

ASSESSMENT OF RURAL YOUTHS' PARTICIPATION IN YOUTHS' AGRICULTURAL ENTREPRENEURS PROGRAMME (YAGEP) IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study assessed rural youths' participation in the Youths Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) in Delta State, Nigeria. The sample consisted of 100 youth plantain farmers selected using a purposive sampling procedure and a simple random sampling technique. Primary data were collected through copies of a well-structured questionnaire. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics of multiple regression analysis. Majority of the respondents were males within the age bracket of 25 - 31, married, had tertiary education with farming experience of more than 15 years, and cultivated farm size of between 0.1-1.0 hectare with 1-5 extension contacts in a season, participation of respondents was to moderate extent. The major problems affecting the rural youths' active participation included insufficient initial capital, poor access to farm machines, poor access to improved farming inputs such as plantain suckers, inadequate farmlands, inadequate training facilities, poor access to markets, youth migration to urban centres, limited knowledge on how to use information and communication technologies for plantain production transactions, high costs of internet services and facilities, lack of electricity, and poor ratio of extension staff to plantain farmers. The result of the factor analysis indicated that an unfavourable economic environment, unfavorable production environment, and institutional barriers were responsible for the challenges rural youths faced towards participation in plantain production of YAGEP. It was recommended that attention should be given to the factors leading to the active participation of the rural youths, through some media advocacy and training on modern ways of agriculture.

Keywords: Agriculture, Plantain, Youths, Entrepreneurs.

The importance of agriculture in the global economy cannot be overemphasized as it is crucial to addressing various global needs such as healthy food, higher and more resilient earnings, and environmental services (Morton, 2007). Agriculture contributes significantly to the economies of both developed and developing countries. History has shown evidence of Agricultural Revolutions before the Industrial Revolution in countries like England, the United States of America, and Japan (Clark, 2005). Agriculture is also a significant source of revenue for Nigeria's rural economy (Odetola and Etumnu, 2013). To boost youth involvement in agriculture, several programmes such as the Youth Employment in Agriculture Programme (YEAP), the Commercial Agriculture Development Programme (YCAD), and the Livelihood Improvement Family Enterprise (LIFE) programme have been established in Nigeria (Adeyanju, *et al.*, 2020).

Young people between the ages of 18 and 35 residing in rural areas and are part of a sociocultural setting are referred to as "rural youths" (Leavy and Smith, 2010). Studies have shown that young people can address the challenges of an aging agricultural population and youthful unemployment in the agricultural sector (Naamwintome and Bagson, 2013). However, some significant obstacles and uncertainties hinder youth participation in agriculture, such as lack of funding, inadequate adoption of modern farming technologies, lack of agricultural policy, poor communication, and internet services (Adekunle *et al.*, 2010; Nwaogwugwu and Obele, 2017).

To encourage youth participation in agriculture, the Delta State government established the Youths Agricultural Entrepreneurs programme (YAGEP) in 2015, which aims to transform unemployed teenagers into entrepreneurs, leaders, and managers in the agricultural sector (Delta State Government, 2016). The

programme focuses on plantain cultivation, a food crop that is widely consumed and can be used to produce plantain chips (Adeoye and Olaoye, 2019). Encouraging Nigerian adolescents to pursue careers in agriculture will provide significant benefits to the country, particularly in terms of ending hunger, food insecurity, and poverty (Akpan, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

Lack of interest in agriculture among the young population in Nigeria has the potential to impede the country's agricultural development and growth efforts. This is exacerbated by challenges such as the perception of agriculture as tedious and capital-intensive, a lack of funding and agricultural policy, poor communication and internet services, and vulnerability to severe weather, pests, and price fluctuations. As a result, young people are increasingly seeking white-collar jobs, leaving elderly people in rural areas to pursue agriculture. However, encouraging Nigerian adolescents to pursue careers in agriculture could provide significant benefits to the country, particularly rural youth, in terms of ending hunger, food insecurity, poverty, and youth restiveness. The Youths Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) was created in 2015 by the Delta State government to address these problems and transform unemployed teenagers into entrepreneurs, leaders, and managers through trainee-centered, service-oriented, and results-oriented design and implementation focused on agricultural activities such as plantain cultivation.

