

REVIEW ON INVOLVEMENT OF THE YOUTHS IN COCOA PRODUCTION IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The contribution of agriculture to the aggregate gross domestic product (GDP) of Nigeria is still very low in the recent time; this may be attributed partly to the few numbers of youth that actively participate in agriculture. An efficient agricultural sector would in no doubt enable a country to generate employment opportunities that will stimulate economic growth and development. The dynamism of the agricultural sector is undoubtedly a springboard for youth empowerment towards a sustainable socio – economic development. This paper asserts that the agricultural sector is the key driver of sustainability of most developed nations in the world. Specifically, the paper focuses on the need for youth engagement in cocoa production in Nigeria; for this will revolutionized the agricultural sector through sustainable development via agro-business in Nigeria. The enormous potentials of youths in Nigeria provide opportunities for the stimulation of agro businesses, thereby reducing youth unemployment towards the achievement of sustainable development.

Key words: Agriculture, Cocoa, youth and empowerment.

Introduction

The importance of cocoa production in Nigeria economy cannot be overemphasized as the crop remains the leading export and foreign exchange earning of the country. Nigeria occupy fourth position as one of the largest producer of Cocoa in the world, after Ivory Coast, Indonesia and Ghana, and also takes third position as largest exporter, after Ivory Coast and Ghana. Oil boom discovery in 1960s made Nigeria to shift its investment attention from cocoa hereby leading to a major world output decline in production (Wikipedia 2020 accessed 11/1/2021).

The earliest cocoa farms in Nigeria were in Bonny and Calabar in the 1870s but the area proved not suitable for cultivation (Punch News paper 2020/05/29). In 1880, a cocoa farm was established in Lagos and later, a few more farms were established in Agege and Ota. From the

farms in Agege and Ota information disseminated to the Yoruba hinterland about cocoa farming, thereafter, planting of the tree expanded in Western Nigeria. William (2010). Farmers in Ibadan and Egba land began experimenting with planting cocoa in uncultivated forests in 1890 and those in Ilesha started around 1896. The planting of cocoa later spread to Okeigbo and Ondo town both in Ondo State, Ife and Gbongan in Osun State and also in Ekiti land (Wikipedia 2020 accessed 11/1/2021).

Nigeria needs a shift from the present mono product based economy (petroleum product) to an economy that is diversified. There is need to join the modern economies of the world as envisioned in the Nigerian government vision 2020 and this may be realized if youths engagement in agricultural development remains on relegated according to Nigeria vision 2020.

The integration of youths into Cocoa production in Nigeria will be an important factor towards Cocoa sector and this will be a greater asset for the increased productivity of Cocoa. It is pertinent to say that youth have innovative behavior, physical strength and fast rate of learning etc. However, the quest for white collar jobs among the youths, infrastructure deficit in the rural areas, and inconsistent government policies may have discouraged the youths from active participation in Cocoa farming. The paper therefore examines the need for youth involvement in Cocoa Production and the challenges surrounding their involvement as well as the prospects in youth involvement in cocoa production in Nigeria.

Broad Objective

The paper reviewing the enhancement of cocoa productivity in Cross River State of Nigeria, as well as examine the following specific objectives:

1. To show the significant involvement of youths in cocoa production in Cross River State
2. To observe major constraints and prospects of youth involvement in cocoa production in Cross River State.

Importance of Cocoa in Economic Development of Nigeria

In Nigeria, agriculture export has played important roles in economic development by providing the needed foreign exchange earnings for other capital development project such as; schools, road constructions, hospitals and other infrastructures in the country before the advent of petroleum. Agriculture contributes significantly to national food self – sufficiency by accounting for over 90% of total food consumption requirements, it helped to maintain a healthy and peaceful population and also a source of food and nutrition for households (FAO, 2010).

The Nigerian economy is essentially agriculture in terms of national output and employment generation. Nigeria was among the leading

cocoa producing nations until oil discovery in early 1970s. Taiwo (2016). This circumstance influenced the attention given to Agricultural sector including cocoa industry in particular which became grossly inadequate. Prior to Independence in 1960 over 81% of gross national product of Nigeria were accounted mainly from agriculture (Cocoa) Okuneye *et al.* (2011). Uwagboe (2011) noted that among other factors responsible for the decline in production of Cocoa in Nigeria was the vacuum created by the abolition of the Nigeria cocoa marketing board, high cost of agricultural labour, lack of credit facilities to cocoa farmers, indiscriminate bush burning, old age of the farmers, massive migration of the youth from rural areas to urban cities that affect cocoa plantation.

