



PREFERENCE DIFFERENTIALS FOR AGRO-ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG YOUTHS IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study analyzed the Preference Differentials for agro-entrepreneurship among youths in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted in the selection of 180 youth agro-entrepreneurs and data collected using structured questionnaire. The study employed descriptive statistics and Principal Component Factor for analyses of data. Results show that the major agro-entrepreneurship activities of the youths were farm production (crop and livestock production), farm input supply, agro-processing, and marketing/distribution. The study identified high profit motive, technical qualification, good market potential, previous experience, ambition to become agro-entrepreneur, desire to be self-employed, government support, family agro-entrepreneurial history, economic needs, and support from donor agencies etc as the important factors influencing the youth's agro-entrepreneurship preference. Lack of credit facilities, corruption, high interest rate, high capital demand, poor transportation facilities, limited access to improved technologies, insufficient information, challenges of market accessibility, poor enabling environment, inconsistent government policies, multiple taxation were the major constraints to agro-entrepreneurship development among the youths. State and private information and communication agencies should be encouraged to convey information on existing government and other small and medium scale business funding support platforms that are accessible to youth agro-entrepreneurs.

Keywords: *Agro-entrepreneurship, preferences, youths, profit motive, and constraints*

Introduction

With the dominance of petroleum as the major revenue source in Nigeria, agriculture still constitutes a very significant sector of the nation's economy. However, agriculture alone cannot reduce the high level of poverty and unemployment among Nigerians, although about 70% of the Nigerian populace obtain their means of livelihood from agriculture (Odohet *et al.*, 2019). In order to improve the livelihood of her citizens, Nigerian government came up with national development plan where specific youth development initiatives are emphasized towards increasing access to agro-enterprise funds, skills, training, and business development services. The Nigerian youths therefore, are expected to rise to the challenges of catalysing the nations' innovative and dynamic participation in agro-entrepreneurship activities. Entrepreneurship is driven by the desire for self-achievement, desire to be independent, need for employment satisfaction and economic well being (Bairwa *et al.*, 2014). They further summarised that the desire to be in control of resources, need for accomplishment, quest to improve economic situation, desire to be self-reliant, and the

need to be gainfully employed are also some important determinants of agro-entrepreneurship preference. The personal decision of the youths to be agro-entrepreneurs is usually determined in terms of utility maximization, where the economic returns from agro-entrepreneurship are compared to returns from wage employment. Meanwhile, Nwibo, and Okorie (2013) observed that the major determinants of entrepreneurship among agribusiness investors are the need to be self-fulfilled and financially independent.

Agro-entrepreneurship is a vehicle for increasing self-employment, boosting of small and medium scale enterprises and poverty reduction. This is achieved by improving the personal quality of life, family, communities, and to maintain a sound healthy economy that leads to national growth and development. An agro-entrepreneur can assist the economy by creating new job opportunities through innovation and research development. Innovations can enhance the economy because they can provide enhanced ways of handling responsibilities, and can also lead to new enterprises that contribute to the

growth of economy. Therefore, agro-entrepreneurs assist in creating wealth for different entrepreneurs seeking agro-enterprise opportunities. Thus, it is a major reason why some persons are pursuing agro-entrepreneurial opportunities, as it plays an important role in every country's economy.

Career opportunities abound in agriculture and it is very imperative for every youth to think entrepreneurship as it confers different advantages and functions that shape someone's life (Nwibo *et al.*, 2016). It is important for Nigerian government to offer different entrepreneurial activities and programmes to advance the skills and influence youths into agro-entrepreneurship sector. Agricultural departments have largely organized and provided trainings such as in agricultural product processing, advertising, branding and marketing. According to Abdul and Norhlilmatur (2013), revitalizing the farming sector will result in more employment opportunities and enterprises.

A potential youth agro-entrepreneurs must possess the sense of independence, intelligence, hardworking, managerial ability and information about agro-entrepreneurship to realize the targets. The emergence of modern technologies and innovations in agricultural sector by the public transformation programmes has established the agro-entrepreneurship sector to be more attractive to the young people. Agro-entrepreneurship is considered to be a major sector that would assist to absorb a greater number of youths in the labour market and poverty alleviation in Nigeria (Mbam and Nwibo, 2015). Nigerians have begun to recognize the relevance of the agro-entrepreneurship sector in the nation's economy. There are enormous and unlimited opportunities it provides to young people.

