ASSESSMENT OF RURAL YOUTHS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN SAPELE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF DELTA STATE

A. Aphunu and B.I.O. Akpobasa

Abstract

Youths constitute a formidable force in the agricultural production process, constituting a sizeable proportion of the workforce especially in the rural areas. While their contribution towards attaining food security cannot be underestimated yet their apparent lukewarm attitude towards agriculture is a source of concern. This study investigates attitudes of rural youths towards agricultural activities in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State. Data were collected with the aid of questionnaire from 115 youths in the study area. Data analyses were through the use of frequency, percentages, means and correlation coefficient. Findings from the study showed that majorities (64.4%) of the youths were resident in rural areas and are mainly farmers (52.2%) involved mostly in arable crop production (69.6%). A greater percentage of the respondents (69.6%) expressed unfavourable attitude towards agriculture. Attitude correlates positively and significantly with participation in agricultural production activities ($r=0.435$) and influenced youths interest in agricultural activities. The need to provide social amenities and infrastructures that will make the youths live and work in the rural areas is emphasized. Also there is need to stimulate youths’ interest in agriculture through effective extension services.

Introduction

The World Bank (2001) noted that majority of the world population consists of young people, three quarters of them living in the rural areas. In Nigeria, the working definition of youth is, persons falling within the age groups of 14 – 30 years. According to the National Population Census (NPC, 2006), youth constitute over 62 percent of the total population, out of which over 50 percent resides in the rural areas. Adesope (1996) in Matthews-Njoku and Ajaero (2007) noted that youths represent the most active segment of the population and the engine that would do most productive work of the society. Youths are the major actors in African agriculture; they make up around 62 percent of the workforce (Kampmann, 1999). In Nigeria there is a growing awareness of the participation of youths in agricultural production as well as their contributions to social and economic development. Youths play vital role in producing various agricultural products such as palm oil, garri, yam, and so on. In fact, the participation of youths in agriculture is sequel to their rural background, which, as noted by Lindley, Crowder and Doron (1996) in Adebayo et al (2006), makes them well suited for professional and technical work in agriculture.

But, Adebayo et al (2006) noted that despite their (youths) rich rural life, farming background and experience, rural youths are yet to actively and productively participate in the development of the nation’s agricultural sector. This is related to the dearth of viable institutional framework for mobilizing, developing and channeling the unique abilities, experiences and aspirations of rural youths towards agriculture. In the same vein, because traditional agriculture in based on hoe and cutlass, CTA (1990) report noted that subsistence agriculture hold no interest or appeal for young people wanting to look on the land nor do they have any intention of following their parents into poverty. The consequential effect, in the opinion of experts, is the untold wastage of potentially relevant agricultural human resources through rural –urban migration of able bodied young men and women. With the emergence of the “oil boom” era in Nigeria and increasing demand for white – collar jobs in the industrial and manufacturing sector which are considered more dignifying, the trend is that youth participation in agricultural productive activities remain obscure and in some cases non existence. The study therefore, examines the attitude of rural youths towards agriculture to ascertain the extent of their involvement in actual agricultural production activities in Sapele LGA of Delta State.

The Nigerian Academic Forum Volume 19 No. 1 November, 2010
Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:
1. Determine the socio-economic characteristics of youths in the study areas.
2. To ascertain the level of youths’ involvement in agricultural activities.
3. To assess the attitude of youths toward agricultural production.
4. To examine the factors hindering youths participation in agricultural activities.
5. To examine the relationship between attitude towards agriculture and level of involvement in agricultural activities.

Methodology
The study was conducted in Sapele Local Government Area, Delta State, Nigeria. Sapele was purposively chosen for the study because it is surrounded by many rural communities which are mainly agrarian. Five communities were randomly selected from the study area and twenty five (25) youths were selected through the various communities’ organizations and associations. This gave total of 125 youths, involved in the study; however 115 interview schedules were useable for analysis. Data were collected through the use of interview schedule and were structured to elicit information on socio-economic variables, attitudes towards agriculture, involvement in agricultural activities and constraints to involvement in agricultural activities. To determine perceived attitude of youths towards agriculture, ten item statements were presented and assessment based on a four point Likert-type rating scale of strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1) with a midpoint of 2.50: mean scores that are equal 2.50 or above were regarded as unfavourable, while scores less than 2.50 were favourable. Involvement in agricultural activities was measured by using the Awareness, participation, Benefit and support (APBS) frame work as used by Obasi and Oguche (1995) in Matthews-Njoku and Ajaero (2007). Participants were given quantitative judgment such that level of involvement is said to be very low if percentage participation indicated by the respondents is between 0-29%, low if 30-44% moderate if 45-59%, high if 60-79% and very high if 80-100%. Constraints to youths involvement in agricultural activities was determined by assessing respondents based on a three point Likert-type rating scale of very serious (3), serious (2) and not serious (1), with a midpoint of 2.0. Mean scores equal to 2.0 or above were regarded as serious and vice versa. Statistical tools used to analyze data include frequency distribution, percentage, mean score and correlation coefficient.