Bymolt *et al.* (2018) states that, previous research has identified various reasons farmers produced cocoa. For example, some have argued that cocoa provides a means for meeting household subsistence needs, generating capital to invest elsewhere, securing inheritable property, and providing financial security at an older age. (Anaeni *et al.* 2011 ; Baah *et al.* 2012) said that “other studies have pointed to better marketing conditions for cocoa compared with other crops”.

The table 1 according to International Cocoa Organisation (ICCO, 2020) showed that Nigeria produced 338000 metric tonnes of cocoa in the year 2000 and the production rose to 385000 tonnes in 2003 at an increasing rate. The highest cocoa production was observed in 2006 with the value of 485000 tonnes. The value of cocoa produced in Nigeria began to drop, in the year 2009 and 2019; the value of cocoa production in the country had reduced to 363510 and 250000 tonnes respectively. This sharp reduction in the cocoa production in Nigeria can simply be associated with inadequate of young farmers who are energetic in the rural areas. This factor among many other factors needs to be addressed by the government to further boost cocoa production in the country.

Table 1: Cocoa production in Nigeria from 2000 – 2019 by International Cocoa Organization (ICCO,) Quarterly Bulletin, 2020

Year	Yield (tons/Hectare)
2000	338000
2001	340000
2002	362000
2003	385000
2004	412000
2005	441000
2006	485000
2007	360572
2008	367020
2009	363510
2010	399200
2011	391000
2012	383000
2013	367000
2014	248000
2015	195000
2016	236521
2017	245000
2018	250000
2019	250000

The significant involvement of youths in cocoa production in Cross River State

Oduwale *et al.*, (2017) reported that the youths in Nigeria are ages between 16-40 years, they constitute 65% of the labour force and possesses the following qualities: active and change orientation, energetic, dynamic, eager to learn, bounds spirit, optimistic for future, receptiveness to new ideas and searching for avenue to direct their energies.

Adeogun *et al.* (2011) noted that majority of cocoa farmers are already in their old age and youths need to be encouraged to engage in cocoa farming.

Youths constitute an important segment of the society, and if given necessary support, their contributions cannot be overemphasized. Youths are important and vital in human resources which will shoulder the responsibility for development including cocoa production (Skuza, 2005). Therefore, it is important to say that some

of the major setbacks in cocoa production can be attributed to the following:

1. **Inadequate virgin forest soils:** There is inadequate virgin forest where youths can utilize for cocoa farming as a result of deforestation (illegal felling of trees). Access to farm land is one notable challenge facing cocoa production in Nigeria. For instance, in a community called Ajassor in Etung local government area of Cross River State, Nigeria, youths are willing to go into cocoa cultivation, but they are seriously hampered by unavailability of land. Farm size determined the level of production and income and also the extent to which the famers will be affected if some of the variables they considered to be factors affecting their involvement in cocoa production are unavailable or inadequate. In some areas bush burning and erosion pose treat on the quality of the soil hereby depleting the nutritive value of the available soils. This alone

can frustrate an upcoming young cocoa farmer in the sector.

2. Poor infrastructure in the rural areas:

In the rural areas where farm lands are domiciled, the infrastructural development such as good roads, electricity, pipe borne water, housing scheme among others are either not available or in a very bad state and this tends to discourage youth from cocoa farming business and in other hand reduce drastically the total output per annum. This factor pave way for youth to engage in other odd business such as motorcyclist popularly called Okada, bus conductors and other illegal business. Therefore, government should concentrate on development of infrastructure in the rural areas to trigger the interest of the youths towards cocoa farming.

3. Lack of improved varieties: The few youths who reluctantly engaged themselves in cocoa farming only use primitive and out dated system of cocoa production which is no longer help to provide a meaningful production that can help boost the economy and make substantive revenue for the upkeep of the famer and his entire household. Hence the need for supplies of improved and proven varieties that will enhance higher productivity such as: early fruiting, disease tolerance, draught tolerance, early maturing and high yielding varieties of cocoa to boost productivity. It should be noted that with the above genetic characteristics, it is now possible to propagate seedlings that will mature within a short period as against the old varieties which will take a longer period before it start producing, the new varieties e.g. CRIN TC series from Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria have the ability to give a higher yield of 1.5 to 2.0 tons of cocoa per hectare annually unlike the elite varieties that can only produce 450kg per hectare annually. With this development the youths will be attracted to cocoa business.

4. Inadequate training and development of skills: Cocoa Farmers especially the youths are not exposed to developing their farm produce to end product such as making soap

and detergent from the pod husk, chocolate from the beans, bread from the cocoa powder etc instead buyers who determines and fix unreasonable prices pushes the farmers to produce less quality beans for exports with lower interest. The interest of the youth can be arose if government and other non-governmental agencies can aid up the act of training and developing the skills of the youths to generate immediate and substantive revenue from their farm produce rather than the total dependence on foreign markets. Alexandria Lowe (2017) said that it is important to find ways for young people to increase their earning potential as day labourers. For example with the right skills, they might be able to command higher incomes for their work. He also posited that, the training provided should also focus on providing young people with the skills the private sector actors in the sector are looking for.