Empirical evidences emerging from few studies on entrepreneurship development in agriculture have yielded mixed results that are inconclusive and contradictory (Shailesh *et al.*, 2013; Nwibo and Okorie, 2013). A lot of studies have been done on entrepreneurship, determinants and investment behaviour (Nwibo and Alimba, 2013). However, it seems that there is no existing empirical knowledge on the determinants of agro-entrepreneurship preference among the youths of Ebonyi State. Thus, creating a dearth in research knowledge and literature. To fill this gap, the study:

- i. determined the agro-entrepreneurship activities engaged by the youths in the study area;
- ii. explored the factors influencing the youth's preferences in agro-entrepreneurship; and
- iii. analysed the constraints to youth preference for agro-entrepreneurship.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Ebonyi State of Nigeria, which lies approximately on latitude 7°3' N and longitudes 5°4' E and 6°45' E and in the Eastern part of Nigeria. A multistage sampling technique was adopted in the selection of the youth agro-entrepreneurs. From the thirteen Local Government Areas in the State with two Local Government Areas from each of the three agricultural zones were randomly selected. In the second stage, two autonomous communities were randomly sampled from each LGA, to give a total of twelve autonomous communities. In the third stage, three villages were randomly sampled from the twelve autonomous communities to give a total of 36 villages. Finally, five youth agro-entrepreneurs were purposively selected from each of the villages. This final selection resulted to a total of one hundred and eighty (180) youth agro-entrepreneurs that were used as the sample size. Primary data were obtained through the use of questionnaire which was administered as interview schedule. The study employed both descriptive and Factor analyses to achieve the objectives of the study. Exploratory factor analysis was employed to analyse the important factors influencing and constraining Youths Agro-entrepreneurship Preference in the study area. Principal component factor analysis with varimax-rotation and factor loading of 0.30 was used. Variables with factor loading of less than 0.30 and variables that will load in more than one factor were discarded (Ashley, *et al.* 2006; Madukwe, 2004). The principal component factor analysis model is stated thus:

$$Y_1 = a_{11}X_1 + a_{12}X_2 + \dots + a_{1n}X_n \quad (1)$$

$$Y_2 = a_{21}X_1 + a_{22}X_2 + \dots + a_{2n}X_n \quad (2)$$

$$Y_3 = a_{31}X_1 + a_{32}X_2 + \dots + a_{3n}X_n \quad (3)$$

$$Y_n = a_{n1}X_1 + a_{n2}X_2 + \dots + a_{nn}X_n \quad (4)$$

Where,

$Y_1, Y_2 \dots Y_n$ = observed factors / constraints

$a_1 - a_n$ = factor loadings or correlation coefficients.

$X_1, X_2, \dots X_n$ = unobserved underlying factors influencing/constraining youths preference for agro-entrepreneurship in the study area

Results and Discussion

Agro-Entrepreneurship Activities Operated by the Youths in Ebonyi State

The result in Table 1 shows that the youth agro-entrepreneurs were involved mainly in livestock production such as poultry and farm input supply such as livestock feed (28.9% each), agrochemical (25%) and fertilizers (22.8%). Agro-processing of cassava (25%), cereals (e.g rice, maize etc) and legumes and nut (20%) were identified as another important career investment options for the youth agro-entrepreneurs. This implies that livestock production (poultry), farm input supply (livestock feed, agrochemical and fertilizers) and agro-processing (cassava products

cereals and legumes and nut) are the major agro-entrepreneurship preferences for the youth agro-entrepreneurs in the State.