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of the study was to assess rural youths' participation in the Youths Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) in Delta State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- i. describe the socio-economic characteristics of rural youths in the area;
- ii. examine the level of participation of rural youths in plantain production of YAGEP;
- iii. examine attitudes of rural youths towards participation in plantain production of YAGEP participating in plantain production of YAGEP

Study Hypothesis

Socio-economic characteristics of rural youths have no significant relationship with their attitude towards participation in plantain production of YAGEP.

Methodology

The Study Area

The research was conducted in Delta State, Nigeria, which is made up of three agricultural zones and twenty-five local government areas. The state is located in the southern region of Nigeria between Latitude 50° 00' N to 60° 30' N and 60° 30' N Longitude 50° 00' E to 60° 45' E of the equator with a population of 4,112,445 people National Population Commission (2013) who rely primarily on subsistence farming for their income. The state has a tropical climate with wet and dry seasons and is bordered by Edo State, Ondo State, Anambra State, Bayelsa State, and Rivers State. The State has a tropical climate with distinct dry and rainy seasons. The rainy season is mainly from April to October while the dry season is from November to March. The temperature ranges from 29°C to 34°C with an average of about 30 Delta State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (2000).

Population and Sampling Procedure

The YAGEP office was contacted for a list of registered farmers. Using a simple random technique, ten registered plantain growers were chosen from the indicated towns. This resulted in a sample size of 100 farmers. The study's participants were all rural

youths in the Delta North agricultural zone. The respondents for the research were chosen using purposeful and simple random selection approaches from the nine (9) local government areas. This was based on the location of YAGEP centres in plantain production. Ten agricultural villages were purposefully picked from the zone. Aboh-Ogwashi, Obiaruku, Mbiri, Ubulu-Uku, ADP Ibusa, Alisime, Camp 74, Owa-Alero, Ewulu, and Onicha-Ugbo were among the group.

Data Collection

The study collected data through duplicate questionnaires distributed directly to the respondents. The questionnaire had five sections, including questions on socioeconomic status, participation in YAGEP plantain production, attitudes toward participation, problems faced by rural youths, and strategies to improve participation. Likert scales were used to measure participation levels, attitudes, and problems, and factor analysis was employed to identify the barriers to full participation. The researcher and four assistants collected the questionnaire copies on the spot, achieving a 100% return rate.

Data Analysis

The data examined the socioeconomic characteristics of rural youths and their participation in YAGEP plantain production, as well as their attitudes towards participation, the major challenges faced, and strategies for improving participation. Exploratory factor analysis was used to identify concerns related to YAGEP plantain production. The hypothesis test was carried out between socioeconomic factors and attitudes towards YAGEP plantain production using multiple linear regression.

Results

The section presents the findings of a data analysis conducted to address research questions and assess hypotheses. The findings are summarized in six sections, including the socioeconomic characteristics of rural youths in the area, the extent of participation in YAGEP plantain production, attitudes towards YAGEP plantain production, problems facing rural youths in YAGEP plantain production, and strategies to improve participation. The socioeconomic characteristics of respondents were analyzed, including sex, age, marital status, educational qualification, farming experience, farm size, and extension contact. The majority of respondents were men, between the ages of 25 and 31, married, had some form of formal education, and had over 15 years of farming experience. The average farm size was 1.9 hectares, and the average extension contact was four times per farming season. The findings suggest that younger rural youth are more likely to engage in development activities, while married youth have greater socioeconomic demands to satisfy than unmarried youth. The more years of farming experience a young person has, the more likely they are to participate in agricultural programmes. Additionally, the findings imply that agricultural extension assistance for rural adolescents involved in YAGEP plantain production is insufficient, and the teenagers may be missing technical plantain production help.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 1A: *Regression test of no significant relationship between socio-economic characteristics of rural youths and their attitude towards participation in plantain production of YAGEP*

S/N	Attitudinal Statements	Explanatory variable	SE	β-value	T	Sig.
1.	I feel proud to be part of the plantain production programme of YAGEP	(Constant)			.824	3.513 .001
		Sex			.232 -.010 -.097	.923

