

The Disposition of Graduate Students in Akure Urban Towards Agriculture as a Tool for Youth Employment

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Abstract

Every society in the Anglophone West African countries has been faced with many social problems and challenges of its youth and these challenges include unemployment, terrorism, poverty, trafficking, kidnapping among others. Agriculture has been considered a catalyst or a tool for ameliorating social problems especially in a developing country like Nigeria where agriculture is the mainstay of the economy. However, agriculture in Nigeria is not appreciated and perceived to be an effective tool for employment among youth. This is because the major problem exhibited by youth is the negative attitude towards agriculture as a result of drudgery in farm operations. The paper examined the disposition of graduate students in Akure city towards engaging in agriculture as a tool for youth employment. Cross-sectional survey design was employed in the study. Purposeful, accidental and simple random sampling techniques were used, and questionnaires and in-depth interview guide were the major instrument for data collection. 250 questionnaires were distributed to respondents and 7 respondents for the in-depth interview were employed. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis which was presented with tables (percentages and frequencies) and charts and Chi-square (X^2) was used to test the hypothesis formulated for the study. The major finding of the study revealed that graduate student's disposition or attitudes toward agriculture is not encouraging and that is why they don't engage in it. On the recommendation note, the finding showed that social workers should be greatly involved in mass literacy campaign and awareness by educating the populace on the relevance of entrepreneurship and diversification through agricultural opportunities.

Keywords: Agriculture, Disposition, Graduate students, Unemployment and Trafficking

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Background to the Study

In many African societies, persistent and high levels of unemployment have been features of the youth labour market for a very long time and Nigeria has a major youth unemployment problem (Annie, 2012). Before the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in Nigeria, green job (agriculture) was the dominant sector of the economy, contributing about 70% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employing about the same percentage of the working population, and accounting for about 90% of foreign exchange earnings (Corporate Agriculture, 2012). To a large extent, green job determines the health and wellbeing of a nation. A strong and efficient agricultural system should ensure adequate food security for the growing population; generate employment for the workforce; provide raw materials for the agro industries, sustain balance payment equilibrium through the generation of foreign exchange, enable adequate utilization of environment resources and eradicate poverty and hunger (Corporate Agriculture, 2012).

Although, Nigeria today depends heavily on oil industry for its revenue, it is still predominantly an agriculture society. Agriculture remains a key sector of the economy providing employment for about 70% of the population (Adebayo & Kavoos, 2016). Thus, the importance of the agricultural sector in generating employment and stimulating overall economic development in a developing country such as Nigeria cannot be undermined. Most public policies in Nigeria, especially since independence in 1960, were tailored towards promoting food security, provision of the agricultural raw materials needed by the manufacturing sector to provide adequate employment and income to alleviate poverty as well as earn substantial foreign exchange.

The industrial revolution of the Nineteenth century which catapulted the agrarian economies of the most countries of Europe got the impetus in Agriculture (Ojenagbo, 2011). Indeed, the importance of agriculture in any nation's economy cannot be over emphasized. For instance, in United States of America, agriculture contributes about 1.1% of the country's Gross Domestic Product. It is 13% of China, 2.6% in Australia, 9% in South Africa, 2.5% in Israel, 12% in Australia, 9% in Argentina, 13.5% in Egypt and in Nigeria it contributes 26.8% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (Nature, 2010). The above statistics is an indication that the more developed a country is, the lower the contribution of agriculture to Gross Domestic Product.

In sub-Saharan Africa, green occupies a prominent position in the national economies, as the sector serves as a key driver of growth, wealth creation, employment as well as poverty reduction. It is also the leading economic activity in the continent which contributes between 20% and 30% of its Gross Domestic Product (Adesina, 2013). In an Agrarian economy like Nigeria, the land as a unit for agricultural production provides the needed fulcrum upon which a sustainable development would blossom. Agricultural production till date remains the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. With a population that is largely agrarian, agriculture has traditionally been the main sources of livelihood for our people. It provides the means of livelihood for over 70% of the population and a major source of raw materials for the agro-allied industries and potent source of the much-needed foreign exchange (World Bank, 1998; Okumadewa, 1997).

