

THE ROLES OF NIGERIAN YOUTH IN FOOD PRODUCTION : A CASE STUDY OF DEKINA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF KOGI STATE

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ABSTRACT

Worst still in Nigeria is the recent intention to imitate the Western nations to divert lands hitherto meant for crop production to feed mankind, to crops to feed automobiles (agrofuel). Our youths nowadays are not helping matters, as they consistently shy away from farming. It was at this instance that this survey was carried out in Dekina Local Government Area of Kogi State to determine the roles youths play in ensuring food security and/or crisis. The LGA has 3 major districts namely; Biraidu, Okura, and Dekina. From each district 30 youths were selected through simple random sampling thus making a total of 90 respondents. Structured interview schedule was conducted on the respondents to elicit data. Descriptive statistics (Mean, frequency, and percentages) were used to analyze the data collected. The results show that aged parents were the major producers of food crops, and cassava was the major staple food produced in the area. Credit facilities should be provided to youths engaged in agriculture to serve as a motivating factor for them to remain in farming business.

Keywords: *Youths, Food crisis/security, Crude oil, Agrofuel.*

INTRODUCTION

Food is one of the basic needs of man. But food production today is far below human need due to population growth, thus confirming the Malthusian Theory that population growth was at geometric rate while food supply was growing at arithmetic progression. The right to food implies the right of every person to have regular access to sufficient, nutritionally adequate and culturally accepted food for an active healthy life (Adamu, 2007). This right has been elusive over time and is now worsened due to the global economic recess. The Nigerian oil-dominated economy has brought economic mess as the price of crude oil nose-dived or continue to fluctuate day in day out. This has paralysed so many economic activities in Nigeria. Prices of food have soared leading to food crisis and poverty.

In the early 1960s, Nigeria was self - sufficient in food production, supply out - stripped demand, thus food was cheap and the citizens appeared to be well fed. At that time, both the young and old were actively involved in farming. While the young

active men and women were busy with the core farming activities like bush clearing etc. the aged did the supervision. These periods witnessed high level of exportation of agricultural produce, and much foreign exchange was earned to sustain other sectors of the economy. With increase in population and the discovery of crude petroleum, the agricultural sector was abandoned. Oil has displaced agriculture as the chief earner of foreign exchange as well as national income. According to NIPSS (1986), prior to 1966, agricultural commodities provided over 80% of the country's foreign exchange earnings, this dropped to about 10% in 1983. In contrast, oil revenue, which was historically a minimal foreign exchange now accounts for about 93% of the total national revenue.

From the point of view of her oil wealth, and as the 6th largest producer of oil, Nigeria is technically one of the richest countries in the world. But she is one of the poorest and least prosperous in terms of living standard and infrastructural facilities. This is because of grafts, embezzlement, wasteful spending and downright looting of public treasury by the political class (The Nation, 2009) greed inclusive. The monolithic nature of Nigerian economy has now plunged the nation into economic woes. The over - dependence on crude oil as the major foreign earner has now put Nigerian economy under serious pressure. The price of the crude oil which peaked at 147 dollars per barrel in July, 2008 nose - dived to about 33 dollars per barrel in that year (The Nation, 2009). This signaled the beginning of economic doldrums and poverty for all oil-dependent economies.

The current national food crisis, apart from the fall of oil price could be traced also to the attitude of our youth towards farming. Youth nowadays tend to shy away from farming, thereby leaving the profession in the hands of aged people who are no longer agile and productive. Most Nigerians, especially the youth see those engaged in farming as wretched and poor (Adekojo, 1998). These able - bodied youth frequently move from their rural abodes to urban cities in search of white collar jobs. This search today can better be termed as 'modernized laziness'. No youth is ready to put his or her hands into use. However, it is not an exaggeration saying that most youth will appreciate a farming job they can sit comfortably at home and press a key on their handsets then the whole work in the farm from bush clearing to harvesting is completed and they get paid jumbo sum at the end of the month. The parents of these youth openly send their wards to cities to make quick money thereby worsening the already bad situation.

