

Economic Contribution of Farm Children to Agricultural Production in Nigeria: A Case Study of Ekiti State of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT This study examined the economic contribution of farm children in agricultural production. To achieve this broad objective, the research work identified the personal characteristics of the farm children, investigated the major activities and examined the attitude of farm children to farming as an occupation. The study also looks into problems of farm children in relation to farm activities, or what they detest most in farming. The study area is Ekiti state of Nigeria. The population for the study comprises all children born or nurtured by farming households or by farmer parents and in a village, which is predominantly considered as a farming community. Structured interview schedule was used in collecting information from 300 farm children in the study area. Stratified random sampling technique was employed. The results show that gender and age play significant roles in contribution of farm children to agricultural production with calculated $\chi^2 = 10.035 > \text{tabulated } \chi^2 = 9.488$; and calculated $\chi^2 = 26.557 > \text{tabulated } \chi^2 = 21.026$, respectively. The study concluded that despite the fact that the interviewed youths contribute immensely to agricultural production, most of them are not satisfied with the way farming is being practiced in the study area. They are therefore not encouraged to consider farming as profession. It was recommended that non-government organizations (NGOs) as well as the government should ensure that modern tools and agro-chemicals, as well as improved farm technologies essential for farmers on the field are made available at affordable prices. This will lessen the drudgery of farm operations, thereby making farm ventures more attractive to youths.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as a developing country has to develop her agriculture if she is to be among the developed countries of the world. In Nigeria today, there is a decline in agricultural production because there is apparent shift of interest from agriculture to the so-called white-collar jobs such as medical practices, pharmacy, teaching, accountancy and engineering, especially among the youths. Many youths today view agriculture in Nigeria as non-status occupation, a manual and undignified one, such that only those who are not qualified for office work do it. There is urgent need to correct this thought.

The development of agricultural sector must depend upon the rural young people. This is because studies by Ajala (1987), Uwadi (1988), Adegunloye (1989) and Bellonele (1992) reveal that majority of rural young people have farming parents. The authors recommended that the farming profession must be made attractive to the large number of young people if the developing nations are going to be able to feed themselves.

A report by Jibowo (1992) shows that in south-western Nigeria the father gives a small portion of land to the son to practice his own independent

farming during his spare time. He further reported that this period is when child has attained the age of between 10 and 12 years and lasts the age of 15 – 18 years. Similarly, studies by Torimiro (1995) show that majority of rural youths are literates and they have potentials and the most tendencies to continue with farming if their needs are justifiably satisfied and their interests are well motivated in the profession. He also stated that this would constitute a part of the strategies for replacing the retiring aged farmers on the farm and also constitute a means for up-dating and linking indigenous knowledge with newly improved farm practices.

There is the need to examine the extent to which the youths are engaged in agriculture in

Nigeria. This study therefore examined economic contribution of farm children to agricultural production in Nigeria with particular focus on Ekiti State of Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Ekiti state of Nigeria. The study was specifically carried out in the northern part of the state. The area was chosen because of the high concentration of farming communities in the area. Ekiti State is located in

the southwestern part of Nigeria and has its capital at Ado-Ekiti.

Most of the dwellers in the study area are farmers and they are involved in the production of crops such as vegetables, yam, maize, cassava and cocoyam. Fruit crops in the area include banana, pawpaw and pineapple.

The population for this study comprises all children born or nurtured by farm families or by farmer parents in the study area. The communities in the study area were stratified into four strata based on farming population and access of farm children to schools. Three communities were selected from each stratum by simple random sampling, making a total of 12 communities. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the respondents for the study. All farming households in each of the twelve communities were numbered. Ten of such households were then randomly selected from each community to make up 120 farming households marked for interview. Every available child within the range of 6 and 17 years of age were interviewed in the marked households. In all, three hundred (300) farm children were interviewed for the purpose of the study.

Structured interview schedule was used to collect data from the farm-children. The data collected covered personal characteristics, farm activities involved in, attitude to farm work and the problems encountered by children in relation to farm operations.

The dependent variable is the economic contribution of farm children to agricultural production. Economic contribution was determined by asking the farm children which farm activities they engaged in on the farm. Independent variables are: age, sex, level of education, and level of satisfaction to farming method. Each respondent's actual age and level of education were asked and recorded on the interview schedule. They were also asked whether they are satisfied with farming method in the study area or not.

Data collected were summarized using frequency counts and percentages. The hypotheses of the study were tested using chi-square analysis. Five percent level of confidence was used for the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study reveal that majority (46%) of the farm children fell between 14 and 17 years age bracket (Table 1). Another 36.0 percent

were between 10 and 13 years old. Very few (18%) of the respondents were below 10 years of age. Most of the respondents are thus in their tender and active age bracket where their interest could still be channeled towards a desired end. It also corroborates Jibowo's (1992) report that farm children start early to practice independent farming.

Table 1: Gender, age and educational level distribution of respondents (n = 300)

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Age (years)</i>		
6 – 9	54	18
10 – 13	108	36
14 – 17	138	46
Total	300	100
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	174	58
Female	126	42
Total	300	100
<i>Level of Education</i>		
No formal education	15	5
Still in primary school	60	20
Completed primary school	52	14
Primary school drop-out	18	6
Still in Secondary School	114	38
Completed secondary school	24	8
Secondary school dropouts	27	9
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2003.

