

Assessment of Challenges Faced By Rural Youths in Family Farming in Benue State, Nigeria: Issues for Consideration

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Abstract: The survey was conducted in Benue State, Nigeria to assess challenges faced by rural youths in family farming. Questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample of eighty (80) respondents. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean score and standard deviation as well as inferential statistics which include factor analysis were used in analyzing data for the study. Results indicate that a greater percentage (75.00%) of the respondents were males, about 98.90% had formal education in school with majority (87.50%) belonging to no formal organization, having a mean farming experience of about 11 years. Major challenges faced by rural youths in family farming were low prices of farm produce (M = 1.69), irregular and untimely supply of farm inputs such as fertilizer, improved seeds, etc (M = 1.61), lack of access to sufficient land for farming (M = 1.58), high cost of labour saving technologies (M = 1.55), poor agricultural extension agent-farmer contact (M = 1.55), lack of incentives from government to encourage poor farmers (M = 1.53), among others. The study recommends that rural youths should be encouraged to remain in agriculture through adequate and timely provision of farm inputs such as fertilizer, agro-chemicals, improved varieties of crops as well as labour saving technologies in order to boost productivity. It also highlights that adequate provision of agricultural extension services to the rural youths in family farms remains paramount in order to have access to improved technologies that will enhance greater output thus increasing household income which improves standard of living.

Keywords: Challenges, rural, youths, family, farming, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Family farms represent a greater percentage of the total agriculture sector in most African countries. It involves the organization of crops, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and poultry production which is managed and operated by a family and primarily dependent on family labour for men and women, the elderly and the youths. In addition, family farmers are instrumental in selecting a wide range of varieties of crops and breeds of animals which are more adapted to the diversity of the agro-ecological conditions (combination of soil, climate and altitude). Family farmers are creating, promoting and conserving the biodiversity of food crops and livestock, transferring the knowledge from the current generation to the next. At the same time, many family farmers are also developing quality products not only for their self-consumption, but also available in niche markets (Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation [CTA], 2014).

According to Ugwoke *et al.* (2005), youths have been part of the overall agricultural development process in Nigeria because of the immense contribution of agriculture to the economy. This is because a larger population of youths represents the link between the present and the future as well as a reservoir of labour. Youths constitute about 40% of the Nigerian population (National Population Census [NPC], 2006) and are the major group much needed for family farming

transformation. Nigeria's National Youth Development Policy (NYDP) see youth as all young persons of ages 18 to 35 years who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Youth is a state of transition between childhood and adulthood characterized by the possession of attributes such as energy, intelligence and hopes which enable them to improve their knowledge and capabilities (Erenie, 2002). The psychologist views the youth as an individual in whom there is time, energy and potentials which have not been fully utilized. Youths are those people with zeal, exuberance, dynamism and are volatile in nature.

Rural youths are the future of the family farming (FAO, 2014). With a growing world population and a decreasing agricultural productivity, rural youths play an important role in ensuring food security for future generations (FAO, 2014). Youth in rural areas provide opportunity for generating the farming entrepreneurs (Chikezie *et al.*, 2012). This is due to the fact that they have the potential to overcome some major constraints in order to expand agricultural production because they are often more open to new ideas and practices than adult farmers (Daudu, 2009).

According to World Farmers' Organization (WFO)(2013), rural youths play a significant role in acting as a catalyst for change in family farming development, given their propensity and willingness to adapt to new ideas, concepts and the energy to implement innovations. Retaining youths in agriculture has the overall aim of transforming the sector from purely subsistence to commercial farming.

Rural youths, smallholder and family farmers face numerous challenges in the prevailing times such as climate change and climate variability; lack of tenure security in a context of increasing competition for land and water; limited access to financial resources, inputs, technology, training, research and advisory services, education, price volatility (energy, food, etc.) and limited access to markets, etc (Jaiswa and Aditya, 2014). According to Proctor *et al* (2015), constraints to rural youths in family farming include shortage of production resources such as land, finance, etc, negative attitude about agriculture, limited agricultural knowledge and skills as well as leadership and managerial skills, limited youth groups and associations/cooperatives and youths involvement in decision-making still low. Others include attraction of quick gains especially from white collar jobs, lack of youth policies, lack of support from elders for youths in agriculture, lack of experience and skill sharing, lack of market accessibility, lack of supportive social services and infrastructure, unwillingness of educated youths to engage in agriculture, etc. The challenges facing family farms are numerous, but there are still an outweighing number of opportunities in family farming.