5. Lack of credit facilities: There is no how cocoa farming business can thrive without consistent credit facilities such as soft loans and grants to assist the youths to aid their farm input and for the routine maintenance of their plantations as and when due . Most young people may get easily discouraged when they can no longer sustain the required farm input and fund needed to enhance high productivity from the point of establishment to harvesting. Financial service providers (governmental and nongovernmental) should improve the availability of financial services for cocoa farmers especially the youths in other to encourage them to be more active in cocoa farming business, they should help more in aspect of initial capital and production of inputs.

Consequently, for cocoa production to be improved there is need for fostering youth involvement in its production at the state level. In other words, Nigeria like other leading cocoa producing countries in Africa needs to involve youths more in cocoa farming. White (2012) opined that the program; “Cocoa Life” aimed at creating empowerment and thriving cocoa farming families to ensure a more sustainable

supply of cocoa was introduced in Ghana. In order to reach these goals, five focused areas were identified.

1. **Training:** Through skills training and the distribution of improved planting material, by this Cocoa Life helps farmers improve their yields and earn higher incomes.

2. **Community:** Young men and women were supported to transform their communities together by means of gender equality education and building a sense of ownership within communities.

3. **Livelihoods:** Cocoa farming provided them access to microcredit so that farmers can develop additional sources of income and reinvest in their businesses.

4. **Environment:** Provision of program that will invest in the protection of land and forests, and promotes efficiency rather than expansion, so as to maintain ecosystems for future generations.

5. **Youth:** Cocoa Life stimulates school enrolment for children and provides training for youths to make it easier to find employment in the cocoa sector once they have finished school.

Constraints of Youths involvement in Cocoa Production in Nigeria

Despite attempts made by the Government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and private institutions to encourage youths participation in agriculture, the efforts have not reflected in the age distribution of the farming population. This could be as a result of constraints faced by young farmers and thus, making it very difficult to engage in agricultural activities as some youths do not perceive agriculture as a lucrative business (FAO,2010).

Poor societal value orientation is considered as one of the constraints to youths involvement in agriculture. While premium is placed over such vocational callings as medicine, engineering and law, agriculture was relegated; a condition that worsened over the dominant influence of the emergent petro-economy which makes Youths looked down on agriculture (Amadi, 2012). Akpan (2012) also

noted that economic factors such as inadequate credit facilities, low farming profit margins, lack of agricultural insurance, initial capital and production inputs and inadequate credit facilities as factors militating youths engagement in agriculture.

According to White (2012), one reason why young people express reluctance to farm may reflect their aversion, not to farming as such, but to the long period of waiting that they face before they have a chance to engage in independent farming, even when land is available in the community. White stressed that in many or most agrarian societies the older generation – parents, or community elders in places where land is controlled not individually but by customary law – retain land as long as possible.

Umeh and Odom (2011) enumerated constraints faced by youth associations to include drudgery nature of agriculture due to the dependence on hand tools; backwardness of the rural area where farming activities predominate, lack of social amenities such as electricity, good roads, pipe borne water, transportation, schools, markets, hospital and communication facilities discouraging involvement of youth in cocoa production. He further added that fund mobilization is still a major setback and of course, returns to investment (RTI) are still low due largely to low input value for those who eventually take up the adventure.

Lack of basic amenities in cocoa growing communities: For example, basic amenities such as schools, pipe borne water, hospitals, recreational centers and tourist creativities are lacking generally. FAO (2010) reported that other constraints to youths involvement in Cocoa production in Nigeria includes

i. **Ageing labour force:** At present, the total sector engages over 60% of the working population, including farmers, traders and processors. However, the current population of farmers is ageing. Combined with the fact that educated people are minimally involved in cocoa production which could threaten the future development of the sector.

ii. Environmental degradation and climate change: The sustainability of natural resources is threatened by certain practices like burning of bush and misuse of modern technologies like irrigation and agrochemicals.

iii. Limited technological development and dissemination: The continued use of traditional processing and distribution methods due to lack of access to new technologies and market information has resulted in low yields and poor quality products of cocoa.

iv. Poor quality infrastructure: Movement of agricultural commodities as well as dissemination of knowledge on market prices and technologies is greatly hampered by poor infrastructure in terms of roads, storage facilities and communication technologies.

v. Insufficient access to markets: Resulting from weak value chains and lack of infrastructure and information, farmers, processors and traders have trouble accessing (international) markets. In addition, low market prices and price volatility pose a serious risk for agricultural stakeholders.

