

Facilitating Rural Youth Access to Agricultural Activities: A Panacea for Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria

Anyim C. O., Odoemelam L. E

*External Relations Department, Shell BP, Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria
Department of Rural Sociology and Extension, Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture
Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria*

ABSTRACT

Youths farmers play an important role in ensuring food security for future generation but they face many challenges. The study investigated factors influencing youth access to agricultural activities in the Niger delta region of Nigeria. Multi stage sampling procedure was used to select 350 youths from 5 states in the region, in the selection of sample size.. Data were collected using questionnaire, interview schedule and focus group discussion and analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics like regression model. The major findings indicated that most of the youths were literate. On level of access to factors of production, land had a mean score of (M=2.03), labour (M=2.00), capital (M=2.28), information (M=2.00) and skill (M=2.28). On factors influencing access to agricultural activities, the coefficient of age (2.020)** , gender (9.108)** , household (-2.722)*** , farm size (1.967)* , credit (5.665)*** , education (2.030)** and access to market (6.557)*** were all significant and related to access to agricultural activities. The implication is that most rural youths do not foresee a prosperous future for themselves in the agricultural sector mostly because of their limited access, therefore the study recommends that education and capacity building programmes for rural youths are defined in a more participating way and focus on agricultural best practices, land laws and knowledge sharing.

Keywords: Agricultural activities, restiveness, youths and access.

INTRODUCTION

Youths represent a very important stakeholder in any society and are vital in any nation's agriculture so as to ensure succession and sustainability of agricultural development. Rural youths are future of the agricultural sector, and with a growing world population and a decreasing agricultural productivity in combination with rural exodus. Sustainable food production and supply are threatened. Young farmers play an important role in ensuring food security for future generation but they face many challenges.

Youths and rural youths in particular have been ignored for a long time in policies and programmes. For example poverty reduction strategy rarely deal with youths issues. When specific youths policies do exist in developing countries they often do not cater for rural youths but tend to be biased towards non-poor males living in urban areas (not sufficiently taken into consideration in policies and programmes). In rural communities of Nigeria, rural children become adult quickly and get married at an early age. The transition phase from childhood to adulthood is often limited in rural areas. Not involving rural youths in policies is risky as it paves the way to undesirable effects on the whole society.

Youths restiveness is described as the unwillingness of the youths to be controlled because they bored and unsatisfied with the current status of things involving them specifically in the society to which they belong in several cases of youths restiveness has taken place in the Nigerian, Niger Delta region. According to (NDDC, 2006) over two million youths in the region were unemployed and have lost hope, faith and dignity. The source added that the region had one of the most crushing poverty in the world. The youths in response to that started reaction by being restive.

Note: Industrially, most rural youths are very industrious and involved in multiple income generating activities.

Youths possess greater vision about the development of rural society. The is because the role of the youths in the rural development is like the role of the farmer to the farm. As the farm cannot be developed without the farmer because the farm belong to him, so would the rural areas not be

developed without the youths because the youths is an important stakeholder of whom the rural communities belong. Youths posses greater strenght because of their muscular built, physical energy, strenght is directed at creative venture, it yields development to the society. This is because youths have energy and ideas which are society’s great potentials (Olujude 2008). The youths is a major determinant of peace and stability of the nation because the are the most active segement of any society and they show higher propensity to adopt development intervention irrespective of the good characteristics of the youths so far discussed, the same characteritics have been known to lead to restiveness when they are not well harnessed, hence the purpose of this study “Facilitating youth access to agricultural activities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Specific causes of youths restiveness in the rural area of Niger Delta according to Anyanwu are:

1. Lack of senses of ownership, participation and benefit from oil and gas industries operating in their communities.
2. Lack of viable income generating opportunities provided for the people by the oil and gas industries.
3. High level of unemployment especially among the youths.
4. Employment of outsiders and excluding indigenes of the community in the employment
5. Exclusion of host communities from service provision to oil industries.
6. Lack of provision of social services like water, electricity, health, education, roads etc.

