
Inheritance	241	1.2196	2.0	321	1.0303	2.7
Gender	267	1.1556	2.2	343	1.0067	2.9
Religion	212	1.0511	2.6	302	1.0689	2.5
Availability of fund	273	1.1737	2.3	322	1.0768	2.7
Being a youth	226	1.1600	1.9	324	1.0579	2.7
Cultural belief	214	1.1895	1.8	331	0.9701	2.8
Grand mean			2.1			2.7

Source: Field survey, 2015

Key: Strongly agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, strongly disagree =1. Benchmark mean = 2.5

Decision: $\bar{x} > 2.5$ indicates influencing factor, $\bar{x} < 2.5$ indicates not influencing factor

Conclusion

The overall results from the study revealed that the youth farmers were majorly males. Results also showed that, majority of them utilized their farm lands there by contributing higher in house hold food production. Results further revealed that, many of them fall within the age range of 30-40 years old and they had more farming experience in the study areas. They utilized their farm lands more in the cultivation of vegetable, arable crop, livestock, other nonfarm activities, and selling of the farmland to raise funds from other nonfarm activities and livestock in Benue and Abia States

respectively. The study therefore, recommends that, youth farmers in Abia and Benue State should make great use of the farm lands in the production of cultivation of vegetable and cash crops in Abia while in Benue they should improve on the production of cash crop.

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