However, the result equally identified the minor areas of preferences by the youth agro-entrepreneurs in Ebonyi State. These areas include; production of watermelon (1.1%), cucumber (1.7%) and cocoyam (3.9%). Meanwhile, rice production (22.8%) was an exception as rice production was a major arable crop of Ebonyi State. Other minor investment areas include marketing of timber products (7.2%), and yam products (9.4%). The low interest in crop production and marketing/distribution subsector could be as a result of high cost of labour, unavailability of farm resources, high capital demand, and unavailability of market. The finding is consistent with Bairwaet *al.* (2014) who reported that employment opportunities abound in our environment but can be effective if entrepreneurship education is given to potential entrants.

Push Factors Influencing Youths Agro-entrepreneurship Preference

Identifying the push factors to youth's agro-entrepreneurship preference is vital in youth's investment decision and interventions. These factors were categorized into *personal, employment and institutional and economic*. From the categories, the personal push factors to agro-entrepreneurial factors include technical qualification (0.629), previous experience (0.542), family agro-entrepreneurial history (0.542), socio-economic attributes (0.798), and parental motivation (0.433). Technical qualification of youths plays significant role in agro-entrepreneurship preference. Technical qualification in self-employment is crucial for critical achievement of higher profits and employing others. This corroborated Bairwaet *al.* (2014) who reported that technical status of an entrepreneur makes him/her an expert in field of endeavour and can motivate to start up a venture. Hence, technical qualification serves as the best predictor of success of every business, especially the new founded business opportunities. It was observed that having relevant experience in the line of business enables investors to efficiently manage such investment in a sustainable manner. This finding agreed with Nwibo and Alimba (2013) who posited that the year spent by an agro-entrepreneur determines how experienced such investor has ventured.

Another observed influencing factor is family agro-entrepreneurship history which can be justified as a youth whose parents are agripreneurs will end up being an agripreneur. Lastly, the identified youth's agro-entrepreneurship push factor is the socio-economic attributes of the youth. This finding corroborates Eniola (2018) who reported socio-economic attributes, such as age, experience,

educational level, training, business ideas, and ability to manage change concerning financing sources have strong impact on management of new agribusinesses.

The result further revealed that the ambition to be become agro-entrepreneur (0.732), desire to be self-employed (0.858), government support (0.548), lack of job (0.859) and support from donor agencies (0.702) were identified as employment/institutional factors influencing youths in becoming agro-entrepreneurs. The ambition to become an agro-entrepreneur and thus self-employed have been observed to have significantly influenced the youths in agro-entrepreneurial preference. Government support to entrepreneurs has been identified as a catalyst for driving the youths to agro-entrepreneurship. This is arguably a fact as government at all levels are expected to provide an enabling environment for successful operation of agro-entrepreneurship activities. This is in agreement with Turro *et al* (2016), who reported that government support such tax incentives to develop the entrepreneurial activities, provision of infrastructural facilities such as good roads, railways, communication system, electricity, storage facilities will help to spur agri-venture creation. The authors further reported that government can also provide financial and social support to entrepreneurs in priority areas such as agriculture [(farm in-put supply, farm production (such as crop and livestock production), processing and marketing, and distributions)], and small businesses.

Lack of job which connotes unemployment situation of Nigeria has been identified to be a major determinant preference to be an agro-entrepreneur. Thus, justifying Narendran and Ranganathan, (2015) who inferred that agro-entrepreneurial force are relatively vast in Nigeria, as joblessness and poverty leads many people with the option of venture creation. In the same vein, Mbam and Nwibo (2015) posited that avoiding joblessness encourages youths to start their own venture, as it is a major factor influencing youth's agro-entrepreneurship choice. This implies that majority of youth agro-entrepreneurs start their own businesses as a result of lack of jobs. Meanwhile, support from donor agencies was found to have a strong effect on youth's agro-entrepreneurship preference. Thus, the youths can be influenced to venture into agro-entrepreneurship if there will be adequate support from donor agencies. Therefore, support from donor agencies is a critical determinant to promote agro-entrepreneurial ventures among youths, because it provides better entrepreneurial climate.