Youth restiveness is defined as a sustained protest embarked upon to enforce desired outcome from a cons authority by an organised youths. It is marked by violence and disruptions of lawful activities in which ever definition added that to be restive means the inability to stay especially because one is bored or not satisfied with certain decisions, changes on existing laws considered to ve unfavourable (Bassey 2005) classified causes of youths restiveness into security policultural, economic and social factors. Since the youth has important qualities which if harnessed are variable tools in the wheel of agricultural acitivities; with the following specific objectives.

1. Describe the socio economic characteristics of the youths.
2. Examine their level of access to factors of production.
3. Determine factors influencing their level of the access to factors of production.

METHODOLOGY

The study area is the Niger Delta region located in south-south region of Nigeria. The nine states that made up the region are Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers States. These states form the population size for this research. The Niger Delta is the world’s third largest wetland, covering a vast coastal plain in the central region of southern Nigeria. It is the world third largest mangrove forest with the most extensive fresh water swamp. Forest is characterized by high consecration of biological diversity and endowed with vast non renewable natural resource particularly hydrocarbon deposits, both oil and gas. It is therefore a region of critical economic and global ecological significance (Ugochukwu 2011). As a result of natural and human induced changes, the area has witnessed significant transformation in the negative direction. The social and environmental impact of coastal erosion, flooding as a result of rise in sea level, losses in fisheries and forest resources are significant especially against the background of increasing upstream dam construction, coastal zone modification, urbanization and rising population pressure. The population of the Niger Delta is estimated at 20 million (NDDC, 2011). It is extremely diverse comprising about 50 ethnic groups, cover 350 communities who speak at least 260 dialects, characterized by nuclear rural settlement occupying isolated dry sites within the swamp areas. Large settlement are found in the interior areas of the delta where drainage conditions and accessibility are better (NDDC 2011). Multi stage sampling procedure was used in the collection of sample size. In the first stage, 5 states were selected from the nine states namely Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Imo and Rivers state respectively. In the second stage 1 agricultural zone was selected from each state, followed by a selection of 2 local government area from each agricultural zone.

From Abia state (Ikwuano and Ukwa west), Akwa Ibom (Eket and Oron), Bayelsa state (Yenegoa and Nembe), Imo (Egbema and Ikeduru), Rivers (Abonema and Obigbo). Stratified sampling techniques was used in selecting both male and female respondents. Households selection procedure

Anyim C. O & Odoemelam L. E “Facilitating Rural Youth Access to Agricultural Activities: A Panacea for Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria”

was used where 20% of the household identified by the community leader was randomly selected. In each household two males and one female within the age bracket of 15-30 years were interviewed. The ratio is because of more male population in the households since female get married earlier than males. Using random sampling technique, a total of five communities were selected from each LGA and 70 rural youths were selected from each community bringing the total to 350 respondents. Data were collected using structural questionnaire, interview schedule and focus group discussion and analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics like frequency counts and means including multiple regression.

Objective 1 which was to identify the socio economic characteristics of the youth was analysed using frequency distribution and means.

Objective 2, which was to ascertain the level of access of factors of production was analysed by asking the respondents a 5 point questions of which any positive response attract 1 point; if otherwise zero. A decision rule of 0-1 low, 2- 3 moderate and 4-5 point high is regarded as a bench mark.

Objective 3 which was to determine the factors influencing youth’s access to agricultural activities was analysed using multiple regression. The explicit form is stated below:

$$Y = F (X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4, X_5, X_6, X_7, X_8 + e)$$

Where Y (dependent variable, access 1; non access 0

and $X_1 - X_7$ (independent variables)

Where

X_1 = Age (measured in years)

X_2 = Sex (dummy variable; male=1 female=0)

X_3 = Educational level (number of years of formal schooling)

X_4 = Household size (number of people living together and eat from the same pot)

X_5 = Total farm size (measured in hectares)

X_6 = Market access (dummy variable; access 1 no access 0)

X_7 ; Access to credit (dummy variable; access 1 no access 0)

e = error term

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table1. Socio economic characteristics of the youth

