

Youth Empowerment Through Cassava Production and Farming Enterprise: A Study of Benue, Kogi and Plateau States of Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated youth empowerment through cassava production and farming enterprise: empirical studies from Benue, Kogi and Plateau states of Nigeria. The study adopted the cross sectional survey research design. A sample of 1200 youths who engage in cassava farming was employed. A 15-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert Scale type instrument titled Youth Empowerment and Cassava Farming Rating Scale (YECFRS) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated and the reliability was calculated using Cronbach Alpha Method. The reliability coefficient was calculated to be 0.78. Three research questions were raised and answered while two hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0,05 level of significance. Data analysis was achieved using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while correlation statistics was employed in testing the hypotheses. The finding revealed that There is no significant relationship between participation in cassava farming and youth empowerment. ($r=0.000$, at $P = 0.00 < 0.05$) There is significant relationship between participation in cassava farming and sustainable development. ($r=0.021$, at $P = 0.00 < 0.05$). The study recommends among others that Stakeholders in agriculture should encourage cassava farming and subsidize farm inputs which could assist in meeting the market demands and providing the youths with the set of competencies needed for global challenges.

Keywords: Youth, Empowerment, Cassava farming and Sustainable Development

Introduction

Youths all over the world constitute the most important sector in any society. They provide the needed manpower for the socio-economic development of the society. Adulssalami (2015) stressed that the youths are the engine room of national development and any forward looking nation must take cognisance of the fact that, her youths must be empowered economically. History has shown time and again that youth are dependable agents of change.

The United Nations General Assembly and World Bank considers a youth to be between the ages of 15 and 24 years. However, the World Health Organization has a different age bracket for a youth. The organization sees a youth as any member of the society that falls between the ages of 15 and 34 years. The population of Nigerian youth according to National Population Census NPC (2022) is 83, 525 307 while the entire population of Nigeria is 217, 275 625. This shows that a significant portion of the Nigerian population constitutes the youth. It therefore, implies that if the number of Nigerians is adequately empowered, there will be a

greater contributing participation in the main stream of economic development in Nigeria as a result of youth empowerment.

Youth empowerment can be defined as a process whereby young people gain the ability and authority to make informed decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people. Akintayo and Adiat (2013) said that it is a means of encouraging youths to do great things for themselves and also to make great impact in their society. Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and agency to make decisions and implement change in their lives and the lives of other people in the society. According to Malyadri and Surnana (2012) youth empowerment could curb a lot of social vices in the society which include; crime reduction and national security. Empowerment ensures that youths have the necessary skills to sustain a livelihood, preventing him/her to adopt the path of crime.

Youth empowerment creates employment, a youth empowered society will not seriously suffer from the problem of unemployment that many nations are battling with the current time. A skilful youth is certainly a job creator. Also it will help in poverty eradication. Youth empowerment can curb the rate of poverty to a large level. One of the keys to empowering the youth is equipped with essential skills he or she can utilize them to feed, assist others and even invest for future use, aiding the nation economically. This will in turn contribute to the increase in employability and add to the GDP of the nation.

Cassava farming as an entrepreneurial skill will contribute immensely to economic development and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria as a nation (FAO, 2018). Cassava is one of the most widely grown root crop and staple food of most Nigerians (Edamissan, Taiwo, Igbekele & Adengan, 2017). Oluwasusi and Akani (2013) maintains that it is one of the few staple crops that can be produced efficiently, without need for mechanization or purchased inputs and in marginal areas with poor soils. This provides the unemployed youths the opportunity to venture into cassava farming and intensify its production as an enterprise for youth empowerment and economic development.

The North-Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria which comprises of Benue, Kogi, Nassarawa, Plateau, Niger, Kwara and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja has the suitable soil and rainfall endowed for cultivation of cassava. With these thriving prospects, it is important for the unemployed youths in this region to venture into cassava farming as a means for empowerment and sustainable development.

The study is therefore designed to assess the extent of youth participation in cassava farming and the benefits derived. It is generally believed that cassava farming has a growing profile in society development and GDP. Any encouragement in this direction can improve the standard of living for the youths and take their minds off the present social vices.

