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Extent of Youths' Involvement in Agricultural Programmes and Projects in South Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

The study determined extent of youths' involvement in agricultural programmes and projects in the south eastern Nigeria. The population of the study comprised all the youths, male and female between the ages of 18 to 40 years that were involved in one or more programmes/projects in south eastern Nigeria. A total sample of 180 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling procedure. Questionnaire was used for data collection while percentage and mean score were used to analyze the data. The result of the study showed that the mean household size was 5 persons and majorities (95.6%) of the youths were literate and engaged in different occupations. Majorities (76.2%) of the youths were aware of most of the agricultural programmes and projects initiated, but were fully involved in few of them. The key serious problems identified among others that militate against youths involvement included poor access to land and other farm inputs (M=2.86), lack of involvement at planning and introduction stages (M=2.88), politics (M=2.90) and inadequate information about the existence of the programmes/projects (M=2.92). The initiative to improve the opportunities for young people to take part in decent agricultural work to provide larger benefits was recommended.

Keywords: Youth Involvement, Agriculture, Programmes, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Agricultural programmes and projects in Nigeria have undergone several changes since independence in 1960. To meet up with the crises arising from the changes, both the federal and state governments have formulated several policies and embarked on a variety of agricultural transformations aimed at improving the capacity of the agricultural sector and alleviate food shortage and rural poverty (Blueprint, 2012). During the period of 1970-1983, the Federal government took over the procurement and distribution of fertilizers and launched ambitious input subsidy schemes and a guaranteed minimum price scheme for grains. This was followed by the introduction of new agricultural technology transfer policies which emphasized transfer of technical information to farmers using various agro-technology transfer systems of national development policies (Ruth, 2013).

In all the effort, the participation of youths has been at the center stage as it is well known that the youth account for a large percentage of Nigeria's population figures. According to Adegoke (2013) Nigeria is estimated to have a youth population of about 67 million (18-35yrs) out of which 42.2% were unemployed as at the end of 2011. Agricultural production must not only be seen as a business but must be made sufficiently attractive to elicit youth involvement. The concept of youth has been defined by United Nations Youth Agenda (UNYA) (2004) as an individual between 15-25 years. Some scholars defined it as a period of an individual's life which comes between the end of childhood and entry into adulthood. Youth, which is the state of being young, is a transitional period in personality development what bridges the years between childhood and adulthood. In some societies as long as one remains a bachelor or spinster, one is a youth (Waldie, 2004). Here, the individual has reached the age of maturity

but the person is yet to acquire the full rights and duties of adult life, like marriage and earning of livelihood both for self and for one's family. In the Nigerian context, a youth is defined as an individual between the ages of 15years and upper age limit of 39years (Sandra, 2013). Three major stakeholders unequivocally exist in a rural household's agriculture which includes the father, the mother and the children, who invariably constitute the youth (Akwiwu, Nwajuba and Nnadi, 2005).

Youths represent the most active segment of the population and the engine that does most of the productive work of the society. Young people are the major force in contemporary world (UNYA, 2004). According to Ugwoke, Adesope and Ibe (2005), youths have been identified as constituting the major resource base for any country embarking on any meaningful agricultural development programmes and projects. Hence, the youths are part of the overall agricultural development process in Nigeria. Youths possess unique capabilities, dynamisms, strength, ambition, hilarity and unique perspectives among others (Akwiwu, Nwajuba and Nnadi, 2005). Youths generally have intellectual contribution, ability to mobilize support and unique perspective.

The term 'involvement' according to Fletcher and Varrus (2007) means the active engagement of people throughout their own communities. It is often used as shorthand for participation in as many farms as possible including decision-making, sports, schools and many activities where people are not historically engaged. Youth involvement has been used by government agencies, researchers, educators and other establishments to define and examine the active engagement of young people in schools, sports, government, community development and economic activity (Ruth, 2013). Youth involvement is also the involving of youth in responsible, challenging actions that meet genuine needs with opportunities for planning and/or decision-making affecting others in an activity whose impact or consequences are extended to others (outside or beyond the youth participants themselves). Other desirable features of the youth involvement (participation) are provision for critical reflection on the participatory activity for group effort towards a common goal (Checkowary and Gutierrez, 2006).

Studies have shown that agricultural development cannot be achieved without active involvement of youths, who are naturallyendowed with enormous energy required for execution of agricultural programmes and projects. Regrettably, there is dwindling interest of youth's involvement in agricultural programmes/projects, resulting to low productivity. This is because most programmes are designed without involving young people (both men/women) (Adeogun, Uwagboe and Aigbekaen, 2011).

