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Awareness and willingness of youths to participate in agriculture among undergraduates in southwest Nigeria

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Abstract. Globally, youth participation in agriculture has been perceived as one of the vital keys for the revitalization of the economy of many countries. Several studies have focused on the different ways of encouraging youth participation in agriculture. However, little attention has been given to the awareness and the willingness of the youths to participate in agriculture. This study, therefore, examined, among other things the willingness of the youths to participate in agriculture especially among undergraduate. Functionalist theory was employed as the framework, while descriptive survey design was used. Structured questionnaire was administered on 200 students purposively selected from some private universities in Nigeria. The study revealed that majority (79.5%) of the respondents was aware of the need for youths to participate in agriculture. A majority (79.5%) of the undergraduates studied were not willing to participate in agriculture, (68.5%) of the respondents were also not willing to attend seminars to encourage youth participation in agriculture. Agriculture makes one dirty (50.5%) accounted for the major reason for the unwillingness of the undergraduates to participate in agriculture followed by laziness (25.0%). There is a need to reorient Nigerian undergraduates and the youths in general on the importance of their participation in agriculture.

1. Introduction

The discovery of oil at Oloibiri in Bayelsa state in 1965 marked a decline turn in the participation of not only the youths but also the government of Nigeria in agriculture [1]. Agriculture which used to be the main hub of the economy of Nigeria was abandoned for the huge sums of money that was generated from the oil boom. Nevertheless the drastic decline in the price of oil across the globe coupled with the total neglect of agriculture may be responsible for the massive food insecurity, unemployment and high poverty rate being experienced not only in Nigeria but also in most developing countries across Sub-Saharan Africa [1].

Governments all over the world are deeply convinced that youths participation in agriculture will go a long way if not totally eradicate among other things unemployment and food insecurity as well as provide abundance of food for highly populated countries like Nigeria [2]. Although these expectations are right and attainable, one of the major hindrances depend on the awareness and willingness of these youths who are supposed to be the major drivers behind these noble objectives towards participation in agriculture.

Although many scholars ([3], [4], [5]) have argued that the solutions to unemployment and food insecurity depends on the enormous participation of youths in agriculture however this study proposes that there is need to examine the willingness of these youths as well as their awareness of the urgent

need to revive the agricultural sector in order to avert the looming famine. It is imperative to ascertain if the average Nigerian youth is genuinely interested in agriculture or whether they are being compelled by unemployment and other socio-economic factors to engage in agriculture. This may have implications on the attainment of the vision of food sufficiency. This study therefore intends to examine the willingness and awareness of undergraduate about youth participation in agriculture.

This study worries that the laudable projects like The Commercial Agriculture Credit Scheme (CACs)—CBN Agric Loan, Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), Interest Draw-back scheme, among others embarked upon by government and non-governmental organizations with the Agricultural Credit Support Scheme, the Nigerian Incentive-Based Risk Sharing in Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL) aim of encouraging youth participation in agriculture may amount to a waste of time if the youths themselves are not aware of the urgency and importance of these demand for their increased participation in agriculture. The consciousness of the youths to this national call therefore demands an interrogation and re-assessment.

Furthermore, this study also speculates that most youths who are currently studying Agriculture across Nigerian universities may not have applied for agriculture as their first choice of course of study. Some may have been offered agriculture as alternatives to their preferred course of study, which they were compelled to accept because of the fear of losing university admissions for that year. Similarly, most students who study agriculture do so because they are being given scholarships and tuition free scheme as obtainable in some higher institutions of learning. This implies that most of these youths coincidentally found themselves in departments of agriculture. They did not intentionally or consciously plan to study or participate in agriculture. This unwillingness to study agriculture may have implications on the practical application of the course of study.

Additionally, in many developing countries, young farmers are predominantly overlooked in policies and programs [6]. This could be as a result of the inability of farmers' organizations and co-operatives to represent their interests. As a result, rural youth including young farmers, may have lower aspirations than their urban peers. These factors coupled with lack of arable land, finance among others have been identified by many scholars [7] as major factors that may militate against youth participation in agriculture. This study is of the view that although these aforementioned factors may be predators of lack of youth participation, however the awareness and willingness of these youths to participate in agriculture are primary concerns that must be addressed before external factors as established in previous studies could properly be resolved.