Statement of the Problem

Youth empowerment and sustainable development has remained a trending issue in national discourse of many nations especially Nigeria. This is based on the fact that the youth are the engine room of national development. Therefore any aspiring nation must take cognisance of this fact that her youth must be empowered economically and otherwise to keep her youth away from the current social vices of cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, cyber crime, prostitution, banditry and a host of other social vices. Kolade, Towobola, Oresanya,

Ayeni and Omodwu (2014) maintained that empowered youths are capable of propelling society to the peak of civilization.

On the strength of the above, Ogundele, Agbade and Akinlabi (2015) posited that every responsible government should formulate national policies geared towards empowerment and development of its youths. It is therefore important to acknowledge the promising role of youths in Nigeria's development and constructing and enabling environment for integrating youth into gainful activities like cassava farming to positively contribute towards sustainable development.

Youth empowerment would help develop self-esteem, a means of livelihood and improve their well being and sustained development. Thus the increasing awareness and importance of youth empowerment through cassava farming calls for an in-depth study of youth involved in cassava farming activities in Benue, Kogi and Plateau States.

Research Questions

Based on the statement of the problems, the proposed research hopes to answer the following questions:

1. What are the factors militating against youth participation in cassava farming?
2. To what extent does participation in cassava farming empower the youth?
3. To what extent does participation in cassava farming enhance sustainable development?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between participation in cassava farming and youth empowerment.
2. There is no significant relationship between participation in cassava farming and sustainable development.

Theory of Motivation by Mc Gregor (1960) and Friere (1973) Empowerment Theory

These two theories were used to refocus the study.

MC Gregor's Theory of Motivation

A human relation Theorist MC Gregor (1960) in his work "The human side Enterprise" advanced a theory about human behaviour that could be held by different people. Average human beings have an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if possible. Because of these human characteristics of dislike of work, most people must be coerced, directed and motivated to work.

The average human being prefers to be diverted, wishes to avoid responsibility, has relatively little ambition and wants security above all. The holders of this notion believe that motivation of persons can be attained through coercion and they have to be closely watched if results must be obtained. The theory emphasizes motivation with extrinsic rewards.

On the other hand, the theory sees man in a more favourable light. Here individuals under the concept possesses potentials that is generally untapped by most environments until coercion or motivating factors are applied, before rewards can be seen. The most important of such rewards is the satisfaction of ego and self-actualization.

Friere (1973) Empowerment Theory

Friere (1973) liberation theory focus on eliminating the causes and addressing the effects of social oppression, educating individuals to move from oppression to liberation and then taking collective action to change oppressive cultural and social structures. Empowerment education for critical consciousness, also commonly referred to as liberation theology, emerged as a concept in the 1950s and 1960s through the teachings and writings of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Awakening a critical consciousness means educating people to perceive the social, political, and economic contradictions in their life. In essence, oppressed individuals become self-liberators.

One of Freire's central tenets is that education is not neutral; it takes place within the context of people's lives. In class or community settings, adults and young people bring with them their life experiences, current pressures, and future expectations. However, with the proper tools, anyone is capable of looking critically at the world, his or her personal and social reality, and the contradictions that exist everywhere (Freire, 1970).

Methodology

A reconnaissance survey was conducted in the study area in order to familiarize with the area and to understand the sampling method that will be appropriate. This survey was carried out in 45 local government areas of Benue, Kogi and Plateau States in August and September, 2023 as a prelude to the actual study. It helped to understand the level of youth participation in cassava farming activities in the different local government areas.

The study adopted McGregor (1960) theory of motivation and Friere (1973) empowerment theory. The cross-sectional survey research design was employed. The study was carried out in Benue, Kogi and Plateau States of Nigeria. A population of young cassava farmers in these States were involved. The sample comprised 1200 youths who are cassava farmers in the study area. Multi-stage sampling technique was used because at different stages, different sampling techniques were employed.

The Youth Empowerment and Cassava Farming Rating Scale (YECFRS) is a 15 – item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert Scale type of Strongly Agree (SA)-5points, Agree (A)-4points, Undecided (U)-3points, Disagree(D)-2points and Strongly Disagree (SD)-1point. A reliability coefficient of 7.8 was determined for the instrument using Cronbach Alpha method. The three research questions were answered using mean and standard deviations while the two hypotheses were tested using correlation statistics.

