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Encouraging Youth's Involvement in Agricultural Production and Processing

Sunday Brownson Akpan

Available evidence suggests an ageing farming population in Nigeria, with an average age of 47 years and life expectancy at 47-50 years in 2008 (NBS 2008, Oboh et al., 2009). In 2009, the national unemployment rate was 19.7 percent with the youth accounting for more than 75 percent (NBS, 2010). Increased involvement of youth in agricultural activities will help reduce the problems of the ageing farm population and increasing youth unemployment. This brief explores issues related to youth involvement in agriculture such as socioeconomic characteristics of youth engaged in agriculture and factors hindering youth involvement in agriculture.

Government efforts in promoting youth in agriculture

Nigeria's government has attempted to stimulate youth's interest in agricultural production and processing since the late 1980s. In 1986, the federal government established the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) to provide vocational training to the youth, and in 1987, the Better Life Programme was created to empower women, especially female youths in the rural areas through skills acquisition and healthcare training. In addition, the People's Bank and the Community Banks were established in 1989 and 1990 respectively, to provide credit facilities to low income earners embarking on agricultural production and other micro enterprises, with special consideration to youth engaged in agricultural production. In 1992, the Fadama program was initiated to enhance food self sufficiency, reduce poverty, and create opportunities for employment for youths in the rural areas.

In 2008 the Akwa Ibom state government initiated an integrated farming scheme for recently graduated agricultural students, and set up a micro

credit scheme for youths engaged in agricultural production and processing. Other state governments also initiated graduate and school-leaver's agricultural loan schemes in an attempt to encouraged youth involvement in agricultural production, empower those engaged in agricultural activities, and combat youth unemployment.

Despite these incentives and the expanding markets for primary and secondary agricultural commodities, the involvement of the youth in agricultural activities has steadily declined in recent years (Adekunle et al. 2009), in spite of the high current youth unemployment rate, and abundance of agricultural jobs available.

Conceptual Framework

The decision to migrate involves both "push" and "pull" factors (Lewis, 1954; and Harris and Todaro, 1970). The 'push factors' include declining national resources; increasing cost of social amenities; loss of employment, oppressive religious, ethnic or political concerns; alienation from community; lack of opportunities for personal development, and/or effect of natural disaster. The 'pull factors' are the likelihood of better employment opportunities; good

educational facilities; diversified marriage opportunities, and better recreational activities.(Bogue, 1969).

The Lewis model explains migration as a transfer of labor from labor-surplus sectors (rural areas) to labor deficit-sectors (urban areas) until a balance is reached. The Harris-Todaro model on the other hand, postulates that migrants assess various labor market opportunities available in the rural and urban sectors and choose the one that maximizes their expected gains. This model explains some of the deficiencies inherent in the Lewis model such as the rise in rural-urban migration in the context of rising urban unemployment.

Overall, some empirical studies found that economic push factors (such as, the lack of rural credit, unemployment, and rural poverty) are most important; while others suggest that economic pull factors (such as, perception of high wages from urban employment) are dominant. This review uses some of these findings to help explain why there is a declining involvement of the youth in agriculture in Nigeria. The discussion is based on literature review and structured interviews with youth and public institutions associated with youth development. Four youth leaders from the urban and rural areas of Abuja, and one official from the ministry of youth were interviewed to validate the finding from the literature.

Findings

Socioeconomic characteristics of the youth

Several of the studies reviewed found that about 80 percent of youth residing in the rural areas are engaged in agricultural activities, and about 90 percent residing in urban areas are engaged in non-agricultural activities (Adekunle et al. 2009). Sample surveys by different researchers (summarized in Table 1), show that youth labor markets in rural (engaged in agriculture) and urban (not engaged in agriculture) areas are dominated by males. Early marriages could explain the disparity, since approximately 70 percent of youth in rural areas are married as opposed to 25 percent in urban areas.

The results also indicate that urban youth obtain a higher level of education, with 80 percent of urban youths achieving the level of a secondary school education, compared to 60 percent of rural youth.

Urban youth also typically come from smaller families, whose heads of household earn more than their rural counterparts. Conversely, the results illustrate that there are insignificant differences regarding work experience as well as the number of years spent in youth associations for both rural and urban youths in Nigeria. These findings are supported by the results obtained from the structured interviews conducted with youth leaders.