In Nigeria today, it is well-known that the growth and development of the economy is determined among other things on how much youths are involved in designing programmes/projects and planning for the future. However, it has become even more difficult for young people to be involved in the programmes/projects of their societies because of a number of factors (Usman, Adebayo, Bakari and Ahmed, 2008). These factors according to Uwagboe (2011) include: old age of farmers, massive migration of youth from rural areas, high cost of agricultural labor, lack of credit facilities, lack of encouragement, limited resources available for funding youth programmes/projects, gender discrimination, unfavorable economic and political conditions, insecure livelihoods, high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment, inadequate opportunity for education and training, poor power supply and high cost of information, communication, technology gadgets among others.

Ovwigho and Ifie (2009) however note that Nigeria youth have the potentials to promote agriculture but most of them are not interested in agricultural activities.

According to Adesina (2016), four major problems among several others accounted largely for youth's lack of interest in agriculture, namely: drudgery in farm operations, lack of competitive market for agricultural products, lack of start-up capital for the youths and lack of buy back scheme (BBC) from the government.

Nwalieji and Nnena (2013) identify key serious problems that militate against youth participation in agricultural programmes to include lack of involvement at planning and introduction stages, misconception of youth as nuisance in the society, most of the programmes' objectives do not address youths felt need, bottlenecks in programme execution, corruption and corrupt practices in programme implementation among others.

It is however unfortunate that in spite of the enormous contributions of youths to agriculture, empirical data on their participation, and scope of involvement in agricultural programmes/projects has not been fully ascertained. Several youth programmes in agriculture have operated and failed due to lack of awareness and involvement of youths in programmes/projects and the design of appropriate intervention strategies.

In addition, recent studies have not addressed extent of involvement of youth in agriculture programmes/projects and how to harness their potentials. This study sets out to determine the

extent of involvement of youths in agricultural programmes and projects in Southeast, Nigeria with a view of making policy recommendations.

The specific objectives were to:

i. identify socio-economic characteristics of the respondents;

ii. Ascertain youths' awareness of the various agricultural programmes in the study area;

iii. Determine the levels of youths' involvement in agricultural programmes; and

iv. Identify challenges of youths involvement in agricultural programmes.

2. Materials and methods

The study area is the southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The states in the southeast geopolitical zone are Abia, Anambra, Eboyi, Enugu and Imo State. Southeast Nigeria lies between latitude 40 50' N to 70 10N and longitude 60 40'E to 80 30'E. It spreads over a total area of 78, 618km2, and representing 8.5% of the nation's total land area. The area has a population of 16,381,729million (NPC, 2007). The major crops cultivated in the geopolitical zone include rice, yam, cassava, maize and vegetables. There are many agricultural programmes and projects initiated by the past and present governments in the southeast zone.

The population of the study comprised all the youths, male and female between the ages of 18 to 40 years that were involved in one or more programmes/projects in south eastern (Abia, Eboyi, Anambra, Enugu and Imo State) Nigeria. A total sample of 180 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling procedure. Stage 1 involved purposive selection of three states, namely Anambra, Enugu and Ebonyi states due to major agricultural activities and existence of many agricultural projects and programmes in these states. Stage II involved random selection of three local government areas (LGAs) each from the selected states to give nine LGAs selected.

These include Uzouwani, Nsukka and Aniri LGA in Enugu State; Anambra East, Ayamelum and Orumba North LGAs in Anambra State; and Abakaliki, Ishelu and Ikwo LGAs in Ebonyi State. Stage III involved random selection of two town communities each from selected LGAs. This gave 18 communities selected. Stage IV involved selection of 10 youths from each selected communities using simple random sampling technique. This gave sample size of 180 respondents.

A questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Data were analyzed using percentage and mean statistic.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Socio-economic characteristics of the youths

Table 1 shows that greater percentage (43.3%) of the respondents was between the age range of 30 to 35 years and the mean age of the respondents was 32.03 years. This implies that youths are still within their middle, active and productive ages and hence can participate actively in agricultural programmes. Adesope (2007) noted that major assets of the youth is their age and dynamism considerable contribute to many of the qualities associated with young people such as their active involvement in community development higher, social propensity, faster reaction time and prowess to innovation. Also, majority (72. 2%) of the respondents were males while the remaining (27.8%) were females. The result implies that youth participation in agricultural programmes in the study area was dominated by males. This may be as a result of low level of female exposure to social activities due to their engagement in kitchen and family welfare.

Table 1 also reveals that greater proportion (51.7%) of the respondents were married. This implies that youths in the study area marry very early as a result of ownership of land resources especially by males, who are heirs, increased concern for household welfare and food security following marital responsibilities. Nnadi and Akwiwu (2005) however noted that married people are more disposed to farming and adoption of new technologies. Also majority (70.0%) of the respondents had household size between 1-5 persons and mean household size of about 5 persons. This implies that the respondents had moderate family sizes which they could care for, hence the need to be involved in agricultural programmes.