This therefore raises these pertinent questions. What are the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents? What are the challenges faced by rural youths in family farming?

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Describe socio-economic characteristics of the respondents; and
2. Ascertain challenges faced by rural youths in family farming.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Benue State, Nigeria (Figure 1). The State has three agricultural zones, namely; Zone A (Eastern zone), Zone B (Northern zone) and Zone C (Central zone). Benue State has land area of 2,882km² with a population of 4,253,641 people (NPC, 2006). The study area consists of twenty three Local Government Areas. Benue State lies within the lower river Benue in the middle belt region of Nigeria. It shares boundaries with five other States namely; Nasarawa to the north, Taraba to the east, Cross-River to the south, Enugu to the south-west and Kogi State to the west. The State also shares a common boundary with the Republic of Cameroon on the south-east. Agriculture is the mainstay of the inhabitants which engages over 75% of the population. The State is the nation's acclaimed food basket because of its rich agricultural produce which includes yam, rice, beans, cassava, sweet-potato, maize, soybean, sorghum, millet, sesame, cocoyam, etc. The State accounts for over 70% of Nigeria's soybean production. Tree crops such as mangoes and oranges of various species are also produced in commercial quantity in the study area. They also rear a wide range of livestock such as pigs, goats, sheep and chicken. Many of the inhabitants also engage in trading, while a reasonable number of them are civil servants.

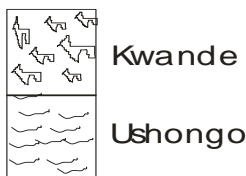
**Key:**

Figure 1: Map of Benue State showing the study area

The population of this study comprises youths who are actively involved in farming activities in Benue State, Nigeria. Zone A which represents Benue North East was selected purposively for the study. Zone A is made up of seven Local Government Areas (LGAs) namely; Logo, Ukum, Katsina-Ala, Vandeikya, Konshisha, Kwande and Ushongo. Two LGAs in zone A namely; Kwande and Ushongo were selected from the seven LGAs using simple random sampling technique. Two communities were selected from each of the LGAs, giving a total of four communities namely; Mbakwen and Mbawer from Kwande LGA and Mbayegh and Utange from Ushongo LGA. Twenty respondents were selected from each of the communities, giving a total of eighty respondents used for the study.

Data were collected using a well structured questionnaire/interview schedule. The questionnaire was divided into two sections (A and B) based on the specific objectives of the study. Section A focused on socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. Section B centered on challenges faced by rural youths in family farming. Data for this study were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean score, standard deviation and factor analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents:

Sex:

About 75.00% of the respondents were males, while 25.00% of the respondents were females (Table 1). There were more male youths in the study area who are involved in farming. This may be as a result of strenuous nature of farming activities. This finding agrees with Okogun (2004) who stated that males are more interested in farming activities because of the tedious nature of it.

Age:

Results in Table 1 show that majority (67.50%) of the respondents were within the age bracket of 21-40 years, while 32.50% falls within the age bracket of ≤ 20 years. The mean age of the respondents was 24 years. This implies that the respondents were energetic and in their productive years, hence greater involvement in farming activities for economic empowerment. This finding agrees with Okwoche *et al* (2012) who stated that youths in their active years are energetic and innovative to participate more in agriculture.

Marital status:

Majority (63.70%) of the respondents were single, while 36.30% were married. This implies that there were more unmarried youths participating in family farming than married youths in the study area. This finding is in contrast with the study of Prosper *et al.* (2015) which stated that married youths have the potentials to participate more in agriculture due to the fact that they have more family responsibilities than unmarried youths.

Level of education:

Results in Table 1 reveal that majority (73.80%) of the respondents had secondary education, while 13.80% and 11.30% had tertiary and primary education, respectively. The mean number of years spent in school was 11.36 years. This shows that majority of the respondents were literate. The need for education in agriculture cannot be over emphasized since the level of education of a farmer do not only increase his productivity but also enhances his ability to adopt innovations. The findings disagree with Beyue and Ernest (2013) who noted that farmers do not need any formal education.

Household size:

Entries in Table 1 reveal that 55.00% had a household size of 6 - 10 persons, while 23.80% had household size of 1- 5 persons, among others. The mean household size was 9.08 persons. Having large household size is advantageous because it provides labour for family farming.

