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Determinants of Utilization of Selected Inputs Among Youth Farmers In Benue State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
The study assessed the determinants of utilization of selected inputs among youth farmers in Benue State, Nigeria. It described the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents in the study area and examined the utilization of selected inputs among youth farmers in the area. Multistage random sampling was used in sampling 120 respondents in the state. A structured questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion were used in eliciting information from the respondents. Descriptive and inferential statistics such as percentage, frequency and mean score were used in analyzing the data for the study. Results showed that; large proportions (75.0%) of the respondents were males, majority of the youth farmers in Benue were within the mean age of 40 years. Result further revealed the grand mean of 2.23 as indicated high utilization of farm inputs in Benue State. There was low level of extension services in the State as indicated by grand mean of 1.8. The three point Likert-Type Scale used showed high utilization of agrochemicals (=2.5), improved seed (=2.1), loan (=2.4) and processing assets (=2.4).The study concluded that several factors militated against utilization of selected inputs among youth farmers in the area such as inadequacy of extension contact, inadequacy of water, inefficient market, and bad road, among others. It is therefore recommended that, there should be adequate utilization of selected inputs among youth farmers in the study area if agriculture is to contribute effectively to food security in Nigeria.

Keywords: Determinant, utilization, selected inputs and youth farmers

INTRODUCTION

Youth is referred as the entire time of life when one is young, including childhood, but often refers specifically to the time of life that is neither childhood nor adulthood but rather somewhere in between (Dorward *et al*, 2010). Youth can also be the appearance, freshness, vigor and spirit as characteristic of one who is young. Although the specific age that constitutes the youth vary but according to United Nations General Assembly, "Youths are the persons falling between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Also, Nigeria National Youth Development Policies stated that, youths comprise of all young people of ages between 18 – 35 years who are citizens of Federal Republic of Nigeria. At this age they are very energetic which means more labour force for agricultural production. Youths encourage agricultural production in rural communities since about 80% of labour comes from them and this agriculture has been identified as the pillar which needs the activities of the youth. Also, Kanu, (2016) confirmed that 75% of the rural dwellers depend on agricultural production. Afolayan, (2013) said that, these youths that play significant roles in the economy of agricultural production and rural development can only be improved through utilization of inputs for bumper harvest. In this event, determinants of utilization of selected inputs among youth farmers in Benue State so as to increase production and improve the food security services cannot be over emphasized (Kanu, 2016). She described Benue State youth farmers agricultural production as still being carried out through the use of physical strength, which declines with age. This, according to her, has been observed as one of the major constraints to agricultural production in the State.

Ojo, (2012) saw the need to use farm inputs and contributed that; government must continue to provide inputs to farmers to boast their role in the production process. Kanu (2016), supported that for youth farmers to move to the next level of agricultural business in medium scale, they have to be provided and utilized improved inputs since the role of inputs is a vital role to the growth of youth farmers in agricultural production. As inputs are needed to be utilized for effective farming so are youth farmers required for effective performance. Therefore, they are extricating twins that need not be separated. The study therefore, determined factors affecting the utilization of selected inputs among youth farmers in Benue State. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to examine the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents; analyze the utilization of inputs in the study area and determine the factors militating against the respondents in the utilization of selected inputs among youth farmers in that area.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Benue State. It is located in North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The population of the study comprised of male and female youth farmers in the state. The main occupation of the people is farming, prominently in the production of yam, guinea corn, cassava and maize. They also engage in domestic livestock production such as goat, sheep and poultry. Multistage random sampling was adopted in the selection of zones, blocks, circles and youth farmers. First, two agricultural zones were randomly selected from the State and two extension blocks were randomly selected from each of the two zones to give a total of four extension blocks from the selected two zones. Two circles were randomly selected from the extension blocks to give a total of eight circles and finally, 15 farmers were randomly selected to give a total of 120 youth farmers in the State. Structured questionnaire and interview schedules were developed. Focus Group Discussion was applied to get useful information from the respondents. Data collected included personal and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents,

such as age, sex marital status, religion, family size, occupation, farming experience and level of education. Others included utilization of inputs in the study area, sources of agricultural information; types of technologies developed and disseminated in the area, and factors militating against the respondents in the utilization of selected inputs among youth farmers in that area.