The last major component -economic factors driving youth's agro-entrepreneurship preference were profit motive (0.955), good market potential (0.921), size of investment (0.721), and minimal capital requirement

(0.803). The desire to make profit has been identified to be a significant factor driving youth's agro-entrepreneurship preference. This is justified as prospective young agro-entrepreneurs give preference to areas of investment with high potential for profit making. The size of the initial investment determines the scope and scale of farm business. This according to World Bank (World Bank, 2017), is justified as many small-scale enterprises found it difficult to access credit facility that is most paramount for growth and development of the small and medium enterprises. Again, most small business operators always find it difficult to meet up with financial conditions required to access facilities from financial institutions in Nigeria. The minimal capital required for starting most agro enterprises has been noted to be one of the most important factors inducing the youth agro-entrepreneurs into starting agro-entrepreneurial ventures. Corroborating the finding, Nwibo *et al.* (2016) posited that capital resource is part of the decisive issues that youths faced in the early stage of their career options. Thus, young people adopt small scale ventures that required minimal financial resources.

Constraints militating against Agro-Entrepreneurship among Youths

It has been observed that there are factors hindering the youths from investing in agro-entrepreneurial activities in Ebonyi State. These factors were categorized into socioeconomic, infrastructural, and institutional factors. Socioeconomic factors that loaded high include: lack of credit facilities, corruption, high interest rate, lack of collateral for loans and high capital demand. Poor transportation facilities, limited access to improved technologies, insufficient information, and challenges of market accessibility were the infrastructural constraints to agro-entrepreneurship preference among the youths. Inconsistent government policies, multiple taxation, and challenges of agro-entrepreneurship education were also identified as the major institutional constraints that hinder agro-entrepreneurship preference among the youths.

According to World Bank report of 2008 (World Bank, 2008), economic constraints are more persistent in agro-entrepreneurship and related activities than other sectors reflect both the nature of agro-entrepreneurship sector and the average size of enterprises. Similarly, lack of credit facilities was identified as one of the major constraints to agro-entrepreneurship preference among the youths. This is justified as it is one of the most crucial factors which new venture must address; for if funds are not readily available or accessible, new ventures may experience problem of growth.

Corruption has been identified as one of the major social factors that constrain the success of agro-

entrepreneurship preference among the youths in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. According to Fouda and Pene (2015), corruption is a worldwide barrier to socio-economic and agripreneurship development. This was justified by World Bank (2017) ranking of Nigeria on *Doing Business Index* which placed Nigeria at 169 out of 190 countries. Similarly, a transparency submission at the African Competitiveness Report identified corruption as one of the three impediments to doing business in Nigeria

Inconsistent government policies have been identified to have significantly contributed to agro-entrepreneurship development in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. To address the ugly scenario, young agripreneurs should be encouraged through favourable government policies and regulations such as reduced tax rate, provision of subsidies, tax holidays, and relaxed licensing regulations.

Multiple taxation is still a major problem and increase in taxes can be disincentive for agro-entrepreneurial venture. This shows that excessive high rates of tax reduce the incentives to invest and lower rates of taxation can lead to increase in investment and growth. Poor transportation facilities have been identified as a bane to youth's agro-entrepreneurship preference. This was justified by the National Spatial Strategy of Ireland report of 2002 which indicated that inadequate transport facilities is a major constraint to both rural and urban entrepreneurship activity. Hence, access to good transportation facilities allows agro-entrepreneurial ventures to become more productive, reduce transportation cost and expand their ventures by reaching the market.

Another challenge to youth's preference for agro-entrepreneurship is poor agro-entrepreneurship education and training which provide the skills needed to start, manage and nurture the business activities. Thus, justifying Igweet *et al.* (2018) who reported that education is often the key determinant for the pursuit of opportunities in new business and employment. This will in turn enhance human capital development that might likely lead to long term poverty reduction.

Lack of collateral for loans has been identified as one of the principal factors hindering agro-entrepreneurship development in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. This is a critical issue in business preference as most financial institutions like commercial banks are still very unwilling to lend money to potential entrepreneurs due to lack of experiences and collateral (Igweet *et al.*, 2018). This also corroborates with the finding of Esiobuet *et al.* (2015) who noted that most financial institutions do reject agro-entrepreneurs from obtaining credit facilities from their institutions because they lack required collaterals, hence, describes the agro-entrepreneurs as non-credit worthy.