development of the region was hinged on the sector alone. Agriculture accounted for about two-thirds of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, over the years, the sector has witnessed rapid decline in its role and contribution to national development. They have been abandoned in pursuit of the black gold. This situation started with the “Oil boom” which led to the rapid decline of the Agricultural sector. Consequently, Nigeria became a major importer of agricultural products as against its earlier position as a major exporter. This led to a decline of the economically active population in agriculture in Nigeria as well as an increase in the level of unemployment, in the region. Nigeria is a nation of approximately 166.2 million people and in 2016, it is estimated to have over 178.5 million people predominantly youths. This overwhelming population has caused supply to outstrip demand especially in the formal employment sector (Kakwagh and Ikwuba 2010; Bakare 2011; Abimbola 2008). Unemployment is undoubtedly the most challenging socio-economic problem confronting the country. Unemployment as described by Kakwagh and Ikwuba (2010) has affected the youths of Nigeria from a broad spectrum of socio-economic groups. A focus on agriculture is generally believed to be a panacea for sustainable development of any nation (Mijerink & Roza 2007; Vaarst 2010; Barbu & Capunsneanu 2012).

Nigeria is endowed with lots of natural and human resources with large expanse of fertile land and estimated to be the most populous country in the Sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria has different sectors such as agriculture, solid minerals, sports, and entertainment, tourism among others, yet the citizens live in abject poverty subsisting on less than \$2 a day as a result of several factors which includes inappropriate domestic policies and an unfavourable external economic environment. The country discovered oil in 1959 over fifty years ago at Oloibiri in today's Bayelsa State, but over 70% of the country's earnings come from oil paying little or no attention to other sectors of the economy which shifts the attention of graduates and undergraduates from engaging in agricultural employment as it is not the trending part in the Nigeria's economy (Yakubu, & Akanegbu, 2015). Agriculture contributed the largest quota to the gross domestic product of the country (Ogen 2007; Lawal and Atteh 2006; Loto 2011). Nigeria during this period was one of the world's leading producers and exporters of cash crops such as cocoa, palm kernel, cotton, groundnut, rubber, and hides and skin (Alkali cited in Ogen; Agbolagba et al 2010; Afolayan & Ajibade 2012). In the late 1970s, Nigeria began its own Green Revolution amidst fanfare, soon after, the programme collapsed and the country lapsed back to its unenviable status of a major importer of grains and processed foods (Ogbalubi, & Wokocha, 2013). For a country which once earned most of its foreign exchange from agriculture, which taught Malaysia how to produce palm, it is a sad irony, that, the Nigeria Green Revolution failed due to, among others, a misapplication of funds, insincerity, absolute neglect and a general high level of nationalism (Shafie, & Nayan, 2010).

According to the Central Bank of Nigeria (2003), the nation unemployment rate, rose from 4.3 percent in 1970 to 6.4 percent in 1980. The high rate of unemployment observed in 1980 was attributed largely to depression in the Nigerian economy during the late 1970s. Specifically from the same source, the economic downturn led to the implementation of stabilization measures which included restriction on exports, which caused import dependency of most Nigerian manufacturing enterprises, which in turn resulted in operation

of many companies below their installed capacity. This development led to the close down of many industries while the survived few were forced to retrench a large proportion of their workforce.

Many youths and graduates see agriculture as a dirty job and a work that demands high financial involvement for it to pay them the best interest. Majority of youth in the Nigerian state has agricultural background, a necessary condition for developing positive attitudes towards agriculture as a career, but only few who have no option engage in agricultural production as a means of livelihood, because they have developed a negative attitude towards agriculture and they are no longer interested in engaging in agriculture as a career do to the following reasons: Inadequate awareness of the scope of opportunities in the agriculture sector; inadequate access to land; insufficient access to capital; the risk associated with farming; temptation towards more lucrative white collar jobs (Yaday, 2016). The problem is that the government does not have the interest of agriculture at heart to be source of employment to the youths and graduates of this country. However, agriculture, if properly embraced and funded will guarantee food security, reduction of poverty and unemployment rate in Nigeria. Diversification of the Nigerian economy through a functional investment in agriculture by individuals, government and the organized private sector will help solve the problem of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria.

Omotesho et al (2015), carried out a study on knowledge and attitude of agriculture students towards commercialization of date palm in university of Ilorin, Nigeria. The study assessed the knowledge and attitude of agriculture students of the University of Ilorin towards the commercialization of plant. The study also investigated the relationship between attitude towards the commercialization of the date palm and some selected characteristics of the students. A total of 86 students were selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. Descriptive statistics and the correlation analysis were the tools used to analyze the data for the study. The study revealed that only 20.9% of the students had a high knowledge of date palm production. At $p < 0.05$ students' knowledge of date palm had a significant relationship with positive attitude towards the commercialization of the plant.