Age	.102	.146	1.427	.157
Marital Status	.156	.023	.223	.824
Educational Qualification	.103	-.046	-.428	.669
Farming Experience	.101	-.223	-2.120	.037*
Farm Size	.078	-.114	-1.134	.260
Extension Contact	.239	.175	1.661	.100

$R^2 = 0.116$, Adjusted $R^2=0.049$, $*p \leq 0.05$

Table 1A demonstrates that there is no significant link between rural teenagers' socioeconomic features and their attitude (that is, I am glad to be a member of the YAGEP plantain production programme) toward involvement in YAGEP plantain production. The findings of the multiple regression are in Table 1.A shows that farming experience (= -0.101) is important to the attitude of feeling pleased to be a member of the YAGEP plantain production programme. This finding suggests an unfavourable link between farming experience and rural adolescents' pride in being a member of YAGEP's plantain production programme. This suggests that less experienced rural youth plantain farmers are more likely than more experienced ones to be proud of their participation in YAGEP's plantain production programme. The conclusion is that the less experience rural adolescents have with plantain production, the more interested they will be to participate in the Programme so that they may acquire new skills.

The R^2 value of 0.116 also indicates that the independent variables in the regression model account for 11.6 percent of the contribution to the dependent variable. The sign of each coefficient is consistent with the assumption; that is, as age and extension contacts grow, the likelihood of rural adolescents feeling glad to be a part of the YAGEP plantain production programme increases. Similarly, if educational qualifications, agricultural experience, and farm size decline, this will result in a negative attitude about participating in the programme.

Table 1B: *Regression test of no significant relationship between socio-economic characteristics of rural youths and their attitude towards participation in plantain production of YAGEP*

S/N	Attitudinal Statements	Explanatory variable	SE	β- value	T	Sig.
1	Advanced technologies in plantain production encourage me to participate in plantain production of YAGEP	(Constant)		.787	4.206	.000
		Sex	.222	.151	1.489	.140
		Age	.098	-.040	-.396	.693
		Marital Status	.149	.070	.683	.496
		Educational Qualification	.099	-.233	-2.199	.030*
		Farming Experience	.097	-.196	-1.875	.064
		Farm Size	.074	.016	.162	.872
		Extension Contact	.229	-.240	-2.301	.024*

$R^2 = 0.135$, Adjusted $R^2=0.069$, $*p\leq 0.05$

Table 1B demonstrates that there is no significant link between rural adolescents' socioeconomic features and their attitude (that is, improved plantain production technologies motivate me to join in YAGEP plantain production) toward involvement in YAGEP plantain production. Educational qualification (= -0.233) and extended contact (= -0. 240) are significant to the attitude of being encouraged to engage in plantain production of YAGEP with

advanced technologies in plantain production, according to the findings of the multiple regression in Table 1B. This finding suggests an unfavourable link between educational attainment, extension contact, and rural teenagers' attitudes about being encouraged to engage in YAGEP plantain production using sophisticated technology. This indicates that rural adolescents with greater educational qualifications and better extension contact throughout a farming season are more likely to be encouraged to engage more in YAGEP plantain production, which uses sophisticated technology. As a result, the better the educational quality of rural youths and the greater the number of extension contacts, the more likely they would be encouraged to engage more in YAGEP plantain production using new technology.

The R2 value of 0.135 also indicates that the independent variables in the regression model account for 13.5 percent of the contribution to the dependent variable. The sign of each coefficient is consistent with the assumption; that is, as age, farm size, and extension contacts grow, the likelihood of rural adolescents being encouraged to engage in YAGEP plantain production using advanced technology increases. Similarly, if educational qualifications, agricultural experience, and farm size decline, this will result in a negative attitude about participating in the programme.

