



Problems and prospects of youth participation in Agriculture: An overview of youth –back – to – land programmes in Ondo state, Nigeria.

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Abstract

The study examined the problems and prospects of youth participation in the youth-back-to-land programmes of Ondo State in South-Western Nigeria. A total of four hundred and five (405) respondents were selected using a multi-stage random sampling technique for the study. One hundred and eighty (180) Youth participants were selected from thirty six (36) host communities of the programmes throughout the eighteen (18) local government areas of the state. Twenty (20) respondents were also selected from trainees in the four (4) agro-business cities, two hundred (200) respondents were selected among host communities' opinion leaders and five (5) respondents were selected from the field and administrative member's staff of the supervisory Agency of the programme. Participants majorly preferred crop and poultry farming. The identified most critical problems militating the success of the programme include: training not supplemented with adequate soft loans for start-off ($X=2.902$), seasonality of agricultural incomes ($X=2.857$), drudgery nature of agriculture ($X=2.806$) and poor/erratic monthly stipends to trainees ($X=2.748$). Respondents' perceptions of the prospects and sustainability of the programme were generally poor as only 21 percent of them agreed that their participation in the programme had enable them to meet the most basic of their needs and 63.9 percent of them disagreed that the programme is being well managed towards sustainability. Hypothesis tested at 0.05 level did not show any significant relationship between the personal characteristics of respondents and the perceived problems hindering the success of the programmes. The study recommended among others, the need to commence sensitization and arousing the interests of youths on the prospects of agriculture as a profitable venture even from the secondary through tertiary institutions. Youth participants are to be given reasonable monthly stipends while on training, there should be a ready and seamless availability of soft loans to the participants after their training as take-off grants, agricultural training centres (agro cities) should be provided with basic social amenities and agro processing industries should be encouraged to be established in the rural communities for value addition to farm produce and products.

Keywords: Agriculture, youth-back-to-land programmes, participation, problems, prospects, sustainability.

Introduction

Agriculture had played a very profound role in the industrial growth and economic development of most of the industrialized nations in the world. In Nigeria, agriculture has always demonstrated pivotal role in poverty reduction and in laying solid foundation for non-agricultural growth. Agriculture had not only produced enough food for the nations' ever-growing populations, it has also being a vital key for provision of employment, poverty alleviation and raw materials for different industries, valuable contributor to Nigerian GDP and major source of foreign exchange. According to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS 2018), agriculture contributes 21.2 percent of the GDP and employs 70 percent of the working population. In spite of the potentials of agriculture in socio-economic development of the nation, a very significant population of Nigeria is still wallowing in unemployment, abject poverty and food insecurity. The recent survey by the vanguard Media Ltd.,(2018) reported that Nigeria spends billions of Naira to import rice yearly and it also discovered that more than 65 percent of the country's population are extremely poor, living on less than \$1 per day and over 60 percent of Nigerian children are malnourished. Researchers over the years have discovered that the major problems that have combined to inhibit the realization of the maximum potentials of agriculture in Nigeria include aged farming operators, small and fragmented holdings, lack of mechanization, poor access to quality seeds, manures, fertilizers and other inputs, inadequate storage facilities, poor extension services, poor and inefficient means of transportation, scarcity of capital input and poor marketing facilities.

The youths constitute the major base for any country which is committed to sustainable agricultural and rural development policies (Adaigbo and Tibi), (2018). Nigerian's population is said to have reached about 167 million people in 2012 with about half of the population made up of youth, defined as individuals between 15 and 34 years of age. The report which was released by the National Bureau of Statics (NBS) on Monday, June 5, 2017 revealed that Nigeria's population has witnessed an alarming increase since 2012 to 181.2 million in 2015, 186 million in 2016 and 190.8 million in 2017. The report further revealed that while 58.1 percent of youth who are currently working are underemployed, 7.9 million of them are unemployed. Youth unemployment rate in Nigeria increased from 29.50 percent in the second quarter of 2017 to 33.10 percent in the third quarter of

2017 and to all high 55.4 percent in the third quarter of 2018.

