

Towards Achieving Food Security in Africa: Meeting the Sustainable Needs of Crop Farm Youth in Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract: This study was designed to investigate the perceived needs of farm youth for them to be sustained in crop farming business in Southwest Nigeria. Their socio-economic situation and how they were faring in the business were examined. Structured interview schedule was used to elicit information from 353 crop farm youth randomly and proportionately selected across the eight farm communities in the study area. Also, unstructured interviews were conducted to probe into some of the issues that were not satisfactorily buttressed during the administration of structured interview. Frequency counts, percentages, means, pie chart and bar chart were used to summarize the data collected. The study revealed, among others, that over 75% of the farm youth were farm owners with over eleven years in the farming business, however, a good percentage found themselves in the business out of their volition. Moreover, for them to be sustained in the farming business, the following major sustainable needs were identified: credit facility, subsidy on farm inputs, incentives, recognition on the job, drinkable water supply, health care and electricity. The extent to which these major sustainable needs could be met would immeasurably contribute to the point to which the food security could be achieved, particularly in the country and Africa at large.

Key words: Crop farming activities; Sustainable needs; Farm youth; Food security.

INTRODUCTION

In the past, agriculture was the mainstay of Nigeria economy, a period when the sector was taken as a matter of importance, just as the nation was blessed with abundant natural resources. However, the situation has changed since the advent of oil boom era in the early seventies, which has made the country to shift her attention away from agriculture. Consequently, it is now becoming increasingly difficult to get food on the table of the common man. In recognition of this, drastic steps need to be taken to integrate the physically and mentally active individuals in the revitalization of the agricultural sector if food must return to the table. This category of people is the youth, who are unfortunately seen as national burden and in fact they remained untapped rural resources^[6,9,17,20]. Sustainability of farm youth's participation in agricultural development cannot be overemphasized as they (the farm youth) were born on the farm, socialized into farming and found to have developed adequate ruggedness suitable for farming, right from their tender ages^[11,16,17]. In the context of this paper, the farm youth are young men and women between the ages of thirteen and thirty who are living in the farming community and actively involved in crop farming activities. This category of population acquired traditional farming skills and knowledge, which are not significantly

utilized to the utmost advantage of the agricultural sector. Their participation in agricultural development is very important because they have potential to contribute actively and productively in all significant aspect of agriculture which includes crop production, livestock rearing and fish production^[20]. The males have been found to be more engaged in agricultural production than their female counterparts who are more involved in processing and selling of commodities produced by their male folk. Hence, the youth participation in agricultural activities must be enhanced and sustained as a necessary endeavour for ensuring food security in Nigeria.

In the Southwest Nigeria, many farm youth engage in crop production while their counterparts in riverine areas are mostly fishermen. The intrinsic interest of their counterparts in the Northern part of Nigeria is livestock rearing, which almost put nomadic education into an absolute failure. This is because they channeled their interest more into herdsmanhip than to other functions^[19]. It is generally observed that many of the farm youth, prior to the peak of their youthful life, tend to be satisfied with their earnings from agriculture because there was little or no socio-economic pressure on them. They, however, became less satisfied as more demand placed on their meager earnings from agricultural activities could no longer sustain their livelihood. In addition, there is a pull action from the urban centres where they could earn more

and enjoy better social infrastructure which are not available in the rural areas. Consequently, the aged men who are less energetic with low innovation proneness are left in the rural areas carrying out unproductive agricultural activities. Their inefficiency and unproductiveness constitute a bane to agricultural development in Nigeria.

However, it is undoubtedly clear that Nigeria could not achieve sustainable food security without the active participation of the farm youth in agriculture. Food security, according to^[7] is a reliable access to food in sufficient quantity and quality for a healthy and productive life for all individuals. The drudgery in agriculture had limited the farm youth participation aside the inability to meet their production needs. Other reasons for this may be due to farm hazards, inadequate extension education, poor farm input, poor infrastructure, storage facilities, processing facilities, marketing facilities. The influence of these factors might have contributed to their reduced satisfaction in crop farming; hence their participation could not be sustained^[5]. However, for food and raw materials to be available at the required quantity to meet local and export demands, the production and sustainable needs of rural youths must be met so as to check their influx into urban centres where they constitute socio-economic burden on the nation and more importantly to boost agricultural production and food security in Nigeria.