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentage, frequency and mean score. Various inputs were disseminated to the farmers in the study area such as improved seeds, agrochemicals, credit/loans, technical advice (Extension contact), food storage facilities and processing assets. The utilization of the above inputs was analyzed using a 3 point Likert-Type scale in this order: always = 3, seldom = 2, never = 1. The number of respondents at each stage was multiplied by the scale and the values added to obtain the total utilization score for each input. The mean utilization score was computed by dividing each input score by the number of respondents and the grand mean obtained by adding the means and dividing by the number of inputs utilized. The mean utilization was calculated using the formula; $X = \sum fx/N$; $X=1+2+3= 6/3 = 2.0$. Therefore, mean score from 2.0 and above indicates high utilization of inputs. The factors militating against the respondents in the utilization of inputs was analyzed using a 4 point Likert-Type scale in this order: Strongly agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly disagree =1. Benchmark mean = 2.5. Decision: $\bar{x} > 2.5$ indicates militating factor, $\bar{x} < 2.5$ indicates not militating factor

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic Characteristics

The Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents are presented in Table 1. The Table 1 showed that, mean age of the respondents was 40 years with 50% within 31-40 years of age bracket. This result implies that the farmers in Benue State are dominated by youths who are active within their productive age. This is in line with, Mazza, (2016) who observed that youth farmers constituted the major work force in Nigeria. The Table also revealed that large proportion (75%) of the respondents in Benue State was males. This implies that more male youth farmers engaged in agricultural production more than their female counterpart. This is line with Abimbola *et al,* (2013) that women were less involved in farming activities than the male counterparts in Nigeria. He also opined that gender disparity in Nigeria has helped in relegating the efforts of women in agricultural production to the background making them minority in the bulk of the production. From the result, average household size of respondents was 6 which show that, majority of them have large families. The result agrees with Nlerum, (2010) who found a similar household size among youth farmers in Niger-delta in Nigeria. This means that youth farmers with relatively large household size help in enhancing productivity. Household size in traditional agriculture determines the availability of labour and level of production.

Result also showed that majority (53.3%) of the youth farmers had secondary education. Their level of education is an advantage as it enhances utilization of agricultural inputs. This agreed with Obiechina, (2003) who reported high literacy level among farmers in South-East Nigeria. Table 1 further revealed that, large proportion (68%) of the youth farmers in Benue State were married. This result agreed with the findings of Ifejika *et al,* (2008) that majority of the farmers in Nigeria were married. The proportion 60.8% of respondents in Benue State had farming as their primary occupation; the result implies

that youths in Benue State engaged more in agricultural activities/productions. This may be attributed to availability of land and other farm inputs in Benue State. According to the result, mean farming experience among the youth farmers in Benue State was 14.3 years.

Farming experience has been variously shown to enhance utilization of inputs to improve farming techniques thereby increasing agricultural output. This is credible because the higher the farming experience, the more the youth farmers could have gained more knowledge and technological ideas on how to tackle farm production problem. This is in agreement with Okwusi and Ekumankama (2010) that the higher the years of farming experience, the more efficient the farmer becomes. The result of Nwobiala and Onumadu (2010) and also Bello and Mazza (2011) found that farming experience has enhanced the participation and adoption of improved farming inputs by farmers thereby increasing agricultural output.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Their Socioeconomic Characteristics

Socioeconomic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	30	25.0
Male	90	75.0
Age		
20-30	44	36.67
31-40	60	50.00
41-50	16	13.33
Mean	**40**	
Marital status		
Singe	42	35.00
Married	68	56.67
Widow	10	8.33
Household size		
1-3	40	33.33
4-6	70	58.33
7-9	10	8.33
Mean	**6**	
Primary occupation		
Civil servants	21	17.5
Farmer	73	60.8
Artisan	13	10.8
Trader	13	10.8
Secondary occupation		
Civil servants	25	20.83
Farmer	48	40.00
Artisan	10	08.33
Trading	37	30.83
Farming experience		
1- 10	70	58.33
11-20	40	33.33
21-30	10	08.33
Mean	**9**	
Level of education		
No formal education	12	10.0
Primary education	24	20.0
Secondary education	64	53.3
Tertiary education	26	16.7

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Utilization of Selected Inputs among Youth Farmers

The utilization of selected inputs among youth farmers is presented in Table 2. Table 2 showed the result of utilization of selected inputs among youth farmers in the study area. The findings revealed that youth farmers in Benue State had high utilization of farm input as indicated by the grand mean of 2.23.They had high utilization of inputs like agrochemicals, ($\overline{x}$= 2.5), credit\loan ($\overline{x}$=2.4), processing assets ($\overline{x}$=2.4) and food storage facilities ($\overline{x}$=2.2). This is in line with Adesoji, (2007) who stated that youth farmers are catalysts to utilize new ideas, concepts and technologies which are critical to changing the way agricultural inputs are practiced, perceived and utilized.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents According to Utilization of Selected Inputs among Youth Farmers Utilization of Selected Farm Inputs in Benue State N=120