The future of agriculture in Nigeria therefore depends largely on ability of the nation to attract and motivate her teaming and virile youth population to pursue agriculture as a professional vocation. Gwanya (2008) described youth in agriculture programmes as very important for land and agrarian reforms which can go a long way towards promoting the interest of youths in the agricultural sector of any economy.

Justification of the Study

Youths constitute a formidable force for sustainable agricultural development of any nation, particularly the agrarian ones like Nigeria. This is because, they possess a lot of energies and bundles of characteristics which if properly nurtured and harnessed, are inestimable assets for productivity and general sustainable socio-economic development. These characteristics include: innovative, proness, minimal risk aversion, faster reaction time, less fair of failure, less conservative, greater physical strength, greater knowledge acquisition propensity, faster rate of learning and faster relationship building (Jibowo, 1998; Adedoyin, 2005; Adewale *et al*, 2009).

Inspite all these very profound innate characteristics that placed youth in the best position to promote agriculture, most of them however show strong apathy towards agriculture. Government at all levels and at various times, have introduced series of polies measures that were aimed at arousing the interests of youths, particularly young school leaver and graduates in agriculture with the view to reducing the high rate of employment and alleviating the pervasive poverty, especially among the teaming youth population. In Ondo State, Nigeria, principal among these policies is the reinvesting in agriculture and encouragement of youth to go back to agriculture in order to reduce poverty and create wealth. Paradoxically however, none of these policy measures had seemed to succeed either because the concepts of such measures were faulty or due to poor implementation. This study was therefore conceptualized to investigate the likely problems that had not allowed the youth in agriculture programmes of the successive Ondo State administrations achieved their set objectives and as well examine the prospects of the programmes if well implemented.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to examine the problems and prospects of youth participation in youth-back-to-land agricultural programmes of Ondo State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are:

- i. examine the personal characteristic of the youths involved in the programmes.
- ii. identify the range of farming enterprises available to the participants.
- iii. identify the problems militating against youths' participation in the programmes.
- iv. identify prospects and investigate sustainability of the programmes.

Hypothesis of the study.

To further verify the result of the study on empirical basic, the following hypothesis was tested in the null forms.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between respondents' personal characteristics and their perceptions of the problems or constraints militating against the success of the youths-back-to-land programmes.

HA: There is significant relationship between respondents' personal characteristics and their perceptions of the constraints against the success of the programmes.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Ondo State of Nigeria. The State is located in the South-Western Nigeria and situated in the forest zone. The choice of the study area was mainly influenced by the fact that, Ondo State is a major agrarian State with an estimated population of about 4.5 million out of which over 46 percent are youths. The state has varied vegetation regimes, favourable soil types, adequate rainfall and ecological diversification which support the cultivation of large variety of crops. The selection of the study area was further influenced by the fact that, Ondo State is a frontline education state in Nigeria with hundreds of secondary schools and ten (10) post-secondary institutions graduating thousands of youths into labour market every year without corresponding

employment opportunities in the State outside agriculture. One hundred and eighty (180) respondents were randomly selected on the basis of five (5) participants from each of the thirty-six (36) host communities of youth-back-to-land programmes throughout the eighteen (18) local government areas of the State. Twenty (20) respondents were also randomly selected from the four (4) agro-business cities on the basis of five (5) respondents per city. Two hundred (200) respondents were randomly selected among the host communities' opinion leaders from forty (40) purposively selected communities and cities on the basis of five (5) respondents per host community and five (5) respondents were also randomly selected from the field and administrative member staff of the supervisory agency of the programmes, Ondo State Agric-business Empowerment Agency (OSAEA) making a sample size of four hundred and five (405). Both structured and interactive schedules were used to elicit information from the respondents. Relevant information obtained include: socio-economic characteristics of respondents, farm holding sizes, range of farming enterprises, available incentives, available social amenities, available inputs and farm machineries, relationships with host communities, attitudes of participants and supervisors to the programmes, perceived challenges and prospects of the programmes. Respondents' perceptions of prospects and sustainability of programmes across the State were measured using Likert Rating Scale. Data were analysed at univariate, bivariate, and multivariate levels. Univariate analysis were used to summarize the variables in the form of frequencies, percentages, mean, mode, standard deviation and standard error. At bivariate level, correlation test, T-test and cross tabulation of variables were used to examine degree of relationship between variables in the study. At multivariate level, Ordered Logit Regression Analysis was used to determine the respondents' personal characteristics influencing their perceptions of the programmes.