The open neglect of this noble profession by Nigerian youths and specifically those from Dekina LGA of Kogi State has created a gap in food security vis-à-vis the growing population. Due to the negligent of agriculture several people are hungry. According to Per Pinstrup, Rajul and Mark (2001), about 800 million people (one - sixth) of the developing world's population do not have access to sufficient food to lead healthy, productive lives. Recent projections from Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations of halving the number of food - insecure people from 800million in 1995 to 400 million by 2015 will not be achieved until 2030. It is in view, of this that this study seeks to answer some basic questions such

as: Who are the major stakeholders in food production in Dekina LGA, What is the extent of their food production?, Why are youths shying away from farming?, and what can be done to woo youths back into farming?.

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the roles of Nigerian youths towards food production in Nigeria with a particular reference to Dekina LGA of Kogi State. Specifically, the study was designed to:

- a. ascertain the major stakeholders in food production in the study area,
- b. determine the extent of food production,
- c. ascertain why youths are shying away from farming, and

METHODOLOGY

The study carried out in Dekina Local Government Area of Kogi State, adopted the survey research design. The Local Government Area has three major districts namely; Biraidu, Okura and Dekina. Majority of the people are farmers growing crops such as yams, maize, beans, cassava, cocoyam, cashew, mango and oil palm. The target people for this research work were youths. Adedoyin (2003) classified youth as people within the ages of 19 - 40 years. From each of these villages 30 youths were selected through simple random sampling bringing the total respondents to 90. Structured interview was conducted on these respondents for data collection. Data elicited were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency and percentages).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data on Table 1 showed that Majority of the respondents were male while the female constitute 31.1%. Majority were within the age ranges of 23 - 25 years. According to Adedoyin (2003), youths at this stage exhibit a number of characteristics which when nurtured and utilized are strong assets to sustainable agricultural development. Table 1 also showcases the educational levels of the respondents. Majority of the youths have secondary education, but a reasonable number of them had NCE and Diploma. The major occupation was civil service, 28.9% were applicants, while only 07.8% were into farming. This finding is *in tandem* with that of Apantaku (2004) that people tend to go to urban areas in search of white collar jobs leaving farming in the hands of few aged people.

Data on Table 2 revealed that parents of the youths were the major stakeholders in food production in the study area, while youths, and civil servants and producers cooperative society constituted each respectively in food production. Cassava was the major staple food in the area, this was followed by maize and yam in their order of preference. The greater involvement of aged parents in farming was due to the exit of youths from home and the need to provide the food needs of their wives and younger children and other dependents relations, a major reason for low mean yields of 04.2/tons/ha/year.

Entries on Table 3 show the various reasons why youths are shying away from farming in the study area. Poor government attention to the agricultural sector,

very difficult to make money quickly from farming, farming is energy - sapping, and low societal prestige were some of the reasons for shelving farming. In recent years, the Nigerian agricultural sector has been experiencing dwindling funding and attention from government (Baba, Ipinjolu and Adurodola, 1999). Government attention is mainly fixed on the oil sector instead of putting agriculture on its priority list, this is one of the major reasons for the current food crisis witnessed today in Nigeria.

Table 4 shows the various causes of food crisis in Nigeria. Over dependence on crude oil, high prices of food stuffs, youths' refusal to go into farming, and post harvest wastages were identified as major causes of food insecurity in Nigeria. Nigeria depends heavily on crude oil for foreign exchange after the discovery of crude petroleum, but the recent wavering oil price has now brought economic woes to Nigeria. The implication here is that, for the attainment of vision 20:2020, there must be a major diversification of economy by re-invigorating the ailing agricultural sector and other non - oil sectors to avoid total collapse of the economy, unemployment, acute food shortage and deaths of victims who are mostly the poor masses.

Table 5 portrays the various suggestions proffered by the respondents that can help convince our youths to go into farming. Provision of credit facilities, improved funding of agricultural sector and award of scholarships to youths studying agriculture, and favourable agricultural policies and programmes were suggested to government and policy makers. The need for improved funding of the agricultural sector is apt if food security is to be attained. The sector suffered alot of under funding for several millennia, a major reason why most intervention programmes have failed in Nigeria. The need for governments and policy makers to put in place sound and sustainable economic policies is apt to fast-track our ailing economy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Food is one of the basic needs of man, but the level of food production in Nigeria is below expectation thereby giving way to hunger and poverty. The dimensions of the current crisis of food and agricultural production in Nigeria are well documented. According to Iheanacho and Ogunbameru (1997), Nigeria currently faces serious food and agricultural problems manifested in growing food importation and accelerating ecological degradation. Nigerian youths did not see the enormity of food crisis, as they constantly shy away from farming. The youths saw farming as a job that does not win government attention, energy - sapping and has low societal prestige. While Provision of credit facilities, and improved funding of agricultural sector were suggested to woo youths back into farming. There should be economic diversification to avoid over - dependence on crude oil as the nation's oil reserve will be exhausted one day. The recent scenario is a good sign that our oil wealth will end one day. Based on the major findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are therefore made.