The result of the factor analysis showed that limited access to improved technologies is a critical factor that affects agro-entrepreneurial development in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Agro-entrepreneurs may have most preference and strong incentives to participate in agro-entrepreneurship activities but inadequate access to improved technologies may constrain them. But, having access to improved technologies by the agro-entrepreneurs will increase food production.

High interest on loans has been found to have negatively affected agro-entrepreneurship preference among youths. This justified the findings of Olatomide and Omowumi (2015) who reported that financial institutions that proffer loan facilities with high interest rate will discourage aspiring individuals who want to be entrepreneurs. For example, some commercial banks have attached their lending rates to as much as 28%, thereby discouraging future agro-entrepreneurs who are still beginners.

Information is a powerful instrument for agro-entrepreneurship development and career choice. Esiobuet *al* (2015) stated that lack of information could be a barrier to agro-entrepreneurship drive and development. This finding is consistent with Olatomide and Omowumi (2015) who noted that the youth entrepreneurs suffered insufficient information on product and input markets. The report further suggested that there is need to aid the active productive youth entrepreneurs to access knowledge on products, input markets and connecting entrepreneurs to global value chains.

Another challenge faced by youth agro-entrepreneurs in launching into their new agro-entrepreneurial venture is high capital demand by the business. Esiobuet *al*, (2015) documented that investment with high capital demand is a critical impediment to agro-entrepreneurship development in Nigeria and they affect motivational influence.

Market accessibility is a very important factor to any venture but in Nigeria the accessibility cost in terms of time and capital is vast. The result of factor analysis indicates that challenge of market accessibility was a major barrier that hinders agro-entrepreneurship development. This result corroborated Mbam and Nwibo (2013) who reported market inaccessibility as critical constraints to agro-entrepreneurship spirit and development among prospective agro-entrepreneurs. Similarly, Igwe, *et al*. (2018) reported that lack of focus, inadequate market research, lack of succession plan, inexperience, lack of proper book keeping, inability to separate business and personal finances will bring about entrepreneurship survival rather than closure.

Conclusion

High profitability, technical qualification, good market potential, small investment, previous experience, ambition to become agro entrepreneur, desire to be self-employed, government support, family agro-entrepreneurial history, economic need, socio-economic attributes, lack of job, parent motivation, minimal capital requirement, short gestation period, support from donor agencies were identified as the important push for agro-entrepreneurship preference and development in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The major agro-entrepreneurship activities of the youths were farm production (crop and livestock production), farm input supply, agro-processing, and marketing/distribution. However, lack of credit facilities, corruption, multiple taxation, poor transportation facilities, challenge of agro-entrepreneurship education and training, limited access to improved technologies, high interest on loans, lack of collateral for loans, insufficient information, high capital demand, and market accessibility were identified to be major constraints to youths agro-entrepreneurship preference. To address these, the study recommended for all the tiers of government to improve on the provision of investment infrastructures to encourage the youths to invest in agribusiness. There should be a policy mandating financial institutions to make loanable funds available to young entrepreneurs at single digit interest rate to enhance participation as agribusinesses.

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Table 1: Agro-entrepreneurial activities of Youths in Ebonyi State