Need has been conceptualized by several authors^[5,11] as the gap that exists between the prevailing situation and what the situation should be. It is the difference between what it is and what should be, or the difference between what exist and what is desired. Sustainable needs of farm youth in the context of this paper are, therefore, the secondary or supplementary basic necessities which are not directly employed on the farm by the youth but their availability would enhance continuous and active participation of the youth in crop farming activities. The current prevailing situation of the farm youth has to be enhanced in order to satisfy their desired situation as a strategy to achieving the goal of food security in the country.

Theoretically, farm youth are social being and essential component of the social system whose sustainable needs on the farm follow the hierarchy established by Maslow^[13]. It is assumed that these needs must be adequately satisfied before they could be motivated and sustained to participate productively in crop farming for assuring food security. When these needs are met, their interest in crop farming is expected to be positively influenced, though those with intrinsic interest will participate productively at low level of satisfaction of these needs. The extent to which these needs could be satisfied however, varies from one individual to another depending on their level of interest vis a vis their socio-economic situation.

Against this background, it is certainly clear that the farm youth could not be effectively sustained in the bid for rural transformation vis-à-vis food security in Nigeria without adequately addressing their perceived sustainable needs. Hence, this study was designed to identify the sustainable needs for the farm youth to be kept in crop farming activities. Specifically, it investigated the socio-economic situation of the farm youth involved in crop production activities; examined how the youth are faring in their crop farming business and; determined from the farm youths' perspective what they would need for them to be sustained in crop farming.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in Ogun State, one of the leading agrarian States in Southwest Nigeria with about 32 percent youth population highly involved in crop farming, which is predominantly practiced. The major agricultural produce in the State include: *Oryza sativa* (Rice), *Zea mays* (Maize), *Vigna spp.* (Cowpea), *Manihot spp.* (Cassava), *Dioscorea spp.* (Yam), *Musa spp.* (Plantain/Banana), *Citrus spp.* (Orange), fruity and leafy vegetables, *Theobroma spp.* (Cocoa), *Saccharium spp.* (Sugar cane), *Ananas spp.* (Pineapple), *Carica spp.* (Pawpaw), *Kola spp.* (Kolanut), *Elaeis spp.* (Oil palm) etc. The rural settlement in the State is viewed as a compact settlement with a resident population of not more than 20,000 people characterized by a fairly high agricultural labour content of at least 40 percent with few basic amenities. With this view, about 63.74 percent of the State's estimated population of about 3.2 million in 1998 were said to be living and working in the rural areas^[15].

One Local Government Area (LGA) with the highest rural population was purposively selected from each of the four divisions of the State viz: Ijebu North, Remo North, Abeokuta North and Yewa South, respectively. Two rural communities in which many farm youth are actively involved in crop farming were purposively selected from each of the selected LGAs, making a total of eight rural communities (Aba Paanu, Agunboye, Akaka Remo, Odofin, Isaga Orile, Olorunda, Idogo, Eredo). About 7.2 percent sample of the estimated population of the farm youth between the age of 13 and 30 were randomly selected from each of the eight selected rural communities. This makes a total of three hundred and fifty three (353) farm youth interviewed for the study.

Pre-tested and validated structured interview schedule was designed and used to elicit information from the farm youth under the following section: socio-economic characteristics of the farm youth; reasons for engaging in crop farming business; and the sustainable needs of farm youths for them to be kept in crop farming. Also, unstructured interviews were conducted to probe

into some of the issues that were not satisfactorily buttressed during the administration of structured interview. Simple descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency counts, percentages, mean, pie chart and bar chart were used to summarize the data collected.

Social situation of the farm youth: The farm youth were categorised according to their gender, age, years of formal education, marital status, mode of living, career aspiration, length of residence, years of farming experience, ownership of farm, sources of finance, access to non-farming activities and level of income in order to understand and discuss their social situation (Table1). Also, the extent to which the farm youth depended on their parents for livelihood were established aside their level of external orientation.