Farming experience:

About 42.50% had 6 -10 years of farming experience, while 21.30% and 18.80% had 11- 15 years and 1-5 years, respectively (Table 1). The mean farming experience was 10.50 years. This implies that respondents in the study area had been farming for quite a number of years and have acquired enough knowledge and experience in family farming. This finding agrees with Abdullahi *et al* (2010) who reported that a good number of youths in family farming had farming experience of 10 years and above and acquired experience and skills through informal sources such as parents, relatives, neighbors, etc.

Farm size:

Entries in Table 1 show that 50.00% of the respondents had 1.1 - 2.0 ha of farmland, while 43.80% had less than 1.0 ha, among others. The mean farm size was 1.48 ha. This implies that the respondents had access to small portion of farmland which they use in farming activities. This agrees with Proctor *et al* (2015) who noted that a large proportion of rural youths farm on a smaller scale which could be due to shortage of resources for production such as land, finance, labour, etc.

Type of farming:

More than half (57.50%) of the respondents engaged in crop production, 36.30% engaged in both crop and livestock production, while 6.20% of the respondents were livestock farmers (Table 1). This indicates that majority of the respondents engaged in crop production. This could enable them to sustain their families economically.

Major occupation:

The majority (92.40%) of the respondents had farming as a major occupation, while 2.50% were carpenters, among others (Table 1). This indicates that farming is the major occupation of the respondents in the study area. This finding agrees with Abdullahi *et al* (2010) who stated that majority of the youths had farming as their major occupation.

Non-farm occupation:

About 41.30% of the respondents were petty traders, while 18.50% and 7.50%, were hair dressers and carpenters, respectively (Table 1). This indicates that petty-trading is the predominant non-farm occupation of respondents in the study area. This may be attributed to the fact that petty-trading requires less start-up capital than other non-farm occupations which they need to be economically stronger to meet family responsibilities.

Membership of formal organization:

Majority (87.50%) of the respondents did not belong to any formal organization, while 12.50% belonged to formal organizations (Table 1). This indicates that the respondents did not have interactions from formal organizations which can

help them to improve productivity in family farming. Membership of formal organization could enhance putting resources together for easy access to credit facilities, production inputs and training opportunities for improved productivity. This study contradicts with findings of Bello *et al.* (2011) who stated that most youths in rice production were members of formal organization.

Contact with extension agents:

About 81.00% of the respondents did not have extension contact in the last one year, while 19.00% had extension contact (Table 1). This may be attributed to low extension- farmer ratio in Nigeria. Lack of access to extension services deprives the youths opportunities of embracing the use of improved technologies that will boost their productivity in family farming.

Remittance from family members/relations:

Majority (90.0%) of the respondents did not receive remittance from family members/relatives, while 10.0% received remittance from family members/relatives (Table 1). This indicates that many of the respondents did not receive remittance from family members/relatives which may lead to lack of proper and adequate farm resources/inputs such as land, fertilizer, agrochemical, etc.

Amount of money received per annum:

The remittance received was less than ₦5000 from family members/relations in 6.30% of the respondents, while 2.50% and 1.30% had ₦5001-₦10000 and above ₦10000 respectively with a mean score of ₦8125 (Table 1). This implies that the respondents were unable to get reasonable amount of money from their family members/relations annually which could assist them in buying farm inputs for greater productivity.

Table 1: Distribution of socio-economic characteristics of the respondents(n=80)

Socio-economic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Mean score
Sex			
Male	60	75.00	
Female	20	25.00	
Age			
≤20	22	32.50	
21 – 40	58	67.50	24.11
Marital status			
Married	29	36.30	
Single	51	63.70	
Level of education (years)			
No formal education	1	1.10	
Primary education	9	11.30	11.36
Secondary education	59	73.80	
Tertiary education	11	13.80	
Household size (numbers)			
1-5	19	23.80	
6-10	44	55.00	9.08
11-15	9	11.20	
Above 15	8	10.00	
Farming experience (years)			
1-5	15	18.80	
6-10	34	42.50	10.50
11-15	17	21.30	
Above 15	14	17.40	
Farm size (hectares)			
≤1.0	35	43.80	

1.1-2.0	40	50.00	1.48
2.1-3.0	2	2.40	
Above 3.0	3	3.80	
Type of farming			
Crop production	46	57.50	
Livestock production	5	6.20	
Mixed farming	29	36.30	
Major occupation			
Commercial driving	1	1.30	
Carpentry	2	2.50	
Farming	74	92.40	
Teaching	2	2.50	
Trading	1	1.30	
Non-farm occupation			
Okada riding	7	8.80	
Hair dressing	15	18.50	
Carpentry	6	7.50	
Petty trading	33	41.30	
Road-side mechanic	3	3.80	
Shoe making	2	2.50	
Tailoring	4	5.00	
Teaching	7	8.80	
Commercial driving	3	3.80	
Membership of formal organization			
Yes	10	12.50	
No	70	87.50	
Contact with extension agents			
Yes	15	19.00	
No	65	81.00	2.07
Remittance from family members/relations			
Yes	8	10.00	
No	72	90.00	
Amount of money received (naira)			
≤ 5000	5	6.30	
5001-10000	2	2.50	8125.00
Above 10000	1	1.30	

