

DETERMINANTS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN AGRIBUSINESS ACTIVITIES IN IKWUANO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Young people perceive agriculture as a profession of intense labour, not profitable and unable to support their livelihood compared to what white collar jobs offer. The study was on determinants of youth participation in agribusiness activities in Ikwuano Local Government Area, Abia State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the socio-economic characteristics of youths in the study area; identified various agro-related enterprises participated by the youths and estimated factors that influence youth participation in agro-related enterprises. Random sampling technique was used to select 90 respondents for the study. Data were analyzed using both descriptive statistics and Probit regression model. Majority (62.42%) of the youths were male. Mean age of the respondents was 23 years. About 90% of the youths were single with diverse levels of formal education. The agribusiness enterprises mostly participated in by the youths were animal production (51.1%) and crop production (23.33%). Result of Probit regression showed that age, household size, access to land, non-farm income, empowerment were 1% respectively and sex (5%) were significant variables influencing youth participation in agribusiness activities. It was recommended that youth in the study area enhance their livelihood sources through diversifying into other agro-related enterprises such as sale of agro-inputs and agro-processing.

Key words: youth, participation, agribusiness activities

INTRODUCTION

Youth have various definitions in the literature. For instance, according to the United Nations General Assembly, "Youth are the persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years inclusive". The African Union defines youth as those who fall within the age bracket of 15-35 years (African Union, 2006). In this study, since the study area is in Nigeria, the African union definition of youth was adopted. Thus, a sampled individual was regarded a youth if he/she falls within the age bracket of 15-35 years.

Young people perceive agriculture as a tedious profession that is neither profitable nor able to support their livelihood compared to what white collar jobs offer. Notwithstanding, agricultural sector remains the largest employer of all economic sectors for most African countries. The sector employs about 65% of the total work labor force in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (World Bank, 2019). Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) 2015 and remains the key sector in most African countries for sustainable food security and poverty reduction (Tostão *et al.*, 2007). According to Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (2019), in 2018, agriculture employed approximately 70% of rural jobs in Nigeria and accounted for more than 85% of rural income streams, and contributed about 25% of

its GDP. Consequently, it is posited that the agricultural sector presents opportunities for alleviating youth unemployment and improving livelihoods and food security in Africa (Fawole and Ozkan, 2019). The profound belief that agriculture is the panacea to youth unemployment in Nigeria has been supported in various quarters in Nigeria.

As a vibrant section in a society, the youth are one of the greatest assets of any country that could be regarded as the future leaders. They are potentially and actually the greatest investment for a country's development. Youth in the rural areas provide opportunity for generating the farming entrepreneurs (Chikezie *et al.*, 2012). This is due to the fact that they have the potential to overcome some major constraints to expand agriculture production because they are often more open to new ideas and practices than adult farmers (Daudu *et al.*, 2009).

In Nigeria, agricultural sector has over the years been identified to have the needed capacity to provide employment opportunities to the youth is agriculture. Agriculture has been a leading sector for employment opportunities in Nigeria over several decades. The agricultural sector is observably significant over other sectors such as manufacturing, service, and oil industry due to its uniqueness in entrepreneurship and self-employment (World Bank, 2019).

Youth participation in agricultural activities refers to the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person. The activities could be focusing on agribusinesses grouped as production, processing and marketing activities for livelihood and income generation. Agribusiness includes growing of crops, livestock rearing, selling agricultural produce as a business venture, and processing agricultural produce (FAO, 2010). Agribusiness can further imply involvement in all the activities (agricultural producers, consumers of goods and services, processors, retailers, finance providers along the agricultural value chain. Each individual participating in agriculture and each business performs some minor steps in the chain and add values along the way by growing, buying, selling, processing, transporting, storing, checking, and packaging.

Agribusiness describes all economic activities that involve the distribution and or transformation of the raw materials that are from agricultural sector and non-agricultural sector; whose final products could be used for agricultural purposes and agro-allied enterprises (Ebong, 2007). The scope of the agri-business is categorized into three independent sectors, which are the Input sector, the Farm sector, and the Output (product) sector. The input sector supplies agribusiness production with the needed inputs in the production process. The farm sector of agribusiness covers such areas as the aquaculture, forestry, crop production and livestock. Output sector accepts diverse economics activities that could be directly identified within the agriculture domain or from related fields which otherwise called agro-allied sector. The output sector is also referred to as the product sector its functions range from product processing to marketing and distribution of these products to various consumers either as raw materials for further production or final consumption.