Way-out of constraints of youths engagement in cocoa production in Nigeria

Agricultural Development Program (ADP) in the various states should be proactive towards the development of youths active participation in cocoa. Government should assist the youths by adequately and effectively funding the farmers to enhance high cocoa production. The paper therefore suggest that public policy makers in the agricultural sector should develop and implement policies that enhance agribusiness in order to promote youth's participation in it through the following targets;

- i. Availability of agro-inputs in cocoa production e.g. agro-chemicals are made available at affordable prices.
- ii. Provision of economic supports such as credit guarantee and modern farming equipment - financing to youth farmers.

iii. School leavers with degrees and certificates in agricultural base discipline should be motivated with interest free loan to enable them start business in cocoa production.

iv. Improved varieties of cocoa seedlings and other improved planting materials with superior genetic characters should be distributed free to the youth to boost their production.

v. Provision of trade policies such as making available bumper harvest purchase plan to forestall spoilage should be put in place.

vi. Government should make available productive land suitable for cocoa production at subsidized rate or free of charge as the case may be in order to encourage active youth participation in cocoa production.

vii. There should be periodic empowerment of the youths through training on basic technologies of cocoa production that will enhance good agricultural practices (GAP) for maximum output.

viii. Research on socio-economic variables affecting youths in cocoa production should be carried out periodically.

Prospects of Youth involvement in Cocoa Production in Nigeria

The active youths participation in Cocoa production will no doubt be improve in most cocoa growing communities in Nigeria most especially Cross River state if all necessary conditions for cocoa production are met as expected.

Therefore, the prospect of cocoa production in Nigeria would be greatly enhanced when government shows commitments and political will in getting rid of most constraints militating against youths interest in the business most especially along the value chain.

The full engagement of youths in cocoa value chain will ensure a business inclination and orientation instead of mere means of survival that has been the practice.

The components of the cocoa value chain with great prospect for the youths include the following:

1. **Production;** as part of the advantages of engaging youths in cocoa production, it is expected that more youths will be more oriented in the production aspect of the value chain, in order words jobs creation among the youths will be enhanced.

2. **Processing;** Obviously outstanding results are guaranteed if the youths are actively involved in the processing aspect of the value chain which will give room for more job opportunities, exposure to technical knowhow and increase in revenue generation.

3. **Standardization (sorting and grading);** The engagement of youths in sorting and grading of cocoa beans for quality produce will serve as job opportunities and also improve the quality and pricing of cocoa products among farmers.

4. **Marketing;** the engagement of youths in cocoa production through buying and selling of cocoa beans can as well give rise to more job creation if more attention that will enhance the interest of the youths will boost the economy of the country. Therefore the youths should be involved in the marketing aspect.

5. **Utilization and end use research;** this process describes the uses of cocoa bean and the byproducts to a finished product such as soap, liquid detergent, chocolate, bread, wine juice etc as part of the economic importance of the crop. The full involvement of youths in this area shall provide business orientation making the products a valuable means of survival than what has been in place currently such as; commercial motor cyclists, bus conductors and so on. The youths should be inclined through training and acquisition of skills that will enhance turning the cocoa into reasonable bye-products and this shall help in growing the economy of the nation. Oduwole (2017) posited that if youths are actively involved in cocoa production the following benefits can be achieved; Increase in cocoa production, youths employment, better

livelihood, increase in world marketing and increase in Nigeria gross products. Furthermore, it should be noted that if the above discussed prospects of youths involvement in cocoa production are actually carried out their orientation shall grossly be changed resulting to change in mindset towards indecent acts such as; thuggery, laziness, kidnapping, robbery and otherwise.

Conclusion and recommendations

Haven't studied well the qualities of the youths as been energetic and reliable in the discharge of various farm activities especially cocoa production in Cross River State and Nigeria as a whole, a well structured agricultural policies that will encourage the youths to participate actively in the cultivation of cocoa across the state need be formulated and implemented.

The paper determine the potentials for youths engagement in cocoa production in Cross River State, examine the challenges of youths participation in cocoa production in the state as well as suggest possible solutions to the epileptic development of Cocoa production in Nigeria. There is need for government to increase investment in infrastructure such as good access roads from farms to the markets, good storage facilities such as ware houses free from destructive pests and many other needful infrastructures that will attract the youths participation in cocoa farming and agricultural production generally. This will surely boost the morale of the youths to be involved in the business of agriculture.

The paper therefore recommends that social policies and research that promote the perception and motivation of youths through awareness creation periodically be carried out so as to empower the youths to be actively involved in cocoa production in Cross River State and Nigeria at large.

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