Table 1C: *Regression test of no significant relationship between socio-economic characteristics of rural youths and their attitude towards participation in plantain production of YAGEP*

S/N	Attitudinal Statements	Explanatory variable	SE	β-value	T	Sig.
1	I want to continue participating in the plantain production of YAGEP					
		(Constant)	.812		2.426	.017
		Sex	.229	-.159	-1.573	.119

Age	.101	.226	2.242	.027*
Marital Status	.154	.139	1.356	.178
Educational Qualification	.102	-.052	-.493	.623
Farming Experience	.100	.152	1.462	.147
Farm Size	.076	.015	.155	.878
Extension Contact	.236	-.076	-.731	.467

R² = 0.145, Adjusted R²=0.080, *p≤ 0.05

Table 1C demonstrates that there is no significant link between rural teenagers' socioeconomic features and their attitude (that is, I want to continue participating in YAGEP plantain production) regarding involvement in YAGEP plantain production. Age (= 0.226) is important to the attitude of continuing to participate in YAGEP plantain production, according to the findings of the multiple regression in Table 1C. This finding suggests a link between age and rural teenagers' willingness to continue engaging in YAGEP plantain production. This suggests that the considerably older rural adolescents may not wish to continue participating in YAGEP's plantain production) towards involvement in YAGEP's plantain production. As a result, the older a rural kid becomes, the more likely it is that he or she will stop engaging in YAGEP plantain production and start participating in YAGEP plantain production. This might be related to a lack of energy and psychological readiness to react to the Programme's difficulties, or their living in a Chayanovian "empty nest."

The R2 value of 0.145 also indicates that the independent variables in the regression model account for 14.5 percent of the contribution to the dependent variable. The sign of each coefficient is consistent with the assumption; that is, as age, marital status, farming experience, and farm size grow, the

likelihood of rural adolescents continuing to participate in YAGEP plantain production increases. Similarly, when educational qualifications and extension connections decline, the likelihood of rural adolescents continuing to participate in YAGEP plantain production declines.

Table 1D: *Regression test of no significant relationship between socio-economic characteristics of rural youths and their attitude towards participation in plantain production of YAGEP*

S/N	Attitudinal Statements	Explanatory variable	SE	β- value	T	Sig.
1	I can overcome any type of hardship by participating in the plantain production of YAGEP	(Constant)	.833		4.729	.000
		Sex	.235	-.160	-1.538	.128
		Age	.104	-.095	-.910	.365
		Marital Status	.158	.109	1.035	.304
		Educational Qualification	.104	-.179	-1.648	.103
		Farming Experience	.102	-.096	-.902	.369
		Farm Size	.079	.012	.122	.903
		Extension Contact	.242	-.122	-1.144	.256

$$R^2 = 0.093, \text{ Adjusted } R^2=0.024, *p\leq 0.05$$

Table 1D demonstrates that there is no significant link between rural teenagers' socioeconomic features and their attitude (that is, I can overcome any form of adversity by engaging in YAGEP plantain production) toward involvement in YAGEP plantain production. The multiple regression findings in Table 1D show that none of the independent variables are related to the attitude of rural youths being able to overcome any form of adversity by engaging in YAGEP's plantain production. The R2

value of 0.093 also indicates that the independent variables in the regression model account for 9.3% of the contribution to the dependent variable.

Table 1E: *Regression test of no significant relationship between socio-economic characteristics of rural youths and their attitude towards participation in plantain production of YAGEP*

S/N	Attitudinal Statements	Explanatory variable	SE	β-value	t	Sig.
1	Participating in the plantain production of YAGEP makes me an elite.					
	(Constant)		.896		3.312	.001
	Sex		.253	-.009	-.083	.934
	Age		.111	-.012	-.110	.912
	Marital Status		.170	-.085	-.784	.435
	Educational Qualification		.112	.133	1.196	.235
	Farming Experience		.110	.002	.017	.987
	Farm Size		.084	-.143	-1.381	.171
	Extension Contact		.260	-.094	-.857	.394

R² = 0.050, Adjusted R²= -0.022, *p≤ 0.05

Table 1E displays the results of a multiple linear regression test that found no significant link between rural teenagers' socioeconomic features and their attitude (that is, engaging in YAGEP plantain production makes me an elite) toward YAGEP plantain production. The results of the multiple regression in Table 1E show that none of the independent variables are related to the attitude of rural youths who perceive themselves to be elites in engaging in YAGEP plantain production. The R2 value is also 0.050, showing that the independent variables in the regression model account for 5% of the contribution to the dependent variable.