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
15-30	65	18.6
21-30	285	81.4
Total	350	100
Gender		
Male	190	54.3
Female	160	45.7
Total	350	100
Education		
Non-formal	22	6.3
Primary	115	32.9
Secondary	102	29.1
Tertiary	111	31.7
Total	350	100

Source: Field survey 2016

Result on Table 1, indicated that 81% of the youth were between 21 – 30 years of age. Youths are people with zeal, exuberance, dynamism and are volatile. In Nigeria about (40%) of the population are youths (NPC, 2006) and are the major group needed for agricultural transformation. Therefore

Anyim C. O & Odoemelam L. E “Facilitating Rural Youth Access to Agricultural Activities: A Panacea for Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria”

enhancing their access to agricultural activities becomes important. The migration of youths to urban areas as a result of unemployment has led to increased level of restiveness while farming activities have been left under the care of aged in the rural areas (Adesope *et al* 2003).

The result on Table 1, further revealed that about (54%) of youths were male while (45%) were female. The implication of this is that more males were involved in agricultural activities than female. This could be attributed to male youths farmer access to land than their female counterpart and they have more energy to do farm operations (Oladeji and Oyesola 2000). Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents were literate while only (6.3%) had no formal education. The implication of this is that more educated youths were involved in farming as a result of unemployment in cities. Sound education have been found to have impacts on farmer’s ability for a balanced assessment of any innovation being transferred to them and also enable them to make better assessment of technology (Ekwe *et al* 2008). As long as many youths remain unemployed, in abject poverty, they will remain vulnerable to many social vices. As the adage says, an idle mind is a devil’s workshop. In order not to devastate the lives and future ambition of our youths, it is therefore necessary to facilitate the access to agricultural activities.

Distribution of Respondents According to their Level of Access to Factors of Production

Variables	High	Moderate	Low	Mean
Land	101 (303)	158 (316)	91 (91)	2.03
Labour	88 (264)	206 (412)	56 (56)	2.09
Capital	153 (459)	206 (412)	1 (0.3)	2.48
Skill	157 (471)	134 (268)	59 (59)	2.28
Information	129 (387)	104 (208)	107 (107)	2.00

Source: *Field survey 2016*

Table 2 revealed that access to land with mean of (M= 2.03), labour (M=2.28), capital (M=2.49), skill (M= 2.28) and information (M= 2.00) indicated moderate access to all factors of production mentioned above. The youths are faced with limited access to land because of land tenure system. More youth would have gone into agricultural activities, if land are made available by the government more than half of the respondents reported that they were not practicing.

Farmers mentioned access to land as one of the major factors that refrain them from starting a farming activity. One of the youth reported inheritance as still the most common existing system to obtain land (usually passed from father to son). A situation where there is improvement in life expectancy, the rural youth may wait for many years before inheriting their share of family land. According to World bank (2008) the size of rural population is expected to continue to grow until 2020. This population growth has resulted in sub division of land and in highly fragmented parcels. Therefore, the youth (especially those with many siblings) end up inheriting just very small pieces. Rural youths severely lack access to capital. Focus group discussion with youths revealed that capital is the biggest challenge they face when they start farming. The implication of the result is that financial institutions often have the perception that youth form a riskier clients category than adults. The youth may not have access to necessary skills required for new management practices and innovations, on best practices due to inadequate visitation by extension agents. The result is in line with Nor and Madukere (2000) assertion that increased agricultural productivity and enhanced farmers income are only attained when effective agricultural system is put in place.