Inputs	**∑x**	**Std. Dv**	$\bar{x}$
Agrochemicals (fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides, improved seeds)	302	0.5795	**2.5**
Improved seeds/cuttings (maize, rice, cassava etc.)	249	0.8009	**2.1**
Technical advice (extension contact)	214	0.7689	**1.8**
Credit/loans (banks, cooperative, groups)	285	0.7676	**2.4**
Processing Assets (mill for cassava, rice, maize, beans, and palm kernel, packaging's).	284	0.7771	**2.4**
Food storage facilities (silos, barn, rhombus etc)	266	0.9092	**2.2**
Grand mean			**2.23**

Source: Field survey, 2018. Key: Always = 3, Seldom = 2, Never = 1. Benchmark = 2.0. Decision: $\bar{x}$ > 2.0 indicates high utilization, $\bar{x}$ < 2.0 indicates low utilization

Factors Militating Against Utilization of Inputs in the Study Area

Factors militating against utilization of selected inputs among youth farmers in the study area are presented in Table 3. From the result, the major factors militating against utilization of inputs in the study area were insufficient fund ($\bar{x}$=3.5), insecurity ($\bar{x}$=3.3), inadequacy of extension contact (3.3), inadequate electricity supply, inadequacy of water, ($\bar{x}$=3.1), inefficient market ($\bar{x}$=2.6), lack of good road, ($\bar{x}$=2.9) and high cost of input ($\bar{x}$=2.9) among others. This result implies that the youth farmers were constrained in utilizing inputs in the study area. The result agreed with the findings of Mazza (2016) that farmers in Nigeria experiences challenges in accessing agricultural inputs such as loans\credit and farm subsidy etc.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to Factors militating against the utilization of farm inputs

Factors	**∑x**	**Std. Dv**	$\bar{x}$	**Remark**
Religious consideration	335	1.1442	**2.8**	Not constraint
Insufficient fund	414	0.8968	**3.5**	Constraint
Insecurity	401	0.6284	**3.3**	Constraint
Inadequate extension contact	395	0.8341	**3.3**	Constraint
Inadequate electricity supply	389	0.9958	**3.2**	Constraint
Inadequacy of water	371	0.7885	**3.1**	Constraint
Inefficient market	307	1.0674	**2.6**	Constraint
Lack of good road	342	1.0179	**2.9**	Constraint
High cost of input	341	1.0342	**2.9**	Constraint
Lack of knowledge of the extension staff	410	0.7948	**3.4**	Constraint
Inadequacy of the farm input	363	0.8741	**3.0**	Constraint
Grand mean			**2.9**	Constraint

Source: Field survey, 2018. Key: Strongly agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, strongly disagree =1. Benchmark mean = 2.5. Decision: $\bar{x}$ > 2.5 indicates militating factor, $\bar{x}$ < 2.5 indicates not militating factor

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The integration of youth farmers in agricultural production in Benue State is an important factor towards agricultural development because youths are found to possess

certain characteristics desirable for sustainable utilization of agricultural inputs. Youth farmers in the State had high utilization of farm input and more males engaged in agricultural production. They are active within their productive age of 31-40 years. Majority (53.3%) of the youth farmers had secondary education and high farming experience which has been variously shown to enhance utilization of inputs. This is credible because the higher the farming experience, the more the youth farmers could have gained more knowledge and technological ideas on how to tackle farm production problems. Youth farmers are the ideal catalysts to utilize inputs given their greater propensity and willingness to new ideas, concepts and technology which are all critical to changing the way agriculture is practiced and perceived. The poor image of persons involved in agriculture needs to be changed and therefore, to transform our country from developing to developed, it needs the youth farmers and inputs utilization for economic growth with benefits of reaching not just the study area but the majority of Nigerians.

Therefore, it is recommended that, government should encourage youth farmers through provision of loan, security, employ more extension workers, provide electricity; adequate water supply, provide efficient market, good road and subsidized the cost of input for higher production.Government should also organize workshops, seminars, conferences, agricultural shows, radio, television programmes and meetings with youth farmers group. Finally, I recommended that youth farmers should organize themselves into cooperative societies and groups for adequate information on input utilization.

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