In Nigeria, there have been some concerted efforts by the Federal Government in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations to engage youths in agriculture through a number of empowerment programmes (FAO, 2016). Dolapo *et al.* (2020) reported that the Nigerian government's commitments to youth empowerment through participation in agribusiness are reflected in several programmes which have been implemented over the years such as the Youth in Commercial Agriculture Development Programme (YCAD), Youth Employment in Agriculture Programme (YEAP), Youth Initiatives for Sustainable Agriculture (YISA) Programme, the Livelihood Improvement Family Enterprise (LIFE) Programme, and the Fadama Graduate Unemployed Youths and Women Support (FGUYS). Youths in Abia State especially those in Ikwuano Local Government Area (LGA) of the State would have participated in these empowerment programmes at one point or the other to enhance their livelihood.

Statement of Problem

Nigerian government attempted to stimulate youth's interest in agricultural production and processing since the late 1980's through various programs and projects. However, many of these programs and projects have failed to achieve the desired objective of making the youth to be intensively engaged in agricultural activities. The recorded participation rate of youth in agriculture is still meager. Study by AGRA (2015), indicated that the youth in Nigeria have the lowest probability of working in agriculture with only 27.1%. The considerable unemployment rate reported among the youth leading to a high incidence of poverty and driving them into social vices is of immense concern. It is somewhat difficult to absorb the annual teeming graduating youth population into the formal employment sector (ILO, 2020). Not only are the youths unemployed, but there is also a recorded high incidence of poverty among the youths which participation in agribusiness activities can ameliorate.

Participation rate of Nigerian youths as well as in Ikwuano LGA in agribusiness could be hindered due to many reasons, chiefly its characterized limited incentives like poor pay, climatic changes, job insecurity and poor work conditions which results in the poor attitude of youth in agriculture. Although agriculture is perceived as the significant alternative solution to youth's unemployment and ability to overcome economic issues, it seems that youth have negative attitudes toward agriculture. They are not interested to join agriculture because they do not view it as an attractive field of work (Abdullah, 2013) and most of the youth perceived agriculture as a part-time job and not as a profession.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study was to ascertain the determinants of youth participation in agribusiness activities in Ikwuano LGA, Abia State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to examine socio-economic characteristics of youths in the study area; identify various agro-related enterprises participated by the youths and estimate factors that influence youth participation in such agro-related enterprises.

Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between socio economic characteristics of the respondents such as age, sex, marital status, education, youth empowerment, access to land, non-farm income and youth participation in agribusiness enterprises.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant since agricultural sector is expected to restore Nigerian economy. Youth are essential resources that any country can have (Kimaro *et al.*, 2015), so their massive population needs to be handled properly. Youth participation in agricultural activities is one of the ways through

which the problem of youth unemployment can be reduced rate in the country. The immense concern is the considerable unemployment rate reported among the youth leading to a high incidence of poverty and driving them into social vices. The profound belief that agriculture is the panacea to youth unemployment has been supported in various quarters. A study by Wasiu and Ozkan (2019) found that youth participation in agriculture can halt Nigeria's rising youth unemployment rate. Therefore, findings from this study are expected to contribute to the efforts of the government in addressing youth un-employment, improving agricultural production and food security through enhanced youth participation in agriculture.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Ikwuano LGA of Abia State, Nigeria. Ikwuano LGA was created out of the defunct Ikwuano/Umuahia LGA in 1991 and has its headquarters at Isiala Oboro. It shares a common boundary with Ini LGA of Akwa Ibom and Umuahia North. Ikwuano LGA is made up of four clans namely Oboro, Ibere, Oloko and Ariam and 18 villages. The LGA is located between latitudes 5° 24' N and 5° 30' N of the equator and longitudes 7° 32' E and 30° 37' E of the Greenwich Meridian. It has an area of 281 km² and a population of 137,993 at the 2006 census. It is made up of about 52 villages and communities and is bounded by Umuahia North and Bende to its North, Umuahia South and Isiala-Ngwa North to its West, Ini to the East and Obot-Akara to the South (NPC, 2006).

The climate is tropical and humid all the year round. There are usually two seasons, rainy season ranges from March to October. The dry season occurs from November to February. The mean annual rainfall ranges from 2000 to 2500 mm with the southern areas receiving more than the northern areas. The temperature ranges between 22 and 31°C. The vegetation is predominantly lowland rainforest. Major occupation of the people is farming. The major food crops grown are cassava, yam, melon, vegetable, three-leaf yam and cowpea. Some important cash crops grown in Ikwuano LGA are oil palm and cocoa, while animals reared are goats, sheep, pigs and poultry. Ikwuano LGA houses Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike and the National Crop Research Institute.