Male farm youth (74.22%) were found to be more engaged in the crop farming activities than their female folks (25.78%), with majority (over 70 %) between the ages of 22 and 30 years. The higher percentage of male involvement in farming occupation is in consonance with the findings of Jibowo^[10] as earlier reported. This shows that male gender is still dominating the farming business in the study area. This situation is not unexpected as many female farmers are still traditionally finding it difficult to personally get hold of farmland. About 90 percent of the youth were literates who had had between 6 and 15 years of formal education. Others had either dropped out of school at a particular level of their education or claimed to have not attended schools at all. High level of literacy among the farm youth in this study area would immeasurably contribute to their proneness to adoption of improved farm technologies for enhancing agricultural development. This agrees with the study of Marsh and Coleman^[12] and Adewale and Adekunle^[2] who found that more years of schooling were associated with higher adoption rate of improved technology than fewer years of schooling. The latter through the studies carried out on farm youth level of use of improved rice technology in Ogbomoso, Southwest Nigeria concluded that farmers' level of schooling showed positive and significant relationship with their use of improved technology. Also, Obibuaku's^[14] observation further corroborated the fact that farm population, which has higher concentration of young people accept new ideas more rapidly than the older people who are influenced by their low level of literacy.

It was further revealed in the study that 50.99 percent of the youth were single, while 47.03 percent were married. It was, however, generally observed that most of those who had attained the marital age but still remained single did so because of their inability to meet up with the anticipated socio-economic responsibilities associated with marriage. This is very much in agreement with the findings of Torimiro^[18] on the study conducted on the

Table 1: Frequency distribution of respondents by social variables (N= 353)

Social variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	262	74.22
Female	91	25.78
Age		
13-17	48	13.60
18-21	52	14.73
22-26	74	20.96
27-30	179	50.71
Years of formal education		
No formal education	11	3.12
Between 1 and 5	07	1.98
Between 6 and 10	63	17.85
Between 11 and 15	272	77.05
Marital Status		
Single	180	50.99
Divorced	04	1.13
Widowed	03	0.85
Married	166	47.03
Mode of living		
Living with relatives	09	2.55
Living with friends	22	6.23
Living with parents	121	34.28
Living alone	201	56.94

Source: Field survey, 2004.

same age group. Over 56 percent of the youth were living alone, while 34.28 percent were still living with their parents. It was further revealed through unstructured interview that most of the male respondents separated from their parents as soon as they were able to own and manage a relatively large farm size that could generate money to meet their petty socio-economic needs. The study revealed that majority (over 70 %) of the farm youth had never depended on their parents for accommodation, feeding and clothing and 64.87 percent had never depended on them for farming. However, 86.97 percent of the youth indicated that they had always depended on their parents for their formal education.

Further investigation through unstructured interview disclosed that most of the parents were responsible for the farm youth education from their tender age prior to their youthful age. This must have contributed to the high number of years (between 11 and 15) of education recorded by over 77 percent of the youth.

Concerning the external orientation of the youth, the study also revealed that all the respondents have travelled to other places outside their communities and they have a significant exposure that would make them to be conversant with what is going on in their immediate communities. For instance, about 94.05 percent of the respondents claimed that they travelled frequently to their neighboring communities, while 88.67 percent claimed to have travelled to other communities in the local government and 73.94 percent claimed to have travelled to other communities outside their local government but within the state. The study also revealed that majority (88.95%) of the respondents has travelled to communities.

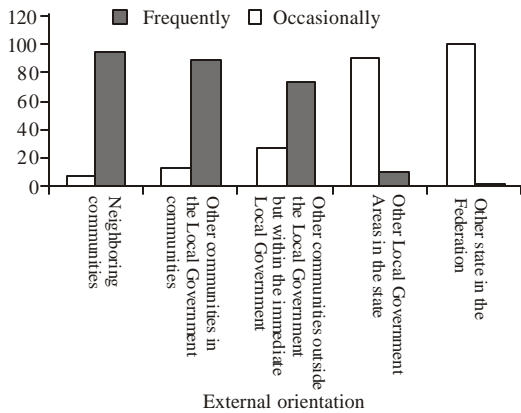


Fig. 1: Distribution of farm youth according to their external orientation

in other local government areas within the state and those who have travelled to other states in the country were 97.45 percent (Fig. 1). The result of the unstructured interview further buttressed that majority (94.05%) of the respondents travelled frequently to neighboring communities because of the routine market activities among communities which is usually at interval of five days.

Farm youth and crop farming business: According to information in Table 2 and Fig. 2, it was interesting to note that while majority (over 75 %) of the farm youth were farm owners with over eleven years in the farming business, a good percentage found themselves in the business against their volition. For instance, 35 percent claimed that they were forced into the business because of the prevailing economic hardship in the country, 51 percent had no other means of livelihood than to engage in farming. This could further be explained as over 77 percent of the youth confessed that they were not originally aspired to go into farming business.