Furthermore, [8] revealed that youths between the ages of 15-24, account for about 18% of the universal population and over half of them live in rural areas of developing countries. This implies that if properly harnessed, this large population of youth who already live in the rural areas are capable of a complete agrarian revolution cumulating into heightened food security and economic sustainability. However, there are concerns that the youths themselves may either not be aware that they are capable of such massive turnaround of the Nigeria economy or may have a different perception to these generally acclaimed solution to food insecurity. Hence it becomes imperative to understand the level of awareness, as well as the willingness of these youths to participate in agriculture.

2. Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on the functionalist theory. The functionalist perspective is based largely on the works of Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, and Robert Merton. According to functionalism, society is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. Functionalism emphasizes a societal equilibrium. To them a disruption in the order of the social system causes disequilibrium in the entire system. Thus for the society to attain stability, every part of it must be functional. According to Durkheim, society should be analyzed and described in terms of functions. Society is a system of interrelated parts where no one part can function without the other. These parts make up the whole of society. If one part changes, it has an impact on society as a whole.

Therefore, this study considers that functionalist theory is very applicable to the understanding of the willingness and awareness of youths about their participating in agriculture. Like the functionalist posited, the economy of Nigeria is presently dependent on agriculture, this explains the numerous

programmes and policies of government geared toward the promotion of the agricultural sector. However, if the youths who are expected to drive these laudable plans are found to be dysfunctional, this will definitely disrupt the agricultural sector, thereby causing disequilibrium in the sector and by extension the Nigerian economy.

3. Methodology

Survey research design was employed in the study, and the functionalist theory provided the framework for the paper. A total of 200 undergraduates were systematically selected across different levels of study in five private universities. These universities, were purposefully selected from Ekiti, Kwara, Ogun, Osun and Oyo state (One private university per state). Forty undergraduates from each private university were selected using a systematic sampling technique and their college register as the sample frame. Five Colleges (Agriculture, Social Sciences, Arts Engineering and Pure and Applied science) were purposefully selected from each of the private universities for the study, 8 students were then selected systematically from each college, using the college register. The participants cut across all ages and religious affiliations as long as the participant was an undergraduate in these purposefully selected universities. A well-structured questionnaire was the major instrument that was used to elicit information from the respondents. The questionnaire comprises both closed and open-ended questions designed to measure the variables of the objectives. A total of 200 copies of the questionnaire were administered on the participants.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20, was used for the data analysis, the results of the analysis were presented on table and reflected on frequency counts, and simple percentage. The ethical issues surrounding social research were duly observed by the researcher. The principle of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, among others was fully emphasized during the study.

4. Results

4.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percent
Age	15-20years	178	89.0
	21-25years	22	11
	Total	200	100
Gender	Male	44	22.0
	Female	156	78.0
	Total	200	100
Ethnic group	Yoruba	148	74.0
	Igbo	24	12.0
	Hausa	28	14.0
	Total	200	100
Marital status	Single	200	100
Religion	Christianity	169	84.5

	Muslim	18	9.0
	Traditional	13	6.5
	Total	200	100
Level	100	71	35.5
	200	32	16.0
	300	57	28.5
	400	40	20.0
	Total	200	100

(Sources: Fieldwork, 2019)

Table 1 revealed that majority (89.0%) of the undergraduates who participated in the study was within the age range of 15- 20year. Majority (35.5%) of the participants were also in 100 levels. The distribution of respondents by gender showed that more female (78.0%) students participated in the study compared to male (22.0%) student. This could be because the female undergraduates were more willing to participate in the study than their male counterparts as also shown in [9].

4.2 Awareness of the need for youth participation in Agriculture

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by awareness of the demand for youth participation in agriculture

Category	Frequency	Percent
Aware	159	79.5
Not Aware	41	20.5
Total	200	100

(Sources: Fieldwork, 2019)

On the awareness of the need for the youths to participation in agriculture, table 2 indicated that (79.5%) respondents were aware of the need for youth participation in agriculture, while (20.5%) were not aware about this need. This implies that majority of the respondents were aware of the importance of youth participation in agriculture.