In addition, students' interest in agriculture as a course of study and their interest in agriculture as a career were positively related to their attitude towards the commercialization of date palm. The study concluded that the level of knowledge and the attitude of agriculture students were generally poor. Increased awareness and knowledge of the agronomy and economics of the plant are therefore suggested among the students. The study recommended that students who are studying agriculture because they could not secure admission in their courses of choice should be counseled on the potentials in agriculture as careers to enable them settle in and embrace agriculture. Lastly, the study also recommends that entrepreneurship and enterprise development should be impressed upon agricultural students.

Abebe (2015) carried out a study on attitudes of undergraduate students towards self-employment in Ethiopian public universities. The main aims of the study was to investigate

the attitude of Ethiopia public university undergraduate grading class students towards self-employment. The data was collected through questionnaire from randomly selected 80 students as Assosa University. The data obtained through questionnaire was statistically analysed through statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 20. The research result revealed that significant number of graduating class students' job preference right after graduation was government or private employment and majority of students do not have short-term self-employment plan in the foreseeable future after graduation. The study recommended that universities entrepreneurship course should focus practically on development of competencies related to entrepreneurship and cultural awareness.

Social work as a profession is concerned with the welfare of individuals and group members of the community. They offer services to individuals, groups, families with the purpose of helping them to overcome their challenges and enhance their wellbeing (Uzuegbu, 2004; International Federation of Social Work (IFSW), 2014). Social worker through advocacy, linkages, public awareness, education, can empower youth and undergraduates especially through information to change their negative perception agriculture as a means of employment. Social workers can also influence government policies towards agriculture so as to make it more attractive and enticing.

Many intriguing studies have been conducted over the last thirty years that have explored different aspects of agriculture and youths employment, benefits and usage of agriculture, factors that promote youth involvement in agriculture, knowledge of agriculture by the youths, attitude of youths towards agriculture, challenges of unemployment among others in different cities of Nigeria (Omotesho, Olabode, Animashaun, & Ogunlae, 2015; Ogbalubi & Wokocha, 2013; Bakare, 2011; Adesina, 2013; Idoko, 2018; Adekunle, Oladipo, Adesa & Fatoye, 2009). Nevertheless, none of these studies addressed the disposition of graduate students in Akure city towards engaging in green job (agriculture) as a tool for youth employment: framework for social workers. This study tends to fill this significant gap by examining the disposition of graduate students in Akure city towards engaging in green job (agriculture) as a tool for youth employment: framework for social workers.

This will go a long way in making the society, the youth, and graduates students develop the enthusiasm towards engaging in agricultural activities. It is in this light that this work is designed to:

1. To examine the disposition of graduate students in Akure city towards engaging in agriculture as a tool for youth employment.
2. To find out the factors that hinder graduate students' involvement in agriculture.
3. To ascertain the ways in which helping professionals or educators can help in increasing the involvement of graduate students in agriculture in Akure city.

Theoretical Framework

Empowerment theory of Babara, Bryant Solomon (1976) is of the opinion that empowerment is a process, a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery

over their affairs (Rappaport, 1984; Seidman & Rappaport, 1986). Empowerment is both a value orientation for working in the community and a theoretical model for understanding the process and consequences of efforts to exert control and influence over decisions that affect one's life, organizational functioning, and the quality of community life (Rappaport, 1981 & Zimmennan, 1981). A distinction between the values that underlie an empowerment approach to social change and empowerment theory is necessary. The value orientation of empowerment suggests goals aims, and strategies for implementing change. Empowerment theory provides principles and a framework for organizing our knowledge. The development of empowerment theory also helps advance the construct beyond a passing fad and political manipulation. A theory of empowerment suggests ways to measure the construct in different contexts, to study empowering processes, and to distinguish empowerment from other constructs, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, or locus of control. Empowerment suggests a distinct approach for developing interventions and creating social change. It directs attention toward health, adaptation, competence, and natural helping systems. It includes the perspective that many social problems exist due to unequal distribution of, and access to, resources. Some individuals are best served by mutual help, helping others, or working for their rights, rather than having their needs fulfilled by a benevolent professional; (Gallant, Cohen, & Wolff, 1985). An empowerment approach goes beyond ameliorating the negative aspects of a situation by searching for those that are positive. Thus, enhancing wellness instead of fixing problems, identifying strengths instead of cataloging risk factors, and searching for environmental influences instead of blaming victims characterizes an empowerment approach.