- a. Government should improve its funding of agricultural sector and put the sector in its priority list.

- b. Rural areas should be made habitable by providing infrastructure, this will help reduce rural - urban drift.
- c. Farm inputs should be provided at the right time at subsidized rates.
- d. Most importantly, the nation's economy should be diversified to avoid over dependence on crude oil.
- e. Credit facilities should be provided to youths engaged in agriculture to serve as a motivating factor for them to remain in farming business.

Table1: Distribution of Respondents Based on Their Socio - economic Characteristics.

<i>Socio-economic characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
Gender		
Male	62	68.9
Female	28	31.1
Age (Years)		
< 18	00	00.0
18 - 20	01	01.1
21 - 22	24	26.6
23 - 25	37	41.1
26 - 28	18	20.0
29 - 32	05	05.6
> 32	05	05.6
Educational Level		
Primary education	20	22.2
Secondary education	32	35.6
NCE/ND	25	27.8
Degree	10	11.1
Higher degrees	03	03.3
No formal education	00	00.0
Occupation		
Civil Service	36	40.0
Artisan	07	07.8
Trading	14	15.5
Farming	07	07.8
Applicant	26	28.9

Source: Field Survey, 2010

Table2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents Based on Major Stakeholders in Food Production

<i>Stakeholders</i>	<i>Frequency (f)</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
Youths	15	16.7
Parents	49	54.4
Civil servants	13	14.4
Expertrates	00.	00.0
Producers cooperative society	13	14.4
Government	00	00.0
Major food crops grown		
Yams	14	15.6
Cassava	33	16.7
Cocoyam	00	00.0
Beans	08	08.9
Sweet potatoes	03	03.3
Maize	26	28.8

Guinea corn/millet Yields/tons/ha/year	06	06.7
> 1 ton	07	07.7
1 - 2 tons	15	16.7
3 - 4 tons	37	41.1
5 - 6 tons	15	16.7
7 - 8 tons	10	11.1
> 10 tons	06	06.7

Source: Field Survey, 2010

Table 3: Distribution of respondents based on reasons why Youths are shying away from farming

<i>Reasons</i> (%)	<i>Frequency* (f)</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Farming is energy-sapping	42	46.7
Low societal prestige (job for poor people)	41	45.6
Farming is a dirty job	22	24.4
Difficult to make money quickly	52	57.8
Dicey weather factors/droughts	05	05.6
Pest and disease infestations	34	37.8
Lack of inputs at the right time	32	35.5
Poor Government attention	53	58.9
Parents/peers influence	14	15.6

Source: Field Survey, 2010

* Multiple Responses.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents Based on the Major Causes of Food Crisis in Nigeria

<i>Causes</i>	<i>Frequency (f)*</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
Increase in population	32	35.6
High prices of food stuffs	49	54.4
Youths refusal to go into farming	47	52.2
Global warming/desertification	22	24.4
Food hoarding	18	20.0
Production of ethanol/biofuel	10	11.1
Over dependence on crude oil	64	71.1
Poor govt. policies and programmes	21	23.3
Post harvest wastages (loses)	37	41.1

Source: Field Survey, 2009

* Multiple response.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents on based suggestions on ways to woo Nigerian Youths into farming

<i>Suggestion</i>	<i>Frequency (f)*</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
Improved funding of agricultural Sector	56	62.2
Awarding of scholarship to youths studying agriculture	56	62.2
Timely provision of farm inputs	34	37.8
Provision of infrastructural facilities to the rural areas	39	43.3
Enforcement of young farmers' clubs in schools	14	15.6
Provision of credit facilities to farmers/youths.	61	67.8
Favourable agricultural policies and programmes.	45	50.0
Organization of agricultural Shows/workshops	19	21.1

Source: Field Survey, 2010

*Multiple Responses.

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