Source: Field survey, 2016

Challenges faced by rural youths in family farming:

Major challenges faced by rural youths in family farming include low prices of farm produce ($M = 1.61$), irregular and untimely supply of farm inputs such as fertilizer, improved seeds, etc ($M = 1.61$), lack of access to sufficient land for farming ($M = 1.58$), high cost of labour saving technologies ($M = 1.55$), poor agricultural extension agent-farmer contact ($M = 1.55$), lack of incentives from government to encourage poor farmers ($M = 1.53$), challenge of climate change/variability ($M = 1.52$), lack of start-up capital ($M = 1.50$), high cost of farm inputs such as fertilizers, agrochemicals, etc ($M = 1.49$), poor yields of crops ($M = 1.49$) and lack of support from family/friends to start up a farm ($M = 1.49$), among others (Table 2). All the standard deviation on challenges to rural youths in family farming was less than one. This shows the uniformity as regards to responses of the respondents on challenges faced by rural youths in family farming. This implies that the respondents were highly constrained by numerous factors which hinder their effectiveness in family farming. This agrees with Proctor *et al* (2015) who noted that constraints to rural youths in agriculture include lack of market accessibility, lack of support from family and friends. They further reported that despite

all the challenges being faced by rural youths, there is no choice but for youths to remain in agriculture which serves as source of employment to them.

Table 2: Mean score of respondents according to challenges in family farming

Challenges	Mean score	Std. deviation
Lack of access to sufficient land for farming	1.58	0.65
Limited access to credit facilities	1.39	0.66
Lack of support from family/friends to start up a farm	1.49	0.71
Limited farmers' youth groups and association/cooperatives	1.41	0.72
Unwillingness of educated youths to engage in agriculture because it makes use of local farm implements	1.44	0.69
Limited agricultural knowledge and skills	1.47	0.69
Lack of physical infrastructures such as electricity, roads in rural areas	1.40	0.77
Poor market information	1.35	0.73
Poor agricultural research and advisory services	1.47	0.72
Lack of start-up capital	1.50	0.71
Negative attitude of youths about farming	1.45	0.67
High cost of improved crop varieties	1.37	0.71
Non- availability of storage facilities	1.35	0.73
High cost of farm inputs such as fertilizer, agrochemicals, etc	1.49	0.65
Attraction of quick gains especially from white collar jobs	1.31	0.73
Insufficient farm labour	1.41	0.68
Poor transportation network	1.30	0.71
Lack of incentives from government to encourage poor farmers	1.53	0.65
Poor agricultural extension agent-farmer contact	1.55	0.63
Challenge of climate change/variability	1.52	0.63
Lack of basic amenities such as pipe born water, etc	1.39	0.70
Unavailability of irrigation facilities	1.44	0.74
High incidence of pest and diseases infestation	1.49	0.71
Low prices of farm produce	1.61	0.56
Poor yields of crops	1.49	0.67
Inadequate training opportunities for youths in family farming	1.46	0.61
Inadequate provision of social infrastructures such as schools, hospitals, etc	1.31	0.73
High cost of labour saving technologies	1.55	0.61
Irregular and untimely supply of farm inputs such as fertilizer, improved seeds, etc	1.61	0.62
Low soil fertility	1.20	0.80
Lack of collateral required to obtain loan from Bank of Agriculture	1.45	0.71

Source: Field survey, 2016

Factor analysis of challenges faced by rural youths in family farming:

Factor analysis of variables with regards to challenges of rural youths in family farming based on the item loadings, factors 1, 2 and 3 (named financial, institutional and logistic problems, respectively) is represented in Table 3.

Variables which loaded high under financial problems were limited agricultural knowledge and skills (0.45), poor agricultural research and advisory services (0.51), high cost of improved crop varieties (0.59), high cost of farm inputs (0.60), insufficient farm labour (0.43), lack of incentives from government to encourage poor farmers (0.66), challenge of climate change/variability (0.51), unavailability of irrigation facilities (0.59), high incidence of pests and diseases infestation (0.49), low price of farm produce (0.41), inadequate training opportunities for youths in family farming (0.49) and high cost labour saving technologies (0.50).