Table 3. Distribution of respondent by sources of information on the awareness of Youth participation

Category	Frequency	Percent
Radio	12	6.0
Television	111	55.5
Newspapers	13	6.5
Online social media	38	19.0
Community leaders	4	2.0
Government Programs	22	11.0
Total	200	100

(Sources: Fieldwork, 2019)

On the sources of information on the awareness of the need for youth's participation in agriculture, table 3 revealed that majority (55.5%) of the students received their information from the

television, while community leaders ranked least among the sources of information identified in the study.

Table 4. Distribution of respondents by which aspect of agriculture they are conversant

Category	Frequency	Percent
Crop farming	40	20
Animal farming	135	67.5
Agricultural extension services	0	0
Food processing and packaging	25	12.5
Total	200	100

(Sources: Fieldwork, 2019)

Table 4 indicated that Agricultural extension ranked least among the aspects of agriculture known to the respondents. However, majority (67.5%) of the respondents were very conversant with animal farming, while (20%) of the respondents were aware of crop farming, also, (12.5%) respondents are aware about food processing and packaging.

4.3 Willingness to participate in Agriculture

Table 5. Distribution of respondents by willingness to participate in agriculture

Category	Frequency	Percent%
Willing to participate	41	20.5
Not willing to participate	159	79.5
Total	200	100

(Sources: Fieldwork, 2019)

Table 5 depicted that (79.5%) of the respondent are not willing to participate in agriculture, while only (20.5%) indicated their willingness to participate in agriculture. This was predominantly because of their perception that the youths should be allowed to explore other means of livelihood rather than agriculture as shown in table 9 below.

Table 6. Distribution of respondent by willingness to attend seminars to Increase youth participation in agriculture

Category	Frequency	Percent
Willing to attend seminar	63	31.5
Not willing to attend seminars	137	68.5
Total	200	100

(Sources: Fieldwork, 2019)

Table 6 revealed that (68.5%) of the undergraduates are not willing to attend seminars to improve youth participation in agriculture, while (31.5%) of the respondents are willing to attend seminars to increase the participation of youths in agriculture. Again this could also be attributed to their lack of interest in agriculture as depicted in table 10 below.

Table 7. Distribution of respondent by the aspect of agriculture they may be willing to participate

Category	Frequency	Percent
Crop farming	51	25.5
Fish farming	68	34.0
Poultry farming	59	29.5
Livestock farming	22	11.0
Agricultural extension services	0	0
Total	200	100

(Sources: Fieldwork, 2019)

Table 7 revealed that only (25.5%) respondents are willing to participate in crop farming, while (34.0%) of the respondents decided that they would prefer to participate in fish farming if given a choice. Similarly, (29.5%) of the respondents would go into poultry farming, while (11.0%) of the undergraduates are willing to go into livestock farming. None of the respondents chose agricultural extension services as a viable aspect of farming they would want to practice.

Tables 8. Distribution of respondents by preference of degree of Participation in agriculture

Category	Frequency	Percent
Full-time participation	41	20.5
Part-time participation	96	48.0
None of the above	63	31.5
Total	200	100

(Sources: Fieldwork, 2019)

Table 8 indicated that only (20.5%) of the respondents agreed that they would be ready to go into full time participation in agriculture, while almost half (48.0%) of the undergraduates who participated in the study prefer a part-time participation in agriculture. However, (31.5%) of the respondents were undecided on their degree of participation in agriculture. Again this reflects reluctance to participate in agriculture on the part of the youth.

Table 9. Distribution of respondents by perceptions about youth's participation in Agriculture

Category	Frequency	Percent
Youths participation in agriculture is very vital	20	10
Agriculture should be left for the elderly	10	5
Youth participation in agriculture will provide employment	75	37.5
Youths should be allowed to explore other means of livelihood other than agriculture	95	47.5
Total	200	100

(Sources: Fieldwork, 2019)

Table 9 reveals that although a negligible proportion of the respondents (5%) posited that agriculture should be left for the elderly. (47.5%) of the respondents perceived that youths should be allowed to explore other means of livelihood rather than agriculture. However, (37.5%) of the respondents posited that youth's participation in agriculture will provide employment opportunities.