Results and Discussion

Respondents' Personal Characteristics: The results, has shown in Table 1, indicate that majority (95.06%) of the respondents were male while only 4.97% were female. This implies that female youth are less attracted to farming as an enterprise than their male counterparts. Table 1 also reveals that majority (66.17%) of the respondents were between the age range of 15 and 25 years while 26.67% were within the age range of 26-30 years and only 7.16% were

above 30 years. This implies that most of the participants were actually youths within the Nigeria's new youth age classification of 15-29 years (Revised National Youth Policy, 2019). The table further reveals that only 0.49% of the respondents had no former education, 6.8% of them had primary education while 93.3% of them had secondary and post secondary education. Young and educated farmers are more prone and receptive to modern and innovative agriculture with possibility of higher productive and

technical efficiencies. Thus, if the programmes are more pragmatically managed, the most desired agricultural revolution in Nigeria can indeed commence from the study area. The result has shown in Table 1 also reveals that majority (54.82%) of the respondents had farming experience between two and five years. This period is long enough for trainees to have mastered the basic rudiments of modern farming, considering their levels of education.

Table 1. Respondents' Personal Characteristics

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	385	95.06
Female	20	4.94
Age (years)		
15-20	65	16.05
21-25	203	50.12
26-30	108	26.67
>30	29	7.16
Marital Status		
Single	385	95.06
Married	18	4.45
Divorced/widowed	2	0.49
Level of Education		
No former education	2	0.49
Primary education only	25	6.18
Secondary education	195	48.14
Post-secondary education	183	45.19
Farming Experience (years)		
< 2	180	44.44
2-5	222	54.82
> 5	3	0.74
Farming Area of Interest		
Crop Farming	150	37.04
Fish Farming	55	13.58
Poultry Farming	68	24.69
Crop/Livestock Farming	100	16.79
Sericulture	12	2.96
Beekeeping	10	2.47
Livestock Processing/Packaging	10	2.47

Sources: Field survey, 2019

The result shows that, crop farming (37.04%), poultry, farming (24.69%) crop/livestock farming (16.79%) and fish farming (13.58%) were the most preferred farming enterprises by the respondents. This was probably due to the fact that those farming enterprises were the most traditional and common ones in the study area. Other farming enterprises which include: sericulture (2.98%) beekeeping (2.47%) and livestock processing and packaging (2.47%) which were although considered more lucrative and profitable suffered apathy from respondent's probably due lack of adequate exposure and training.

Problems of youth participation in youth-back –to-land programmes: Table 2 shows the average scores

of the problems perceived by the respondents militating the success of the programmes. The result reveals that training not supplemented with adequate soft loans or take-off grant ($X=2.902$), seasonality of agricultural incomes ($X=2.857$), drudgery nature of agriculture ($X=2.806$), poor and erratic monthly stipends to the trainees ($X=2.748$), unimpressive responses from the prospective trainees ($X=2.593$), lack of basic social amenities for the pleasure of the trainees in the agricultural settlements (agro cities) ($X=2.463$) and poor returns on agricultural investments ($X=2.357$) were the most critical constraints to the success and sustainability of the programmes. This finding is consonance with the finding of Adekunle *et al*, 2009.