Table 1 further indicates that about 95.6% of the youths were literate and possess significant educational experience that could enable them be involved in agricultural programmes. Education is an asset for adoption decisions and it influence positively the intensity of involving (participating) in agricultural programmes (Nnadi and Akwiwu, 2006). Greater proportion (23.3%) of the respondents was traders. This implies that youths in the study area engage in one occupation or the other as means of surviving and earning income. Also the respondents belonged to one group or the other such as age grade, social club and cooperative society in order to improve status.

3.2 Youths' Awareness of the Various Agricultural Programmes/Projects

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents were aware of the existence/availability of following programmes and projects. These

include National Programme on Food Security (NPFS) (76.2%), Fadama projects such as Fadama III Project Additional financing (97.2%), Agricultural Developments Programmes (ADPs) (80.0%), Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (RTEP) (58.3%), IFAD Value Chain Development programmes (67.6%), Sasakawa global 2000 project (cassava and rice) (55.0%) and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Anchor Borrowers Programme (67.6%). This implies that the majority of the youths are aware of the most agricultural programmes.

3.3 Levels of Youths' Involvement in Agricultural Programmes/Projects

Table 3 shows that in Anambra State, the respondents were fully involved in Fadama projects (M= 1.50), Agricultural Developments Programmes (ADPs) (M= 1.44), United State Agency for International Development (USAID) Maximizing Agricultural Revenue and Key Enterprises in Targeted Sites (MARKETS) (M= 1.20), IFAD Value Chain Development programmes (M= 1.83), Sasakawa global 2000 project (M= 1.00) and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Anchor Borrowers Programme (M= 1.75). Also in Ebonyi state, youths were fully involved in Fadama projects (M= 1.00), ADPs (M= 1.25), USAID-MARKETS (M= 1.36), IFAD VCDP (M= 1.75), Sasakawa global 2000 project (M= 1.20) and CBN Anchor Borrowers Programme (M= 1.20), while in Enugu state, youths were only fully involved in Fadama projects (M= 1.00), ADPs (M= 1.33), West African Agricultural Productivity Project (WAAPP) (M= 1.50) and World Bank Rice Irrigation Project (M= 1.00). This implies that youths across the three states under study are fully involved in only Fadama projects and ADPs.

The findings are in agreement with Mangal (2009) which stated that there is insufficient youth involvement in the agricultural programmes/projects even though this class of people is the most productive of any society as it contains people in the prime of their life physically and mentally. According to Ihimodu (2004), empirical records of many of these programmes and projects are not impressive enough to bring about the expected transformation on the livelihood of the targeted population. Involvement of youth at the early stage of development process empowers them to make independent development decisions and follow-up development issues affecting them. Also, involvement of youth in agricultural programmes has the potential of reducing the problems of the ageing farm population and increasing youth unemployment and this calls for securing the interest and participation of young people in agricultural programmes/projects in the form of deliberate shift in policy, training and promotion that specially targets the youth (National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAAS), 2005).

Results of Table 4 (Z = -10.77) and significance level (ρ = 0.000) revealed significant differences in rural women's economic empowerment before and after membership in rural microcredit funds at the 1% error level. In other words, women's membership in rural microcredit funds influenced their economic empowerment positively.

3.4 Challenges of Youths Involvement in Agricultural Programmes/projects

Table 4 shows the major challenges of youth involvement in initiated agricultural programmes and projects in the study area. These were lack of involvement at planning and introduction stages (M= 2.88), poor access to land and other farm inputs (M= 2.86), misconception of youth as nuisance in the society (M= 2.17), most of the programmes' objectives do not address youths felt need (M= 2.83), bottlenecks in programme execution (M=2.33), corruption and corrupt practices in programme implementation (M=2.57), politics (participant nomination and selection) (M= 2.90) and inadequate incentives from the programme (M= 2.40) and inadequate information about the existence of the programmes (M= 2.92). This implies that youths in the study area are faced with a lot of challenges of being involved in the agricultural programmes/projects available to them.