Table 10. Distribution of respondent by reasons for their unwillingness to participate in agriculture

Category	Frequency	Percent
Lack of access to land	32	16.0
Lack of interest	94	47.0
Lack of finance	24	12.0
Laziness	50	25.0
Low profit prospects	0	0
Total	200	100

(Sources: Fieldwork, 2019)

Table 10 explained the reasons for the undergraduate's unwillingness to participate in agriculture. Lack of interest (47.0%) in agriculture accounted for one of the major reason for low youth participation in agriculture. This is followed by laziness (25.0%) lack of access to land (16.0%).

Table 11. Distribution of respondents by the opinion that agriculture should be made a compulsory course in tertiary institutions

Category	Frequency	Percent%
It should be made compulsory	41	20.5
It should not be made compulsory	114	57.0
Youths should be allowed to decide if they want to participate or not	45	22.5
Total	200	100

(Sources: Fieldwork, 2019)

Majority of the respondents (57.0%) were of the view that agriculture should not be made compulsory in schools while only (20.5%) posited that agriculture should be made compulsory students in tertiary institutions.

Tables 12. Distribution of respondents by other reasons for not participating in agriculture

Category	Frequency	Percent
Stressful	29	14.5
Dirty	101	50.5
Unprofitable	24	12.0
No land	0	0
No access to funds	46	23.0
No access to farm machinery	0	0
Low market demand for agricultural products	0	0
Poor yields	0	0
Total	200	100

(Sources: Fieldwork, 2019)

Surprisingly, negligible issues such as agriculture is dirty and stressful (50.5% and 14.5%) respectively, are the major reasons for lack of youth participation in agriculture. However, (23.0%) of the respondents indicated that lack of access to funds was among the reason why youths do not participate in agriculture. Factors such as lack of access to farm machinery, low market demand for agricultural products and poor yields were not considered by the respondents as major limitations to youth participation in agriculture.

5. Discussion of Findings

This study revealed that majority of undergraduates was aware of the current demand by government on the need for youth's participation in agriculture. This is in line with the position of [10] that knowledge is an important factor to establish an interest of the youths in agriculture. According to [10], knowledge can lead to more skills for the youths as a preparation to establish their own business. Agricultural education and training are important for economic development, particularly in improving the quality and increasing the quantity of future entrepreneurs. However, this study submits that this high level of awareness about youth participation in agriculture among the undergraduates studied did not translate into increased willingness or high rate of participation in agriculture by the youths.

Furthermore, many of the respondents stated that the main source of their awareness was from the television while the least was community leaders. This implies that the Community leaders who are supposedly closer to the farm lands and the youths have not been active in communicating this clarion call to the youths. Similarly [7] also observed that rural people are always associated with agriculture activities including contract farming. Consequently, community leaders who are closer to the rural areas are expected to spearhead the move to encourage the younger generation to participate in agriculture.

Agricultural extension ranked least among the aspects of agriculture the youths are conversant with. Agricultural extension workers are farmers who are responsible for the dissemination of information especially with regards to recent and improved methods of farming. This study posits that the low knowledge about Agricultural extension among the youths is a clear indication of the lack of impact of this aspect of Agriculture. This has implication on the rate at which information is or will be disseminated to not only the youths but to farmers across Nigeria. This also collaborates the proponent of functionalist theory that the inability of this aspect of agriculture to function well, will definitely affect the stability of the entire system.

On the willingness of the youths to participate in agriculture, an overwhelming majority of the respondents stated that they are not willing to participate in agriculture. Many of the undergraduates are of the opinion that they should be given the opportunity to explore options other than agriculture. Similarly a good number of the respondents were also not willing to attend seminars to encourage youth participation in agriculture; these imply lack of interest to participate in agriculture. This situation is worrisome, considering the prominent role that youths are expected to play in agriculture as also noted by [1] that youths are very important resources for every nation especially for sustaining agricultural

productivity which is an important sector for development and the youths being important stakeholders in the development ladder need to be included in policy formulation.