Table 1F: *Regression test of no significant relationship between socio-economic characteristics of rural youths and their attitude towards participation in plantain production of YAGEP*

S/N	Attitudinal Statements	Explanatory variable	SE	β-value	t	Sig.
1	I work hard and smart to make participating in plantain production of YAGEP worthy.					
		(Constant)	.806		3.382	.001
		Sex	.227	-.014	-.134	.894
		Age	.100	-.004	-.037	.971
		Marital Status	.153	-.080	-.739	.462
		Educational Qualification	.101	-.124	-1.122	.265
		Farming Experience	.099	-.037	-.341	.734
		Farm Size	.076	.194	1.870	.065
		Extension Contact	.234	.011	.096	.924

R²= 0.052, Adjusted R²= -0.021, *p≤ 0.05

Table 1F displays the results of a multiple linear regression test that found no significant link between rural adolescents' socioeconomic features and their attitude (that is, I work hard and cleverly to make participating in YAGEP plantain production worthwhile) toward plantain production. The results of the multiple regression in Table 1F show that none of the independent variables are related to the attitude of rural youths who work hard and cleverly to make YAGEP plantain production worthwhile. The R2 score for the regression model is 0.052, suggesting that the independent variables explain 5.2 percent of the contribution to the dependent variable.

Conclusion

According to the poll, rural youths in Delta North Agricultural Zone of Delta State had good views about involvement in the State's Youths Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP). This suggests that the rural youths have witnessed concrete evidence of the roles that YAGEP may play in

bettering the lives of participants in the area of plantain cultivation. As a result, engagement in this Programme should be increased so that more rural adolescents acquire more positive attitudes and so participate more completely in the Programme, thus improving plantain production in the region.

Recommendations: Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. The survey indicates that rural adolescents aged 25 to 31 with small farmland holdings are less likely to participate actively in agricultural programmes and are prone to rural-urban migration. To encourage their participation in agricultural production and processing, initiatives such as agro-based contests and exhibitions/fairs should be developed and implemented. These initiatives can celebrate winners and groom them as solution providers for identified sector challenges, thereby driving interest in further participation in agricultural programmes.
- ii. The research found that adolescents participated modestly in the Youth Agricultural Empowerment Programme (YAGEP) and took on leadership positions in implementation, assessment, advising, information distribution, environmental awareness creation, capacity development, and cooperative organizations to improve plantain production. It is suggested that advocacy efforts using youth-targeted media channels and respected people from prominent fields, such as entertainment, business, and technology, who are active in agricultural activities should be utilized to promote and advocate for young engagement in the state's future agricultural programmes.
- iii. The survey revealed varying levels of favourable attitudes toward participation in agricultural programmes among teenagers. To consistently push youngsters on this path, school-based instruction in current agricultural and agri-business practices, partial or full financing of their agricultural plans, and

placement in farms to support those who desire to start their businesses should be implemented.

- iv. The study identified strategies such as luring and sensitizing rural youths outside the school system, delivering age-appropriate information on plantain production both inside and outside the school system, providing extension education, strengthening the state extension system for better service delivery, and providing plantain storage facilities to reduce post-harvest losses as effective in improving rural youth participation in the programme. Therefore, it is recommended that all stakeholders in youth and agricultural development work together to achieve the proposed plans via social capital activities.

Contribution to Knowledge

- i. The research findings revealed that rural adolescents had some involvement in YAGEP plantain production, albeit to a modest extent. This insight contributes to our understanding of rural youth participation in agricultural programmes, highlighting the need for more targeted strategies to encourage active engagement.
- ii. The study discovered that rural adolescents had limited participation in YAGEP plantain production, indicating a gap in current approaches to youth involvement in agriculture. This contributes to knowledge by emphasizing the need to reevaluate existing strategies and develop more effective ones that can motivate rural youth to participate in agricultural programmes.
- iii. The research findings identified various challenges faced by rural adolescents in engaging with YAGEP plantain production, including unfavourable economic and production environments, as well as administrative and policy shortcomings. This knowledge highlights the need to address these obstacles to encourage greater youth participation in

agricultural programmes, thereby improving rural development outcomes.

- iv. The study recommended specific strategies to enhance rural youth participation in YAGEP plantain production, such as luring and sensitizing rural youths, providing age-appropriate information, and delivering extension education. This contribution to knowledge provides practical solutions for addressing the challenges faced by rural adolescents and promoting their active involvement in agriculture, thereby improving their livelihoods and helping to sustain rural communities.

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