Table 2: Problems of Youth Participation in Youth-Back-To-Land Programmes

S/N	Problems	Mean Score	Ranking
1	Very low budgetary allocation	0.914	18 th
2	Poor returns on agricultural investment	2.357	7 th
3	Training not supplemented with adequate soft loans or take-off grant	2.902	1 st
4	Lack of prompt access to farm inputs, implements and machines	2.215	8 th
5	Unimpressive response from prospective trainees	2.593	5 th
6	Small farm holdings occasioned by land tenure system	1.028	7 th
7	Problems of marketing (low prices of agricultural products)	2.136	9 th
8	Poor/lack of storage facilities	2.086	10 th
9	Poor access to emerging information on agriculture	1.097	16 th
10	Poor and erratic monthly stipend to the trainees	2.748	4 th
11	Drudgery nature of agriculture	2.806	3 rd
12	Poor road network	1.848	12 th
13	Lack basic social amenities in agricultural settlements(agro cities)	2.463	6 th
14	Lack of agricultural insurance for the trainees	1.201	15 th
15	Seasonality of agricultural incomes	2.857	2 nd
16	Wrong perception of agriculture as a primitive enterprise	2.045	11 th
17	Lack of value addition to farm produce/product	1.346	14 th
18	Poor attitudes of trainers and government officials	2.117	13 th
19	Inconsistent policies on youth-in-agriculture programmes by the successive administrations	0.832	19 th

Source: Field survey, 2019

Respondents' perceptions of prospects and sustainability of youth-back-to-land programmes (YBLP): Table 3, shows the perceptions of the respondents on the prospects and sustainability of the youth-back-to-land programmes. About 65.6 percent of the respondents disagreed that the programme was not well-thought out while only 13.4 percent agreed and 21 percent were undecided. This implies that the

concept of the programme was generally accepted by the respondents. Table 3 further shows that about 86.6 percent of the respondents agreed that the trainees were only in the programmes because they had not been able to secure white collar or any other paid employments while only 6.4 percent disagreed. This finding is in agreement with the prediction of the UN World Health Organization (2018) as reported by

E-farms that by 2030, 6 out of every 10 young people will live in the city, and by 2050, this population will increase to 7 out of 10 people, meaning that more young people than ever before are moving to cities and towns to find work, leaving few people behind to work in rural areas. The further study reveals that 75 percent of the respondents agreed that the YBLP has been able to keep participating youths out of idleness with its concomitant social vices such as toutting, thuggery, robbery etc. This indeed presents a bright prospect for the programmes' sustainability. From the Table, 60.5 percent of the respondents perceived that the

programmes if well managed by the supervisory agency has the potential of reducing unemployment and alleviating poverty among the teaming youths.

The study as shown in table further shows that 51.7 percent of the respondents agreed that the programmes are capable of making Ondo State one of the food basket states in Nigeria if youths are encouraged and well-motivated to participate in the programmes. The user can also be useful as change agents for modern agricultural and rural development.

Table 3: Respondents' Perceptions of Prospects and Sustainability of Youth-Back –To –Land Programmes (YBLP)

S/N	Statement	SA	A	UD	D	SD
1	YBLP is not a well thought-out programme	5	8.4	21.0	36.2	29.4
2	You are participating in the programme only because you have not been able to secure any paid employment	82.4	4.2	8	3.4	2
3	YBLP has been able to keep the participant away from idleness and the associated social vices	50.4	24.8	10.5	10.1	4.2
4	YBLP has the potential of providing employment and alleviating poverty among the youth	40	20.5	18	10	11.5
5	YBLP is capable of turning Ondo State into one of the food basket States of Nigeria	32.4	19.3	10.9	12.6	24.8
6	YBLP has the potentials of producing change agents for agricultural and rural development	17.8	24	29.2	16.4	12.8
7	YBLP is quiet relevant to the industrialization drive of Ondo State	20.5	18.7	35.3	17	8.5
8	Your participation in YBLP has enable you to meet the most essentials of your basic needs	10.6	18.1	10.3	40.2	20.8
9	With the way YBLP is being managed, the probability of its sustainability is high	10.6	15	10.5	40.7	23.2
10	With your experience so far, you will be most prepared to invite your friends to join the programme rather than roaming the streets searching for paid jobs.	15.8	18.2	10.9	30.2	24.9