Three clans; Oboro, Ibere and Ariam were purposively selected for sampling. This was based on the predominance in agribusiness activities in the area. Lists of youths in agricultural related activities were obtained from Ministry of Agriculture. Three villages were purposively selected making a total of nine villages. Random sampling technique was used to select 10 respondents from each of the nine villages selected giving 90 respondents for the study.

Primary data were collected with the use of structured questionnaire. Data were collected during July–August 2019 on socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents, various agro-related enterprises by the youths and factors that affect youths' involvement in agribusiness. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency and percentages) and Probit regression. Socio-economic characteristics of youths and the various agro-related enterprises participated by the youths were analyzed using descriptive statistics while factors that affect youth participation in agro-related enterprises was analyzed using Probit regression.

Model Specification

The Probit model is specified thus: $Y_i^* = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_n X_n + V_i$ (1); and that: $Y_i = 1$ if $Y_i^* > 0$; $Y_i = 0$ otherwise; where: X_1, X_2, \dots represent vector of random variables, β represents a vector of unknown parameters and v represent a random disturbance term. Probit model constrains the estimated probabilities to be between 0 and 1 and relaxes the constraint that the effect of the independent variable is constant across different predicted values of the dependent variable. This is normally experienced with the linear probability model (LPM). The Probit model assumes that while we only observe the values of 0 and 1 for the variable Y , there is a latent, unobserved continuous variable Y^* that determines the value of Y . The other advantages of the Probit model include believable error term distribution as well as realistic probabilities (Nagler, 1994). Dependent variable Y_i is participation of the respondents in any agribusiness activities (participation in any agribusiness activities is 1, otherwise is 0), independent variables; X_1 is age (number of years), X_2 is sex (male is 1, female is 0), X_3 is marital status (married is 1, single is 0), X_4 is education (number of years spent in school), X_5 is youth empowerment (yes is 1, no is 0), X_6 is access to land (yes is 1, no is 0), X_7 is annual farm income (naira).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Youths

Table 1 shows that the youths had mean age of 23 years. This implies that most of them were still young adults who could exert energy which could be gainfully employed in agribusiness.

Male youths (62.2%) were more than the females (37.8%). Majority of the youth (90%) were single and had formal education. Meanwhile, 56.7% of the youth participated in some of the agribusiness activities due to unemployment. Majority of the youths from the study area were able to acquire land for agribusiness activities through gift (52.2%) and inherited land (27.8%).

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Frequency	(%)
<i>Age (years)</i>		
19-22	6	6.67
23-26	28	31.11
27-30	36	40.00
> 31	20	22.22
Mean	28	
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	56	62.20
Female	34	37.80
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	81	90.00
Married	9	10.00
<i>Education</i>		
No formal education	9	10.00
Primary education	12	13.30
Secondary education	44	48.90
Tertiary education	25	27.30
<i>Reasons for participating in agribusiness</i>		
Unemployment	51	56.70
Personal interest	21	23.30
Inherited enterprise	11	12.20
Others	7	7.70
<i>Source of land</i>		
Gift	47	52.20
Inherited	25	27.80
Purchase	5	5.60
Lease	13	14.40

Field Survey (2019)

Youth Participation in Agribusiness Activities

Table 2 presents the various agribusiness activities participated in by the youth in the study area. The data indicate that animal production (72.20%) was a major agricultural enterprise operated/owned and managed by the youths in the area. The animal farms identified include piggery, poultry and fish farming. Crop production (63.30%) is the second enterprise of choice in the study area. The majority of the crops planted were cassava, yam and vegetables. Agro-processing activities were conducted by (53.30%) of the youth. These processing activities include cassava processing into garri, fufu, pork meat processing/sale. Few youths participated in the sale of agro-input/ services.

The results show that the youths are predominantly into animal and crop productions for income generation. Agro-processing among the youths reduced postharvest losses. Participation of youths in sales of agro-input therefore can lead to increase in productivity through the use of improved farm inputs. Moreover, youths are encouraged to further diversify into these sectors of agribusiness; such as agro-processing and sales of agro-input/services for greater efficiency in agribusiness participation.