In the contemporary Nigeria however, it is generally observed that most young people prefer businesses in other sectors to agriculture. Their inability to source enough capital could be a major reason for this development, while some might not just be interested in the occupation, Gbadamosi and Akindele-Oscar⁴¹, established that external influence, extrinsic reward, self expression and people oriented value play equal role in influencing the choice of agriculture as a career. The study further revealed that none of the respondents had access to farming machineries which has made them to be operating at a very primitive level with its attendant implications of low productivity and high drudgery.

On how they got money to finance their farm business, 73.37 percent claimed that they financed their farming projects through self finance, while few others, about 24 percent, claimed that they enjoyed the financial

Table 2: Frequency distribution of respondents by farming business information (N= 353)

Farming business information	Frequency	Percentage
Career aspiration		
Non-farming	272	77.05
Farming related	38	10.77
Pure farming	43	12.18
Years of farming experience		
Between one and five	19	5.38
Between six and ten	50	4.16
Between eleven and fifteen	73	20.68
Between sixteen and twenty	32	9.07
Above twenty	179	50.71
Ownership of Farm		
Non-farm owner	85	24.08
Farm owner	268	75.92
*Source(s) of finance		
Self finance	259	73.37
Parents	87	24.65
Family	15	4.25
Friends	32	9.07
Banks	01	0.28
Cooperatives	90	25.50
Access to non farming activities		
No	46	13.03
Yes	307	86.97
+Level of income in naira (N) /annum		
Below ₦ 88, 949.56	117	33.14
Between ₦ 88, 949.56-176,376.22	165	46.74
Above ₦ 176, 376.22	71	20.11

Mean income = ₦132, 662.89

Standard deviation = ₦43, 713.33

* Multiple responses; + ₦ N140:00 = \$1:00, Source: Field survey, 2004.

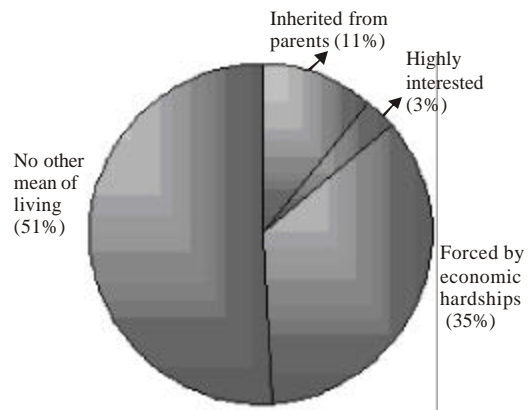


Fig. 2: Farm youth's reason for going into farming

support of their parents and/or their co-operative groups (Table 2).

Over 86 percent engaged in non-farming activities in order to complement their farming endeavour as the farming business alone could not support their livelihood. Investigation into the income made from the farm business revealed a mean income of ₦132, 662.89 per annum. About 46.74 percent earned between ₦ 88, 949.56 and ₦ 176, 376.22 (between about \$644 and \$1,278) per annum. Using the US\$2 a day poverty line (ILO, 2001),

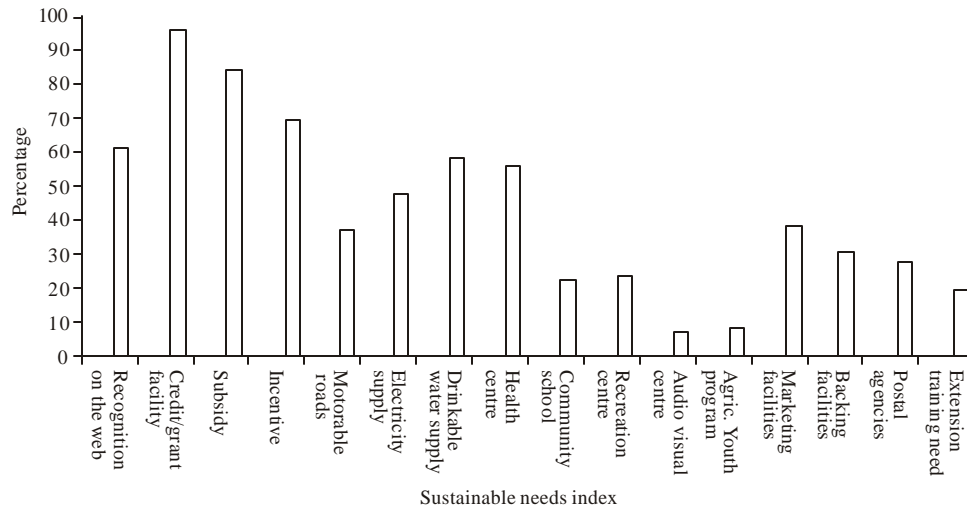


Fig. 3: Distribution of farm youth according to their needs for sustainability on the farm

this situation, by and large, may have implication for the youth economic survival.