Table3. *Factors influencing youth’s access to agricultural activities in the study area*

Variables	Regression coefficient	Standard error	T – value
Age	0.00423	0.002	2.020**
Gender	0.06055	0.007	9.108***
Household size	0.01721	0.006	2.722***
Farm size	0.109	0.055	1.967*
Credit	0.000112	0.000	5.665***
Access to market	0.00122	0.000	6.557***
Education	0.00524	0.003	2.030**
Intercept	0.283	0.103	2.740**

Anyim C. O & Odoemelam L. E “Facilitating Rural Youth Access to Agricultural Activities: A Panacea for Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria”

R – square	0.707		
R ² adjusted	0.679		
F – ratio			32.454***

Source: Field survey, 2016

*** significant at 1%

** significant at 5%

* significant at 10%

Table 3, shows the regression results of the factors influencing youths access to agricultural activities in the study area. The exponential regression model was chosen as the lead equation based on the value of adjusted R², number of significant variables, signs of significant variables as they confer to a priori expectation. The explanatory power of the factors reflected by the pseudo R² (0.707) seems fairly high. However, the overall goodness of fit as reflected by the F – ratio was good (32.454)^{***}. In terms of consistency with a priori expectation on the relationship between the dependent and explanatory variables have positive coefficient indicating direct relationship of the independent variables to access of the probability model.

Results showed that all the variables were significantly related to access to agricultural activities. The coefficient of age (2.020)^{**} was positive and significantly related to access to agricultural activities at 1% level of probability. The implication of the result is that as the age of the respondent increases, their access to agricultural activities also increases. Gender was positive (9.108)^{***} and significantly related to access to agricultural activities at 1% level of probability. This implies that there is gender disparity in land holdings and other resources pertaining access to agricultural activities. For young women, it is even more difficult to acquire land. Gendered land rights data base show stark disparity in land holdings in all region of the world. The coefficient of household size was positive and significantly related to access to agricultural activities at 1% level of probability. The implication is that large household size will lead to sub-division of land and in highly fragmented pieces. Therefore, youths (especially those with many male siblings) end up inheriting just very small piece together with other resources.

The coefficient of farm size (1.967)^{*} was positive and significantly related to access to agricultural activities at 10% level of probability. This indicates that there is a direct relationship between farm size and access to agricultural activities. It further shows that the larger the size of farm, the higher the likelihood and intensity of the younger people in engaging in agricultural activities. The coefficient of credit was (5.665)^{***} was positive and significantly related to access to agricultural activities at 1% level. This implies that the higher the youth access to credit, than more to gain access to agricultural activities. According to respondents, if they gain access to land, lack of access to finance makes it difficult to invest on the land. Loans are the most commonly offered financial products to youths. Although many times accessing credit remains difficult for young people. First of all, youth often lack the required collateral such as land or savings to obtain credit from financial institutions.

Access to market (6.557)^{***} was positive and significantly related to access to agricultural activities of the youths. The implication is that the more market access, the more youth will be willing to engage in agricultural activities. Access to market often remains difficult for youths because market structure often do not favour young people. Mc Nulty M and Nagen (2005) in their findings reported that, they are typically large number of producers/consumers and only a few market intermediaries. At times the youths are not organised to counter these strong market actors. The youths complained that they don't have the required knowledge of how market work and they lack information on prices,

Education (2.030)^{**} was positive and significantly related to access to agricultural activities at 5% level of probability. This implies that increase in level of education will enhance access to agricultural activities and also acquire the necessary training and skills to make informed decisions on farm business. Only do rural youths have less access to education but the education in rural areas is often of less relevant to rural lives. Schools are not playing role in shaping the perception of youths towards agriculture, they use agricultural activities as punishment. By so doing, the youths see agriculture as a less worthwhile subject or as a last resort for under achievers hereby influencing rural youth aspiration in negative way.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study investigated youth access to agricultural activities in the Niger delta region of Nigeria. The study revealed that access to land, labour, capital, skill and information were limited and socio economic factors like age, gender, education, credit, household, farm size, access to market etc. affected youths in facilitating their access to agricultural activities. The study therefore recommends that;

1. Government and their funding institutions should assign a sufficient percentage of the national budget to launch policies empowering young rural people. This empowerment should enable them to promote productive activities in the field of family farming, small scale farming, fisheries etc. thereby reducing restiveness in the region.
2. Government should also implement policies which are adapted to young rural people's needs and to the different cultural, social and economic backgrounds, in order to reduce inequalities in rural areas and guarantee an access to land for the youth, give them future prospects in farming and value people's identities

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