However, this theory makes us to understand that graduate student's participation in agriculture sector in Nigeria is very low, largely because the sector has been made highly unattractive due to risks, costs, lack of funding and incentives, inadequate information, technology, policy inconsistency, ineffective marketing, inefficiency and its labour-intensive nature. As such, motivating the youths to view agriculture as a career opportunity will require a multilevel intervention. In the first instance, those within the school system must be targeted. Secondly, those outside the school system must be lured and sensitized. How should this be done? They should be taught by delivering age-appropriate information inside and outside the formal school system, adequate training is also necessitated. The absence of agriculture from the curriculum, particularly at the compulsory levels of education should be addressed (Adekunle, Oladipo, Adisa, Fatoye, 2009). This theory relates to this study because empowerment is both intangible such as information empowerment and also tangible in the form of material empowerment. Graduates can be empowered through information by desensitizing them of their ill perception and misinformation about agriculture as being unattractive, dirty, and a poverty-stricken job. Also government and NGOs can help empower youths and undergraduates through loans, grants, providing farm machineries, improved seedlings, fertilizers among others.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Akure city which is made up of the following communities: Araromi, Alagbaka, Ijoka, Ilemo, and Ijapo. Akure city is located in Ondo state of the South-

West Nigeria with people who are mostly Christian and Muslims. The study also employed cross-sectional study design. The study had graduate students living in Akure city as the population and male and female students who were 18 years and above constituted the population for this study. The simple random, accidental and purposive sampling techniques were used in this study. The Purposive and simple random technique was used to select the aforementioned communities in Akure city and any graduate who was met whether on the street or in his/he home was administered with the questionnaire by the researcher or the two (2) research assistants.

A total of 257 respondents were sampled for the study in consideration of the time and resources available for the researcher. The study employed 250 questionnaire and 7 In-Depth Interview (IDI) as the major instruments for data collection and the IDI was used to complement the finding of the questionnaires from the respondents. The questionnaires were self-administered and comprised open and close ended questions and it was administered to the respondents in their respective communities. The collection of data using questionnaires was sorted out, assembled, coded and computer processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was organized around the research objectives and analysis involved the use of frequency distribution (which include the frequency and percentage) for easy interpretation.

Results

The analysis was based on responses of the respondents from the questionnaires and IDI which were distributed to graduate students in Akure city. From a total of 250 questionnaires that were distributed among the communities selected from Akure city for the study, 93.2% (N=233) were correctly filled and returned while 6.8% were not filled and returned. The analysis of this study was done from the 233 questionnaires and 7 IDI that were valid. The socio-demographic data covered the sex, age, marital status, and religious affiliation of the respondents. The information from the respondents indicated that out 233 participants, 50.6% were males while 49.4% were females. The study then showed that there were more male than female respondents. The study found out that 63.9% respondents were between the ages 18-26 years, 35.6% were between the age of 27-36 years while 0.4% were between the ages of 37 and above. This implies that the majority of the respondents (63.9%) were between the age ranges of 16-26 years. The study also revealed that 57.6% were Christians while 42.4% were Muslims.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by the Disposition of Graduate Students towards engaging in Agriculture as a tool for Employment

Disposition/attitude	Frequency	Percent
Positive	72	30.9%
Negative	128	54.9%
don't know	33	14.2%
Total	233	100.0%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

The data on Table 1 shows the distribution of the respondents on the disposition/attitude of graduate students toward agriculture. Out of all the respondents, 30.9% indicated that their attitude towards agriculture in Akure city were positive, 54.9% of the respondents indicated that their disposition/attitude were positive while 14.2% of the respondents indicated that they don't know. The study therefore revealed that the majority of the graduate students (54.9%) indicated that their disposition was negative. A female participant from the IDI supported this finding with the following statement that:

In my opinion, only students that has interest in agriculture venture into it. Most of them go for classic skills to learn. It's just like mechanic, it is being viewed as a dirty work and it is mainly for the illiterate. But out of 10 graduate students, one is into agriculture. Most students also look at stress of clearing, ploughing, planting, weeding, etc. Machineries would have been a better resource to help out but the cost machinery is so high for student to purchase. I personally plan having a mini garden in my house to plant vegetables so it's all about interest. (Female graduate students, Ijoka-Akure city).