However, the above finding is in agreement with Adebayo et al. (2006) who observed that many of the strategies used to improve agricultural growth in the past have failed because the programmes and policies were not sufficiently based on in-depth studies and realistic pilot surveys. This according to them could be attributed to lack of public participation in the design, formulation, implementation and evaluation of policies as well as limited implementation capacity within the sectoral ministries and a poor understanding of the details and specifics of polices by implementers. National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAAS) (2005) revealed that programme design and implementation do not focus on youth engagement processes, as such; youth do not attach value to the benefits and resources for such programmes. Apparently, the agricultural sector is not looked at as a viable sector of employment and remains highly unattractive to the youth due to the risks, intensive nature and low profitability (FAO, 2012). In addition, Daudu, Okwuche and Adegboye (2009) identified lack of commitment, lack of logistic and land insecurity as the major problems inhibiting youth participation in agricultural activities.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to their socio-economic characteristics (n= 180)

Variable	Percentage (%)	Mean (M)
Age (year)		
18 - 23	6.7	
24 – 29	22.2	
30 – 35	43.3	32.03
36 - 41	27.8	
Sex		
Male	72.2	
Female	27.8	
Marital status		
Single	43.3	
Married	51.7	
Widow	5.0	
Household size		
1 – 5	70.0	
6 – 10	30.0	4.50
Level of education		
No formal education	4.4	
Primary education attempted	12.2	
Primary education completed	16.7	
Secondary education attempted	16,7	
Secondary education completed	30.0	
Tertiary education	20.0	
Major occupation		
Applicant	16.7	
Civil servant	15.0	
Trading	23.3	
Farming	18.3	
Schooling	10.0	
Apprentice	6.7	
Artisan	10.0	
Membership in social organization		
Age grade	53.3	
Social club	30.0	
Cooperative society	16.7	

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to their awareness of available agricultural programmes/projects in the study area (n=180)

Agricultural programme/project	Aware (%)	Not Aware (%)
NPFS	76.2	24.0
Fadama projects	97.2	2.8
ADPs	80.0	20.0
USAID MARKETS	40.6	59.4
RTEP	58.3	41.7
IFAD Value Chain Development programmes	67.6	32.4
West African Agricultural Productivity Project (WAAPP)	30.3	69.7
Sasakawa global 2000 project (cassava and rice)	55.0	45.0
Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) anchor borrowers program	67.6	32.4
World Bank Rice Irrigation Project	28.5	71.5

Table 3. Mean distribution of respondents according to their level of involvement in available agricultural programmes/projects

Agricultural programme / project	Anambra State Mean (M) n=60	Ebonyi State Mean (M) n=60	Enugu State Mean (M) n=60
NPFS	0.75	0.65	0.00
Fadama projects	1.50*	1.00*	1.00*
ADP	1.44*	1.25*	1.33*
USAID MARKETS	1.20*	1.36*	0.00
RTEP	0.36	0.88	0.75
IFAD Value Chain Development programmes	1.83*	1.75*	0.00
West African Agricultural Productivity Project (WAAPP)	0.00	0.36	1.50*
Sasakawa global 2000 project (cassava and rice)	1.00*	1.20*	0.92
Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) anchor borrowers program	1.75*	1.20*	0.00
World Bank Rice Irrigation Project	0.50	0.50	1.00*

*M≥ 1.00 = fully involved

Table 4. Distribution of respondents according to their challenges of involvement in agricultural programmes

Challenge	**Mean (M)**	**SD**
Lack of involvement at planning and introduction stages	2.88*	0.737
Poor access to land and other farm inputs	2.86*	0.626
Misconception of youth as nuisance in the society	2.17*	0.788
Most of the programmes' objectives do not address youths felt need	2.83*	0.493
Poor implementation of programmes' objectives	1.67	0.726
Bottleneck in programme execution	2.33*	0.493
Corruption and corrupt practices in programme implementation	2.57*	0.629
Politics	2.90*	0.472
Inadequate incentives from the programme	2.40*	0.641
Untimely introduction of programmes	1.90	0.761
Inadequate information about the existence of the programmes/projects	2.92*	0.674

Source: Field survey, 2016; *= major challenge (M ≥ 2.00)

4. Conclusion and recommendations

Youths are very important resources for any nation especially for sustaining agricultural productivity, an important sector for development. The youth is a stakeholder in the development process because of their great assets, resilience, resourcefulness and perseverance. The involvement of youth in the agricultural programmes and projects in the implementation level involve carrying out a number of project related activities. Youth's involvement at the early stage of development process empowers them to make independent development decisions and follow-up development issues affecting them. However, majority of the youths are aware of the most of the agricultural programmes available in the study area but are fully involved in only ADPs and Fadama projects across the states studied. Major challenges of youth involvement include lack of involvement at planning and introduction stages, poor access to land and other farm inputs, politics and inadequate information about the existence of the programmes.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Agricultural programme and project design and planning are such critical stage of the development processes that require active involvement of different stakeholders. Youth in particular, being the majority of Nigerian's population structure, are important stakeholder in planning processes and should be included in every stage of the development process

2. The major challenges of youth involvement should be tackled by the appropriate stakeholders in order to encourage massive and full youth involvement in agricultural programmes/projects.

3. Youths should identify themselves in any development programme available in their communities for them to be recognized and be involved.

4. There should be initiative to improve the opportunities for young people to take part in decent agricultural work to provide larger benefits.

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