The results further reveal that more than half (58%) of the farm-children are male while 42% of them are female. It may be inferred that gender is no barrier to active involvement in farming activities. Data collected indicate that majority (46%) of the farm-children were either in secondary school or they had completed secondary education. Another 34.0 percent were still in primary schools or they had completed primary education. It may be inferred that the farm children were provided with educational facilities in their local communities.

Ninety percent of respondents were not satisfied with the way farming is being practised in the study area (Table 2). According to them, farm work is tiring, tedious and not rewarding at all. The poor satisfaction with farm life of the farm children is a bad development for agricultural development since the farm children who are expected to make careers in agriculture were not happy with the way agriculture is being practiced in their communities. This low level of satisfaction to farming life was further reveal when the respon-

dents were asked the problems encountered in relation to farm operations, or what they detest most in farming.

Table 2: Level of satisfaction of respondents with farming methods (ns=300)

Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfied	30	10
Not Satisfied	270	90
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2003.

The results of study also reveal the problems of farming as a profession in the study area. Half of the youths reported that farming as a profession is very unrewarding because after the farmer must have gone through the back-break-

Table 3: Problems encountered in relation to farm operations (n = 300)

Problem	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of modern tools	60	20
Unaffordable input prices	45	15
Unrewarding nature of the job	150	50
Lack of capital for expansion	45	15
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2003.

ing rigour of primary food production, he is forced to sell his produce at take away prices because of pressing need for money and the perishable nature of his produce (Table 3). Another 35.0 percent observed that lack of modern tools and unaffordable prices of farm inputs are the major problems of agricultural production in their

Table 4: Activities of farm-children on the farm (n = 300)

Activity	Frequency	Percentage*
1. Clearing of land	100	33.3
2. Making of ridges	300	100
3. Planting	250	83.3
4. Weeding	300	100
5. Application of fertilizer	220	73.3
6. Spraying of chemicals	190	63.3
7. Harvesting	120	40

* Multiple Responses

Source: Field Survey, 2003

Table 6: Chi-square analysis showing relationship between selected personal characteristics and contribution to agricultural production

Variable	Calculated χ^2	Tabulated χ^2	Degree of freedom	Level of significance	Decision
Gender	10.0352	9.488	4	0.05	Significant relationship
Age	26.5568	21.026	12	0.05	Significant relationship
Level of education	35.5402	36.415	24	0.05	No Significant relationship

communities.

All the farm children participated in making of ridges and weeding. More than half of the farm children took part in planting, application of fertilizers and spraying of chemicals (Table 4). It may be inferred that most of the farm children do actively contribute to agricultural production in their communities.

The results in Table 5 reveal the occupational aspiration of respondent farm children. Majority (56%) of the farm children aspired to make careers in medicine, law and engineering. Few (8.0%) of them showed interest in farming as a profession. This is a bad development as there are no prospective generation to take over farming from the aged and ageing farming population in the study area.

Table 5: Occupational aspirations of farm children (n = 300)

Occupations	Frequency	Percentage
Teaching	39	13
Farming	24	8
Medicine	66	22
Law	54	18
Engineering	48	16
Trading	33	11
Others	12	4
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2003.

The results of the study also show that there is significant relationship between gender of respondents and their participation in farm activities since the calculated χ^2 exceeds tabulated χ^2 at 0.05 level of significance (Table 6). In addition, there is significant relationship between ages of respondents and their participation in farm activities. The results shows that the gender and age of farm children go a long way in determining what they do on the farm. In other words, male farm children significantly participated than female farm children in agricultural activities. Similarly, the older the farm children are the more they participate in agricultural activities.

The results also reveal that there is no significant relationship between respondents' level of education and their contribution to agricultural production. It could be inferred that as long as the children remain with their parents or guardians, they are made to participate in farm activities, no matter their level of education.

CONCLUSION

Gender and age have effect on economic contribution of farm children to agricultural production in the study area. Most of the interviewed youths (90%) are not satisfied with farming methods in the area. Eighty eight percent of the sampled youths strongly rejected farming as a profession in future. Lack of modern tools, unavailable and unaffordable agricultural inputs, unrewarding nature of farming and lack of capital for expansion are problems discouraging the farm children from career aspiration in agriculture. Based on the results and conclusion of the study, it was recommended that agricultural science as a subject should be made a compulsory subject in all primary and secondary schools throughout Nigeria, as an agriculture nation. This will be an avenue where by sound practical and theoretical agriculture will be taught to the young generation from childhood through adolescence. This should encourage and create youth's interest in agriculture. Also government at various levels should make provision for loan, and this should be made

available strictly to the young people aspiring to venture into agricultural production. In addition, non-governmental organizations, various institutions, religious bodies, cooperative societies should purchase farm machinery and allow farmers to rent them at low costs to be used on their farm. Other farm inputs like fertilizer, agro-chemicals, and improved seeds could also be bought in bulk and made available at affordable prices for farmers on the field. This will lessen the drudgery of farm operations, thereby making the venture more attractive to youths.

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