Source: Field survey, 2019

KEY

SA	=	Strongly agreed
A	=	Agreed
UD	=	Undecided
D	=	Disagreed
SD	=	Strongly disagreed

Result of Hypothesis

Table 4 summarizes the results of the Chi-square analysis used to test the stated hypothesis, which is to determine whether or not there were significant relationships between the personal characteristics of the respondents and their perceptions of the problems militating against the success of youth-back-to-land programmes in the study area. The summary of the resource as shown in Table 4 shows that, at 0.05 level of significance, there were no significant relationships between gender (cal. $X^2 = 0.365$, Tab. $X^2 = 2.038$), age (Cal. $X^2 = 0.482$, Tab. $X^2 = 2.104$), educational level ($X^2 = 0.379$, Tab. $X^2 = 3.428$), farming experience ($X^2 = 0.566$, Tab. $X^2 = 4.033$), and farming areas of interest ($X^2 = 0.642$, Tab. $X^2 = 2.654$) of respondents and their perceptions of the constraints of youth-back-to-land-programmes (YBLP) since the tabulated X^2 values for all the variables are greater than their calculated X^2 values. This implies that, none of these variables was associated with respondents' perceptions. The result could be explained against the background of the fact that, all the respondents were youth with sufficient education and farming experience coupled with adequate information on the programmes and farming enterprises generally. These characteristics expectedly made them to be objective in the evaluation of the programmes.

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Table 4: Summary of Chi-Square Analysis of the Relationship between Selected Variables and Respondents' Perceived Problems of YBLP

Variable	N	Df	Cal. X^2 Value	Tab. X^2 Value	Comment
Gender	405	2	0.365	2.038	Not Significant
Age	405	4	0.482	2.104	Not Significant
Educational level	405	2	0.379	3.428	Not Significant
Farming experience	405	2	0.566	4.033	Not Significant
Farming area of interest	405	4	0.642	2.654	Not Significant

Table 5: Summary of Students T-Test Analysis

t	Df	P.Value	Mean diff	Std. error diff.	Comment
1.384	136.46	0.018	3.458	2.018	Not Significant

Conclusion

The identification of militating factors against the success of youth-in-agriculture programmes in developing countries, particularly Nigeria is very critical to the efforts of reducing unemployment, alleviating poverty and ensuring food security. The outcome of this study has revealed lack of adequate start off funds or grants at the completion of training, seasonality of agricultural incomes, drudgery nature of most agricultural enterprises, poor and erratic monthly stipends to the trainees, unimpressive responses from prospective trainees, (lack of passion), lack of basic social amenities in the agricultural settlements and poor returns of agricultural investments as the most critical constraints to the success of youth-back-to-land programmes in the study area. The implication of this findings is that unless these problems are addressed with an holistic approach, youths, particularly the educated ones may never accept farming as a worthy and sustainable venture but rather, that of low class, illiterates, aged and rural people.

Recommendation

Based on the findings from this research, the study recommends the following:

1. Ensuring sensitization and motivation of youths to stay back in the rural areas. Factors leading to youth migration to urban centres must be pragmatically addressed.
2. Participating youths in agricultural programmes should be given reasonable stipends while on training and micro credit or soft loans must be readily available to them as take-off grants.
3. Agricultural settlements should be provided with the basic social amenities for the pleasure of the participants while on training.
4. Government should establish a marketing board to mop up farm produce especially during harvesting or glut in order to prevent low profitability and waste.

5. Agropreneurs should be encouraged and motivated to establish cottage processing industries in the rural areas for value addition to the farm produce.
6. Budgeting allocation to youth-in-agriculture programmes should be improved and supervisory agencies must be alert to their responsibilities through genuine motivation and extension services to the youth trainees.

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