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondent by the factors that hinder Graduate students' involvement in Agriculture

The factors that hinder them	Frequency	Percent
It is a dirty job	2	0.9%
Not a quick source of income	199	85.4%
Lack of capital	18	7.7%
No interest in agriculture	13	5.6%
Other(s) please specify	1	10.4%
Total	233	100.0%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Table 2 showed that 0.9% of the respondents were of the view that agriculture being a dirty job is one of the factors that hinder graduate students' involvement in agriculture in Akure city, 85.4% respondents were of the view that agriculture is not a quick source of income, 7.7% were of the view that the lack of capital is one of the major challenge why graduate students don't really want to engage in agriculture, 5.6% were of the view that their major factor is that they don't have interest in agriculture and 10.4% were of the view that the quest for white collar job among others were the major factors hindering them from participating agriculture. It can be observed that greater percentage of the respondents 85.4% respondents were of the view that agriculture is not a quick source of income or money in Akure cities. The findings of this of this study is in agreement with the male IDI participant who stated that:

“Finance, inadequate information, unfavourable government policy, difficulty getting the product to the consumers, lack of interest, lack of modern equipment, no fund to start, insecurity which will discourage the youth, peer pressure, quest for white collar job, start-up capital, unavailability of land and resources are some of the factors that hinder the graduate student's involvement in green job.” (Male graduate students, Araromi-Akure city)

On what Government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can do in improving or promoting the graduate students disposition in engaging in agriculture as a tool for employment, 42.9% indicated that grant should be given to them, 24.0% stated that loan should be made available to them, 18.0% indicated that farm mechanization should be made available, 5.2% said that agricultural extension officers should be employed while 9.9% stated that provision of pesticides and fertilizers should also be considered. In affirmation, a female participant stated that:

“They should provide land and materials needed and make it accessible to the youths, empower those interested with a start-up capital (at least 30%) enhance the availability of modernized farming equipment, enlighten the youths on the importance of agriculture to man, provide necessary resources for farming activities, enact realistic policies that promote agriculture, create a means of marketing which improves profitability, incentives that will motivate youths should be given.” (Female participant, Alagbaka-Akure city).

Discussion of Findings

The study examined the disposition of graduate students in Akure city towards engaging in agriculture as a tool for youth employment: framework for social workers. The findings from the study showed that majority of the respondents (63.9%) indicated that agriculture means cultivation and production of crops for human consumption. More so, the findings were supported by Okadi et al (2017) who stated that agriculture ensures adequate food security for the growing population, and it is capable of producing optimal yield while ensuring the continual availability off resources used in production. The findings also showed that greater percentage of the respondents 85.4% respondents were of the view that green job is not a quick source of income or money in Akure cities.

This finding disagrees with the findings of Oko (2017) and Ademiluyi (2007) who opined that graduate students don't engage in agriculture as a means of employment because they lack the abilities and the competencies, they need in order to succeed both in private and public sectors. This situation is as a result of inability of graduates to acquire entrepreneurial skills while in school and the situation has greatly reduced the entrepreneurial mindset of graduates. Most of them leave without knowing or having those skills where the government cannot provide immediate employment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Agriculture contributed the largest quota to the gross domestic product of the country and Nigeria during this period was one of the world's leading producers and exporters of cash crops such as coca, palm kernel, cotton, groundnut, rubber, and hides and skin. The findings suggested the need for professional social workers to embark on mass literacy by educating the populace on the importance of entrepreneurship and diversification through agriculture. This will enable the graduate students to be independents and also to be job creators and not job seekers. Social workers are also in a position to advocate for the provision of necessary resources and facilities that enhance mechanized agriculture.

Helping professionals also link people to various agencies where they can get resources that help them engage in meaningful agricultural activities. They also should also facilitate formulation and implementation of policies that address or empower every youth who are interested in going into agriculture. From the foregoing, it can be seen that social work is of great relevance in Nigeria especially in facilitating agricultural activities. Based on the recommendation, the Government, NGOs, social workers and corporate organizations should organize seminars and programmes, that center on changing the mindset of undergraduates towards agriculture in the positive direction. The engagement in agriculture by the masses will reduce unemployment. This is one of the most important findings of the study as there are many aspects of agriculture where people can engage in such as crop production, animal production, marketing of farm produce among others. The graduates and the general youth in the society should embrace agriculture as it creates employment and a source of empowerment. This invariably will reduce crime rate that comes with unemployment in the society.

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