Table 2: Youth Participation in Agribusiness activities

Agribusiness Activities	Frequency*	Percentage
Animal production	65	72.20
Crop production	57	63.30
Agro-processing	48	53.30
Sales of agro-inputs/services	24	26.70

Field Survey (2019); * - multiple responses

Factors Influencing Youth Participation in Agribusiness

Factors that influence youth participation in agribusiness enterprise in the study area are presented in Table 3. Age, sex, youth empowerment, land access and non-farm income were the significant variables influencing participation of youth in agribusiness activities in the study area. The Chi-Square value indicated a goodness of fit for the equation. The Chi-Square was significant at 1% indicating that the data fit the model.

The coefficient of age was found to be negative and significant at 1% implying that the probability of youth participation in agribusiness enterprises declines with increase in age. This result agrees with Agboola *et al.* (2004) who reported that increase in age decreases participation of youth in agribusiness enterprise. Sex was significant at 5% and positively related to youth participation in agribusiness enterprise. This implies that male youths have higher participation in agribusiness enterprise than their female counterparts.

Empowerment of youth in agribusiness enterprises was observed to be positive and significant at 1% consistent with *a priori* expectation that participation of youths in agribusiness enterprise increases with increase in number of empowerment activities attended. Youth empowerments in form of access to financial services, trainings on new innovations, provision of agricultural inputs are expected to increase youth participation in agribusiness. FAO (2014), affirmed that the availability of funds plays a substantial in agriculture development and the ability to access financial services in form of credit is essential for starting any agricultural venture especially among the youths.

Land access was significant at 1% and positively related to youth participation in agribusiness enterprises, this implies that access to land enhances their participation in agribusiness enterprise. According to FAO (2011), youth consider secure land access as principle for starting farming. Youth access to land contributes to household food security, employment creation and income generation as land is used as collateral and security for one to access credit, signifies their identity, elevates their status, and also improves their participation in decision making within their communities and other organizations (MIJARC, 2012).

The coefficient of annual farm income was positive and significant at 1% consistent with *a priori* expectation that the greater the income of youth, the higher the probability of participation in agribusiness enterprise. This result is in line with the findings of Arene and Anyaeji (2010) which revealed positive and significant relationship between farm income and participation of youth in agribusiness enterprise.

Table 3: Probit estimates of determinants of youth participation in agribusiness enterprise in the study area

Parameter	Estimate	Std. Error	Z	Sig.
Age	0.000	0.000	-3.925***	0.000
Sex	0.050	0.020	2.468**	0.014
Marital status	-0.019	0.022	-0.880	0.379
Education level	0.005	0.016	0.338	0.735
Youth empowerment	0.020	0.005	4.203***	0.000
Land access	0.000	0.000	12.791***	0.000
Annual farm income	0.000	0.000	2.572***	0.010
Intercept	-2.356	0.043	-54.542***	0.000
<i>Pearson Goodness-of-Fit test</i>				
Chi-Square	4938.254			
Sig	0.000			
Pseudo R ²	0.742			

Field Survey (2019). *** - significant at 1%, ** - significant at 5%, * - significant at 10%

Testing of Hypothesis

The hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents such as age, sex, marital status, education, youth empowerment, access to land, non-farm income and youth participation in agribusiness enterprises in the study area. It was tested and rejected at 1% and 5% probability levels, respectively. This is because some of the independent variables in agribusiness were found to be significant determinants of youth participation in agribusiness at 1% and 5%, respectively and are therefore not equal to zero.

CONCLUSION

Youths in the study area participated mostly in animal farming activities. Age, sex, household size, empowerment programmes for youths and land access and non-farm income were the factors influencing youth participation in agribusiness activities. Therefore, the combinations of these significant variables account for youth participation in agribusiness activities in the study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need for Government to ensure that agricultural related youth empowerment programmes designed for the youths are implemented and those targeted youth populations are reached out to. Since youths in the study area are predominantly into animal and crop productions to enhance livelihood, there is need for youths empowerment programmes to emphasize the need to participate in other sectors of agribusiness such as input supplies/services and agro-processing which have linkages potentials. Youths in the study area should pool resources to form enterprise clusters in order to establish agribusiness firms. This will solve the problems of land ownership, marketing of produce, ease access to credit and government interventions. There is need for training and re-training of the youths through various empowerment activities. These youths' agribusiness empowerment programmes must ensure the use of modern technologies, use of innovations and Information Communications Technology (ICT) in agriculture to enable youths in the study area compete with their counterparts globally.

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