WILLINGNESS OF YOUTH TO PRACTISE AGRICULTURE: IMPLICATIONS FOR FARM SUCCESSION AND SUSTAINABLE FARMING SYSTEMS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Nigeria is an agricultural nation having forty-one percent of her Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from agriculture which also employs about seventy percent of her workforce. Approximately thirty-three percent of the nation’s land is used as arable land although about eighty percent of the land is potentially cultivable. The rural farming population is noted to be ageing while the youth are migrating from rural areas to engage in activities other than agriculture. This study examines the factors which influence the willingness of youth in tertiary agricultural institutions to practice agriculture after graduation. A sample of final year agricultural students in four tertiary institutions in south west Nigeria was used for the study. Data and information were obtained through structured questionnaire and secondary sources. Results indicate only forty-nine percent of the students had aspirations towards the practice of agriculture as a profession after graduation while fifty-one percent had aspirations for other things apart from agriculture. Reasons given for the lack of interest in agriculture after graduation include labour-intensive nature of farming in the country, perceived low profitability of agricultural enterprises and lack of easily accessible funds for agricultural activities. Recommendations made by the students include increased government participation in the agricultural industry with particular reference to funding of agricultural institutions (research and banking institutions) and provision of good social infrastructure in rural areas. With these recommendations appropriately addressed, the students are hopeful that more youth will take agriculture as a profession and thus take over from the ageing farmers.

Key words: Youth, farming systems, agriculture, farm inheritance, farm succession.

1. Introduction
Nigeria is a tropical country which lies between latitudes 4° and 14° north of the equator and longitudes 3° and 14° east of the Greenwich meridian. With an estimated population of 181 million people (CIA, 2015), the country has a rich natural agricultural resource endowment which includes about two hundred and thirty billion cubic metres of water and 84 million hectares of agricultural land. Agriculture contributes about forty-one per cent to the nation’s GDP and employs about seventy per cent of the workforce. However, Nigeria’s dependence on food imports has increased over the years, causing the country to expend over eleven billion dollars ($US) on food importation every year.

Farming in Nigeria is dominated by smallholder farmers who produce more than seventy per cent of total national agricultural output from the cultivation of about ninety per cent of total cultivated arable land. These smallholder farmers cultivate relatively small farm plots which are usually less than five hectares using simple implements. Agriculture in Nigeria can generally be described as low input, rain-fed agriculture. Farming systems vary widely across the country from one agro-ecological zone to the other. The prevalent farming system in a particular location largely depends on natural and socio-economic factors in the area. These factors include climate, soils, crops, livestock, pests, food preferences and population. In south-west Nigeria, however, intercropping is very prominent with cereal-tuber crop combination being the most practiced farming system (Amujoyegbe, 2012).
Young people are noted for their energy, enthusiasm and creativity which have been recognized as being part of a nation’s greatest assets (FAO et al., 2009; Kakwagh and Ikwuba, 2010; Vargas-Lundius, 2011). When these positive attributes are effectively promoted and utilized, youth will play a key role in improving agricultural productivity and sustaining farming systems. With the ageing farming population in Nigeria (Adeyemo et al., 2010; Akpan, 2010), it is important that a structural change in the labour composition of the farming sector be effected.

For this study, youth is taken to be people in the 15-35 years age bracket. This category of people makes up about forty-two per cent of the Nigerian population (NBS and FMYD, 2013). It has been noted that instead of taking a career in agricultural activities in the rural areas, rural youth migrate to urban areas to find alternative employment (FAO et al., 2009). In a study carried out in a southwestern Nigerian university by Adebo and Sekumade (2013), most of the sampled students in agricultural sciences, many of whom came from farming families and had their childhood homes in rural areas, perceived agriculture as laborious, of low self-esteem and a stepping stone to other professions. Evidence (Ayanda et al., 2012; Tijani, 2014) suggests many young people in Africa, including Nigeria, are choosing not to pursue livelihoods in agriculture, particularly as farmers. Decision by these young people will obviously have implications for farm succession and sustainable farming systems.