[11], also observed that participation and willingness entails the ability of individuals to have an input in the decision making process and to play a role in measures aimed at improving their quality of life. These seminars backed up by strong will-power will provide platforms for youth to actively participate in policy making in agriculture. However, irrespective of how attractive agricultural policies in favour of the youth may be, their unwillingness to participate in agriculture will be a major hindrance to the sustainability of such policies.

Furthermore, although, the respondents agreed that youth participation in agriculture is a necessity, however, in reality can we say that there is currently high participation in agriculture by Nigerian youths? This complements the findings of [12] that agricultural practice in Nigeria is dominated by the aged. Furthermore, efforts have been made by high agrarian based institutions of learning like Landmark University to make participation in agriculture compulsory for all students irrespective of the student's discipline. However this study discovered that the student would have preferred that participation in agriculture be made optional among the undergraduates especially for students in non-agricultural disciplines.

Hence majority of the respondents would have preferred other options to agriculture. This further depicts the lack of interest to participate in agriculture among the youths. This has a very negative implication, especially on the numerous laudable projects embarked upon by the government and other non-governmental organisation to encourage Nigerian youths to participate in agriculture [14]. Hence if there is no willingness to participate in agriculture on the part of youths, these programmes will amount to a total waste of time and resources. Lack of interest accounted to the major reason behind the unwillingness of youths to participate in agriculture among the respondents studied. This is consistent with the findings of [2] that most Nigerian youths are not interested in agriculture despite their potentials. Major factors such as lack of arable land, lack of finance among others were not even selected by the respondents as major impediments to their participation in agriculture. This contradicts the submissions of [6] that Nigeria's agricultural sector is bedevilled with several challenges such as lack of access to markets and credits, low level of technology especially mechanization, inadequate post-harvest infrastructure (storage, processing, transport), low uptake of research findings by stakeholders and limited availability of improved technological packages especially planting materials and certified seeds. Although this situation may be true, however this paper argues that the primary challenge in agriculture is the general lack of interest in agriculture by the youths. This has serious implications on Nigeria's agricultural plans and policies as well as the food security, considering that "the youths are the leaders of tomorrow".

Negligible and flimsy excuses such as agriculture is unfashionable, people will look down on me, agriculture will make me look too old and poor, it will make me loose respect among others were some of the reasons given by the respondent for not participating in agriculture. Only less than half of the respondents even perceived that Youth participation in agriculture will provide employment. This implies that if the leaders of tomorrow fail to uphold agriculture which has been identified by most experts as the base of the country's economy, then the hope for the revitalization of Nigeria's economy is bleak.

This finding is consistent with the Functionalist theory which likens the society to an organism that is made up various parts, where the inability of one part to function will affect the entire system. Similarly the inability of the Nigerian youths to participate in agriculture will go a long way in affecting the economy of the country. Furthermore, [15] and [13] also posited that young people are noted for their energy, enthusiasm and creativity which have been recognized as being part of a nation's greatest asset. When these positive attributes are effectively promoted and utilized, youths will play a key role in improving agricultural productivity and sustaining farming systems. Hence there is need to re-orientate Nigerian youths in order to maximize their energy particularly in agriculture.

6. Conclusions

The study concludes that majority of the university undergraduates who constitute a greater percentage of the Nigerian youths are not willing to participate in agriculture, despite their awareness of its benefits to the Nigerian economy. This has direct implications on the efforts being made by government, non-

governmental organizations, community leaders and parents, among others. Consequently, the laudable agricultural policies and programmes geared towards encouraging youth participation in agriculture may amount to a total waste of time and resources if this problem is not addressed. Increased youth participation in agriculture coupled with the vast arable land and diverse human and material resources that characterize Nigeria as geographical location will cumulate to massive economic reform. Hence there is need to re-orient Nigerian youths on the importance of their participation in agriculture.

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