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of rural youth engaged and urban youth not engaged in agriculture in Nigeria (in percentages)

		Rural Youth engaged	Urban Youth not engaged	Sources
Gender	Male	80	65	Torimiro et al.2006; Echebiri 2005, Olujide 2008, lawal et al. 2009
	Female	20	35	
Marital status	Single	20	70	Torimiro et al. 2006. Echebiri 2005, Adekunle et al, 2009
	Married	70	25	
	unspecified	10	5	
Education (yrs)	No schooling	10	5	Echebiri 2005, Olujide 2008, Lawal et al 2009
	Primary	25	10	
	Secondary	60	80	
	unspecified	5	5	
Work experience (yrs)	1-5	75	70	Echebiri 2005, Olyiwola 2005
	6-10	20	15	
	unspecified	5	15	
Family size (number)	1-3	70	20	Olujide 2008, Lawal et al 2009
	unspecified	30	80	
Years in youth programs	2-3	60	20	Torimiro et al. 2006, Lawal et al. 2009
	unspecified	40	80	
Monthly income (₦)	9,000	50	50	Torimiro et al. 2006; Echebiri 2005, Shittu et al 2009
	unspecified	50	50	
Ownership of business	Self	80	90	Olujide 2008,
	unspecified	20	10	

Factors limiting rural youth involvement in agriculture

These factors have been identified primarily through surveys (Adekunle et al. 2009). From the literature review, there are economic, social and environmental factors reducing rural youth involvement in agricultural production in Nigeria (Table 2). Economic factors include inadequate credit facilities, low farming profit margins, and a lack of agricultural insurance, initial capital and

production inputs. Social factors include public perception about farming and parental influence to move out of agriculture. Environmental issues include inadequate land, continuous poor harvests, and soil degradation. These findings are largely in agreement with the results obtained from the interviews conducted with selected youth leaders. The results further reveal that economic based constraints seem to be the most important factor.

Table 2: Constraints to Rural Youth’s Involvement in Agriculture (mean responses)

Constraints	Mean	Ranking
Inadequate credit facility	2.883	1
Poor returns to investment	2.667	2
No agricultural insurance	2.667	2
Poor basic farming knowledge	2.567	3
Insufficient access to tractors & other farm inputs	2.483	4
No ready market	2.350	5
It is energy-sapping	2.333	6
People perception	2.283	7
Insufficient initial capital	2.150	8
Farmers are not respected	2.100	9
Non – lucrateness of agriculture	2.033	10
Continuous poor harvest	1.940	11
Poor storage facilities	1.933	12
Insufficient of land	0.967	13
Soil degradation	0.658	14

Source: Derived from Adekunle et al., 2009

Reasons for rural youth involvement in non-farm activities and migrating to urban areas

Surveys by Olayiwola (2005) and Echebiri (2005) identified factors affecting youth rural-urban migration (Table 3). The economic pull factors they identified include the perception of greater job opportunities due to the presence of industries or companies in cities. Economic push factors included poor physical infrastructure and social amenities in the rural areas, search for education and skills acquisition, and the absence of desirable job opportunities. Other factors include a general dislike of village life or expulsion from rural communities resulting from the commitment of an offense or crime. The results reveal that economic factors were the dominant reason for rural youths increased involvement in non-farm activities and migrating to urban areas. These findings were

consistent with the opinion of the youth leaders interviewed by this author.

The results further confirmed that, regardless of the difficulties in finding employment, a majority of rural youths preferred living in urban areas. The findings are also consistent with the findings of Adepoju (1986) and Adebayo (1999) who found that rural areas in Nigeria were neglected with respect to the provision of social and economic opportunities.

Table 3. Reasons for Youths preferring urban areas in Nigeria

Echebiri (2005)	% of respondents	Ranking
Communal dispute	5.90	6
To get married	6.36	5
General dislike of the village life	28.64	3
Poor quality of education facilities in the village	21.82	4
Absence of desirable job opportunities in the rural areas	72.73	1
Poor physical infrastructures and social amenities in the rural areas	57.73	2

Olayiwola (2005)	% of Respondents	Ranking
To avoid boredom in agriculture	74.4	2
Report of city life and condition by migrants	44.4	6
Joining relatives in town	55.6	5
Expulsion from rural communities due to crime	68.9	4
Search for education and acquisition of skills in town	93.3	1
Apprenticeship in various vocation in towns	72.2	3
Absence of industries /companies in the rural areas	68.9	4

Recommendations

The findings derived from the literature and substantiated by structured interviews of youth leaders and officials of the youth ministry confirm that both pull and push factors affect rural-urban migration.. As such, in order to improve youth involvement in agricultural production and processing in Nigeria, attention should be given to the factors leading to youth migration to urban areas (Table 3). In addition, the economic constraints facing youths in agriculture (lack of credit, weak profitability, capacity constraint, etc) should be examined.

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For more information:

IFPRI-Abuja
International Food Policy Research Institute
c/o International Center for Soil Fertility and Agriculture Development
No.6/ Plot 1413 Ogbagi Street
Off Oro-Ago Crescent
Cadastral Zone 11, Garki, Abuja
Nigeria
E-mail: ifpri-nigeria@cgiar.org
www.ifpri.org