Loadings under institutional problems were limited access to credit facilities (0.59), poor market information (0.54), attraction of quick gains especially from white collar jobs (0.40), poor transportation network (0.40), poor agricultural

extension agent-farmer contact (0.50), inadequate provision of social infrastructures (0.57), irregular and untimely supply of farm inputs (0.61) and lack of collateral required to obtain loan from Bank of Agriculture (0.52).

Logistic problems comprised lack of access to sufficient land for farming (0.54), lack of support from family/friends to start up a farm (0.72), limited farmers' youths groups and association (0.55), unwillingness of educated youths to engage in agriculture because it makes use of local farm tools (0.69), lack of physical infrastructure such as electricity, roads in rural areas (0.65) and low soil fertility (0.41).

The three factors which loaded high based on challenges faced by rural youths in family farming agrees with Jaiswa and Aditya (2014) who stated that rural youths, smallholder and family farmers face numerous challenges in the prevailing times such as climate change and climate variability; lack of tenure security in a context of increasing competition for land and water and inadequate governance of land tenure; limited access to financial resources, inputs, technology, training, research and advisory services, education, price volatility and limited access to market, etc.

Table 3: Factor analysis of respondents according to challenges in family farming

Challenges	Factor 1 (Financial problem)	Factor 2 (Institutional problem)	Factor 3 (Logistic problem)
Lack of access to sufficient land for farming	0.220	-0.200	0.546
Limited access to credit facilities	-0.004	0.597	0.017
Lack of support from family/friends to start up a farm	-0.074	0.276	0.723
Limited farmers' youth groups and association/cooperatives	0.037	-0.042	0.558
Unwillingness of educated youths to engage in agriculture because it makes use of local farm implements	0.240	-0.181	0.694
Limited agricultural knowledge and skills	0.459	0.197	0.193
Lack of physical infrastructures such as electricity, road in rural areas	-0.123	0.397	0.655
Poor market information	0.264	0.542	0.340
Poor agricultural research and advisory services	0.516	0.339	0.110
Lack of start-up capital	0.445	0.584	0.003
Negative attitude of youths about farming	0.204	0.056	0.301
High cost of improved crop varieties	0.591	0.048	0.272
Non- availability of storage facilities	0.006	0.387	0.295
High cost of farm inputs such as fertilizer, agrochemicals, etc	0.609	0.054	0.058
Attraction of quick gains especially from white collar jobs	0.315	0.401	0.198
Insufficient farm labour	0.432	0.087	0.240
Poor transportation network	0.257	0.405	0.301
Lack of incentives from government to encourage poor farmers	0.669	0.029	-0.101
Poor agricultural extension agent-farmer contact	0.181	0.507	-0.063
Challenge of climate change/variability	0.511	0.208	0.006
Lack of basic amenities such as pipe born water, etc	0.379	0.189	0.251
Unavailability of irrigation facilities	0.593	0.089	0.210
High incidence of pests and diseases infestation	0.496	0.345	0.028
Low prices of farm produce	0.417	0.011	-0.034
Poor yields of crops	0.156	0.275	-0.111
Inadequate training opportunities for youths in family farming	0.490	0.353	0.088
Inadequate provision of social infrastructures such as schools, hospitals, etc	0.017	0.575	0.151
High cost of labour saving technologies	0.508	0.310	-0.027
Irregular and untimely supply of farm inputs such as fertilizer, improved seeds, etc	0.316	0.611	-0.104
Low soil fertility	0.006	0.465	0.416
Lack of collateral required to obtain loan from Bank of Agriculture	0.304	0.529	0.060

Source: Field survey, 2016

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Most of the youths in the study area were males, single with mean age of 24 years, having one form of formal education or the other as well as farming as a primary occupation. Major challenges faced by rural youths in family farming include low prices of farm produce, irregular and untimely supply of farm inputs such as fertilizer, improved seeds, etc, lack of access to sufficient land for farming, high cost of labour saving technologies, among others. The study further shows that the youths were highly constrained by financial, institutional and logistic problems.

The study recommends that government at federal, state and local levels should encourage youths to remain in agriculture through adequate and timely provision of farm inputs such as fertilizer, agro-chemicals, improved varieties of crops as well as labour saving technologies in order to boost productivity. Provision of agricultural extension services to the rural youths in family farming remains paramount for easy access to improved technologies that will enhance greater output thus increasing household income which improves standard of living.

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