Farm youth perceived sustainable needs on the farm: Sixteen items were indicated to be highly needed by the farm youth for them to be sustained in crop farming business. Bars in Fig. 3 shows that credit or grant facility was ranked highest by 95.18 percent of the respondents, followed by subsidy on farm inputs (83.85%), incentives (69.12%), recognition on the job (61.19%), drinkable water supply (57.51%), health centre (54.96%), electricity supply (47.31%), marketing facility (37.68%), motorable roads (36.54%), banking facility (30.03%), postal agency (27.20%), recreation centre (23.51%), community school (21.25%), extension training (18.98%), agricultural youths programmes (7.37%) and audio-visual centre(6.52%).

This was further corroborated by data in Table 3 as the farm youth ranked credit or grant facility, subsidy on farm inputs, incentives, recognition on the job, drinkable water supply, health centre, electricity supply, banking facilities, storage facilities, marketing facilities and motorable road as their major needs. Other sustainable needs indicated by the youth in the ranking – order include postal agency, extension training or training needs, processing facilities, recreation centre, agricultural youths programme, schools located in their community and audio - visual centre.

The farm youth socio-economic situation will apparently be enhanced by meeting their financial needs for farm investment through easy access to credit/grant facility and subsidy, which could be facilitated through various governmental and non-governmental agencies saddled with agricultural development in the country. In addition, Ijere^[6] was of the opinion that the potentials of farm youth could be fully exploited to the country’s advantage if adequate incentives could be made available

Table 3: Distribution of farm youth by rank order of sustainable needs in crop farming activities

Crop farming activities	Mean ranking of sustainable needs in crop farming	Rank (N)
Credit or grant facility	3.9462	1
Subsidy	3.8074	2
Incentive	3.6204	3
Recognition on the job	3.5977	4
Drinkable water supply	3.5354	5
Health centre	3.4873	6
Electricity supply	3.2975	7
Banking facility	3.2578	8
Marketing facilities	3.2521	9
Motorable roads	3.1586	10
Postal agency	3.0907	11
Extension training	3.0765	12
Recreation centre	3.0255	13
Agricultural youths programme	2.9008	14
Schools located in their community	2.8074	15
Audio - visual centre	2.7904	16

Source: Field survey, 2004

to them in their various farming endeavours. Generally, in Nigeria of today, farmers are not given adequate recognition in the society; they are usually looked down upon and naturally categorized as those in chronic poverty.

Meeting the economic aspect of the sustainable needs of farm youth would place them in a vintage position for a better recognition in the society. Also, the pull factors into the urban centre, which have been found^[1] to be the presence of a relatively functional social and infra-structural facilities (such as drinkable water supply, health centre, electricity supply, marketing facility, motorable roads, banking facility, postal agency, recreation centre, community school and audio-visual centre) if adequately provided in the rural areas could greatly contribute to the youth sustainability on the farm. Although, unstructured interview further revealed that most of the youth would not want to stay on the farm if they have a better alternative!

Conclusion: Strengthening the farm youth as relevant and significant actors in the traditional rural – based agricultural economy is a must if the food security as envisioned by the African stakeholders is to be realized^[7]. Meeting the sustainable needs of the farm youth for enhancing food security in the country must, as a matter of policy, consider the option that would facilitate and encourage their retention on the farm or their return to the farm in order to develop into new and modern farmers as well as improve the living conditions in the rural areas. Also, as a matter for immediate consideration, realistic interventionist’s programmes that would re-orientate the farm youth and facilitate their realization of their potentials must be embarked upon by the various extension institutions in order to re-awaken the muscles for sustainability of the rural and agricultural sector. This would, in the long run, foster a smooth transmission of farming business from the aged farmers to the young farmers, ensure continuity of farming and sustainability of the agricultural sector supported by the vibrant population and consequently, realize the vision of assuring food security particularly in the country and in Africa at large.

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