| Agro-entrepreneurial Activities | Areas of Preference | Frequency(N=180) | Percentage |
|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Farm Production | | | |
| <i>Crop production</i> (30*) | Cassava | 16 | 53.3 |
| | Yam | 17 | 56.7 |
| | Rice | 25 | 83.3 |
| | Cocoyam | 1 | 3.3 |
| | Vegetable | 3 | 10.0 |
| | Cucumber/ Watermelon | 6 | 20.0 |
| | Banana | 2 | 6.7 |
| <i>Livestock Production</i> (30*) | Cattle | 2 | 6.7 |
| | Piggery | 3 | 16.7 |
| | Poultry | 9 | 30.0 |
| | Fish | 4 | 13.3 |
| | Goat | 14 | 46.7 |
| | Sheep | 10 | 33.3 |
| | Bee keeping | 1 | 3.3 |
| | Snail | 3 | 10.0 |
| Farm Input Supply (60*) | | | |
| | Breeding stock | 4 | 16.7 |
| | Cassava Products | 4 | 6.7 |
| | Livestock feed | 14 | 23.3 |
| | Farm equipments | 11 | 18.3 |
| | Seedlings | 7 | 11.7 |
| | Agro-chemicals | 11 | 18.3 |
| | Fertilizers | 9 | 15.0 |
| Agro-processing (30*) | | | |
| | Cassava Products | 8 | 26.7 |
| | Yam products | 5 | 16.7 |
| | Fish | 2 | 6.7 |
| | Palm oil/kernel | 6 | 20.0 |
| | Livestock products | 5 | 16.7 |
| | Livestock feed | 4 | 13.3 |
| | Cereals (rice and maize) | 7 | 23.3 |
| | Legumes &nuts | 7 | 11.7 |
| Timber product | 3 | 10.0 | |
| Marketing/ Distribution (30*) | | | |
| | Livestock feed | 27 | 15 |
| | Flour | 23 | 12.8 |
| | Cereals (rice, and maize) | 39 | 21.7 |
| | Legumes & nuts | 30 | 16.7 |
| | Palm products(oil, broom, and kernel) | 25 | 13.9 |
| | Yam products | 17 | 9.4 |
| | Cassava products | 26 | 14.4 |
| | Timber products | 13 | 7.2 |

Source: Survey data, 2016; *Multiple responses obtained

Table 2: Factors Influencing Youths Agro-entrepreneurship Preference

| Factors | Personal attributes (factor1) | Employment & Institutional (factor 2) | Economic (factor 3) |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|------------------------|
| Profit motive | -0.033 | 0.050 | 0.955 |
| Technical qualification | 0.629 | 0.115 | -0.030 |
| Good market potential | 0.268 | 0.213 | 0.921 |
| Size of investment | 0.295 | -0.002 | 0.721 |
| Previous Experience | 0.542 | 0.055 | 0.087 |
| Ambition to become agro-entrep. | 0.240 | 0.732 | 0.129 |
| Desire to be self – employed | 0.103 | 0.858 | -0.016 |
| Government support | 0.153 | 0.548 | 0.243 |
| Family agro-entrep. History | 0.542 | 0.321 | -0.006 |
| Economic Need | 0.008 | 0.095 | 0.768 |
| Socio-economic attributes | 0.798 | 0.088 | 0.044 |
| Lack of job | 0.024 | 0.859 | -0.035 |
| Personal choice | 0.247 | 0.255 | 0.338 |
| Parent motivation | 0.433 | 0.050 | 0.055 |
| Minimal capital requirement | 0.263 | 0.153 | 0.803 |
| Support from donor agencies | 0.083 | 0.702 | 0.021 |

Source: Survey Data, 2017

Table 3: Constraints militating against Agro-entrepreneurship Among Youths

| Constraints | Components | | |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Socioeconomic factors | Infrastructural Factors | Institutional Factors |
| Lack of credit facilities | 0.790 | 0.004 | -0.079 |
| Corruption | 0.696 | 0.068 | -0.083 |
| Inconsistent government policies | 0.292 | 0.263 | 0.913 |
| Multiple Taxation | -0.047 | -0.263 | 0.533 |
| Poor transportation facilities | 0.076 | 0.734 | 0.065 |
| Challenges of agro-entrepreneurship training and education | -0.061 | 0.005 | 0.573 |
| Poor management skills | 0.272 | -0.294 | 0.055 |
| Lack of market information | -0.091 | 0.054 | 0.119 |
| Inadequate preparation | 0.049 | 0.008 | 0.273 |
| Limited access to improved technologies | 0.049 | 0.628 | 0.175 |
| High interest of loans | 0.715 | -0.083 | -0.320 |
| Lack of collateral for loans | 0.739 | -0.157 | -0.028 |
| Insufficient information | -0.095 | 0.616 | 0.081 |
| High capital demand | 0.978 | 0.049 | -0.094 |
| Challenges of market accessibility | -0.118 | 0.723 | 0.162 |
| High failure risks | -0.380 | 0.002 | -0.208 |
| Gender Risks | -0.389 | -0.360 | -0.165 |

Source: Survey Data, 2017