Farm succession can be viewed as the process of how farms are passed on from one generation to the next. In most developed countries, the ideal type of farm family business ownership and management are handed down within the family (Stiglbauer and Weiss, 2000). This ensures sustainability of the farm family business. However, in southwest Nigeria where farm lands are mainly rural lands, most of the land is acquired through inheritance (Saka et al., 2005; Adeyemo et al., 2010). Traditionally, the farm land is not handed down to a particular successor, but is divided up into plots to be shared by direct descendants of the farm owner. This system of obtaining farm land is one of the reasons why many farm lands in south west Nigeria are fragmented and small.

2. Methodology
Using the multi-stage sampling technique, four tertiary institutions from which two hundred and forty students were sampled, were selected from south west Nigeria. The sampled students were agriculture students in their final year of study. Data were obtained through the use of structured questionnaire while analyses were by descriptive and inferential statistics.

3. Results
Mean age of the sampled students was 22.4 years. About forty-nine per cent (48.75%) of the students indicated willingness to practice agriculture after graduation while fifty-one per cent (51.25%) indicated willingness to engage in other activities aside agriculture. Table 1 illustrates the opinion of the students on the present state of the agriculture sector in Nigeria.

Table 1: Students’ opinion on present state of agriculture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present state of agriculture</th>
<th>% of students who agree</th>
<th>% of students who disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too traditional and laborious</td>
<td>90.83</td>
<td>9.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>98.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets national food demand</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very lucrative</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>93.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive to young people</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>94.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With a very youthful Nigerian population, it is necessary to harness this youthful human resource and all the natural resources to transform agriculture from its present state to a position where it is sustainable, meets national food demand, very lucrative and attractive to youth.

Reasons given by the fifty-one per cent of the students who indicated unwillingness to practice agriculture after graduation include:

- Labour intensive nature of agriculture: More than sixty per cent of farm work is done by hand-labour which of course, leads to drudgery and fatigue.
- Unwillingness to live in rural areas: These students associate farming with being resident in rural areas where social infrastructure is inadequate or lacking. They prefer to live in urban centres where social amenities are available.
- Non glamorous profession: Agriculture was considered as a profession of low esteem.
- Low returns on investments: Quick returns on investments was considered as high priority for any business venture to be considered attractive and profitable for these students.

With regards to the students who indicated willingness to practice agriculture after graduation, reasons given for their willingness include:

- Viable business opportunity: There is always need for food and other agricultural products such that there is opportunity for every agricultural venture to have a portion in the business market. Some products also have export potential.
- Self employment: Instead of being job seekers who are waiting to be hired, these young people can become job creators employing themselves and others.
- Financial independence: Instead of being dependent on family and friends for finance due to unemployment, these young people can through the practice of agriculture have a good and sustainable source of finance to cater for themselves and others.
- Opportunity to contribute to national development: By using the knowledge and skills acquired from school, they will be able to practice agriculture in such a way that modern technology is utilized to sustain our farming systems.

4. Conclusion

Recommendations made by the students towards attracting youth to agriculture include increased government participation in the agricultural industry with particular reference to the funding of agricultural institutions (research and banking institutions). In addition, government is expected to provide social amenities and infrastructure in rural areas to make residence in these areas comfortable and agricultural investments attractive. With these recommendations appropriately addressed, the students are hopeful that more youth will take agriculture as a profession and thus take over from the ageing farmers.

From the results of this study, it is evident that there is need for guidance of students and parents when it comes to the choice of a career path for the students. Counseling of students in schools by qualified personnel should therefore be an active process throughout a student’s stay in school. Furthermore, rural development should be of a higher priority for the government Modern infrastructure should be provided in rural areas such that all basic facilities available in cities are also available in rural areas. With these facilities in place, young graduates will find it more comfortable to live in rural areas and engage in agricultural activities.
5. References


Word Count: 1,873