Results and Discussion
Socio-Economic Characteristics
Table 1 show that majority of the respondents (53.9%) were male and a high percentage of the youths were between the ages of 21 and 25 years bracket (73.9%). This is in agreement with Agumagu et al (2006) findings that youth in the age bracket of 21 and 25 years dominates their study areas. The table also shows that majority (52.2%) of the respondents were unmarried and were mainly farmers, respectively. This tally with Matthews – Njoku and Ajaero (2006) finding that 56% and 44% of the respondents in their study were single and married respectively. The result also confirms the fact that agriculture employs a high percentage of youths, especially in the rural areas where the major occupation is agriculture (Kompmann, 1999). Also, 43.5% of the youths had secondary education suggesting that the youths had a moderate level of awareness about agricultural activities as a result of their level of education. Education is important in creating positive mental attitude towards adoption of modern farming innovations (Benor et al, 1997). Most of the respondents were rural dwellers. This placed them in vantage position in the practice of agriculture and makes efficient use of available natural resources to promote food security.

Youths Involvement in Agricultural Activities
Table 2 showed that youths were highly involved in arable crop production (69.56%), farm labour (65.21%) and crop (palm oil) processing (60.86%). Youths were moderately engaged in agric business (47.52%) and poultry production (46.07%); lowly engaged in horticulture (39.13%) and cash crop (34.28%) production and very lowly involved in fish production (12.17%). The finding implies that youths and more involved in crop production and farm labour supply than livestock production. Matthews-Njoku and Ajaero (2007) reported that youths are interested in crop production than livestock, due to the short gestation period of the crop varieties produced, which ensures quick
Youth’s Attitude towards Agriculture

Table 3 shows the mean response on youth’s attitude towards agriculture. Youths’ agreed that farming is stressful (Mean = 3.20), farming is for the less privileged in the society (Mean = 3.08), farming is for the school drop-outs and illiterates (Mean = 2.78); agricultural products attract low prices (Mean= 2.66), farming reduces ones status in the society (Mean = 2.6.4) and that farming in meant fore the old (Mean = 2.64). Overall, majority of the youths showed unfavourable attitude towards agriculture as a livelihood occupation. The result confirms Amalu (1998) assertion that attitudes towards agriculture and agricultural methods have not changed as much as they need to. To worsen matters, he further noted, rural youths have migrated to the cities in growing numbers and have become consumers rather than producers of food. Table 4 shows that 69.6% of the respondents have unfavourable attitude towards agriculture, while 30.4% have favourable towards agriculture in the study area. The implication of the findings is that youths are unfavourably predisposed to participation in agricultural productivity.

Constraints to Youth’s Involvement in Agricultural Activities

Table 5 shows that lack of incentives from government (Means = 2.30), insufficient land (Mean = 2.12), lack of infrastructure in the rural areas (Mean = 2.10) and inadequate training and extension services (Means = 2.02) were perceived serious constraints hindering youth’s involvement in agricultural production activities. The result is in line with Nor and Madukwe (2000) assertion that increased agricultural productivity and enhanced farmers income are only attainable when an effective agricultural extension system is put in place. Lack of infrastructure and essential input also hinders youth’s participation in agricultural and rural development activities (Onuekwusi and Ottah (2006) in Matthews-Njoku and Ajaero, 2007).

Relationship between Youth’s Attitude towards Agriculture and Involvement in Agriculture.

Table 6 shows that youth’s attitude towards agriculture correlated positively and significantly with involvement in agricultural production activities ($r = 0.475$). The significant relationship could be attributed to a number of factors such as institutional deficiencies (death of infrastructures in the rural areas, lack of government support to encourage agriculture, etc) rural – urban migration tendencies, emerging new livelihood interest of youths (which are non – primary productive) generally perceived low and differed reward or feedback of agriculture as a source of livelihood. Farmers attitudes are more likely to correspond with their behaviour; and in most cases, attitude influences a broad range of behaviours (van den Ban and Hawkins, 1996). That majority expressed or exhibited unfavourable attitude towards agriculture as a livelihood activity translates to low or no involvement in agricultural productive activities in the area.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed that though youth’s are involved in some agricultural activities in the area, they generally show unfavourable predisposition to participating in agricultural activities. This was enhanced by some institutional problems such as lack of government support and poor extension services, and lack of social and infrastructural facilities in the rural areas. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

1. There is need for development planning to put adequate structures in place for youths to appreciate their immediate environment. In this regard, government would provide infrastructures and social amenities in the rural areas to encourage youths to live and work in the rural areas.
2. Government should stimulate agricultural production by providing extension services directed at rural youths to improve participation in agricultural activities. In line with this, youth’s empowerment programmes should be intensified while also encouraging youth’s organizations such as young farmers’ clubs.
References