The results were present thus:

Research Question One.

What are the factors militating against youth participation in cassava farming?

Table 1: Mean scores of respondents on the factors militating against youth participation in cassava farming

S/No	Item Description	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
1.	None availability of start-up capital	1200	4.67	.643	Strongly Agree
2.	Lack of prompt access to farm inputs, implements and machines	1200	4.48	.572	Agree
3.	Problems of marketing (low prices of cassava products)	1200	2.98	.421	Undecided
4.	Poor access to emerging information on agriculture.	1200	4.42	.573	Agree
5.	Wrong perception of agriculture as a primitive enterprise.	1200	4.56	.641	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean		1200	4.22		Agree

Upper and lower boundaries for decision 1.00-1.49 (SD), 1.50-2.49 (D), 2.50-3.00 (U), 3.01-4.49(A), 4.50-5.00(SA).

Table 1 shows that, out of the above listed items there is no way a youth will escape obstruction in cassava farming. While trying to establish a cassava farm of sufficient scope, a lot of challenges are present. Ranging from none availability of start-up funds or capital, lack of prompt access to farm inputs, implements and machines, problems of marketing (low prices of cassava products), poor access to emerging information on agriculture and the wrong perception of agriculture as a primitive enterprise as represented by a grand mean of 4.22.

It is clear that youths do not want to engage themselves in cassava farming. Most youth like white collar jobs, and many of the respondents are working with local and primitive farm tools and with inadequate financial aid or capital

Research Question Two

To what extent does participation in cassava farming empower the youth?

Table 2: Mean scores of respondents on the extent to which participation in cassava farming empower the youth

S/No	Item Description	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
1.	Sustainable development can be attained through youth empowerment in cassava farming.	1200	3.76	.492	Agree
2.	Participation in cassava farming aids poverty eradication among youths which enhances youth empowerment.	1200	2.93	.372	Undecided
3.	Participation in cassava farming is an area for job creation that can empower the youth	1200	4.21	.512	Agree
4.	Sustainable development is the result of youth empowerment through gainful ventures as cassava farming.	1200	4.53	.639	Strongly Agree
5.	Participation in cassava farming as a means of empowerment for youth has impact on sustainable development.	1200	4.18	.471	Agree
Grand Mean		1200	3.92		Agree

Upper and lower boundaries for decision 1.00-1.49 (SD), 1.50-2.49 (D), 2.50-3.00 (U), 3.01-4.49(A), 4.50-5.00(SA).

Table 2 shows that most the means are above 3.01. The grand mean is 3.92 which is the agreement level. Hence, the respondents agree that Participation in cassava farming aids poverty eradication among youths which enhances youth empowerment.

Research Question Three

To what extent does participation in cassava farming enhance sustainable development?

Table 3: Mean scores of respondents on the extent to which participation in cassava farming enhance sustainable development

S/No	Item Description	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
1.	Sustainable development can be attained through participation in cassava farming.	1200	3.94	.513	Agree
2.	Participation in cassava farming creates jobs for sustainable development among youths.	1200	4.43	.578	Agree
3.	Participation in cassava farming is an area for job creation that can empower the youth for sustainable development	1200	4.64	.632	Agree
4.	Job creation for sustainable development among youth is achievable through participation in cassava farming	1200	4.11	.509	Strongly Agree
5.	Participation in cassava farming is a sure means for sustainable development.	1200	4.27	.602	Agree
	Grand Mean	1200	4.28		Agree

Upper and lower boundaries for decision 1.00-1.49 (SD), 1.50-2.49 (D), 2.50-3.00 (U), 3.01-4.49(A), 4.50-5.00(SA).

Table 3 shows that all the means are above 3.01. The grand mean is 4.28 which is the agreement level. Hence, the respondents agree that participation in cassava farming enhances sustainable development.

Hypotheses Testing

Pearson moment correlation was used to test the hypotheses of the study at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between participation in cassava farming and youth empowerment.

Table 4: Correlation between participation in cassava farming and youth empowerment

Variable	N	Mean	Sig.(2tailed)	Decision
Participation in cassava farming	1200	1.000	0.000	Significant
Youth empowerment	1200	0.743	0.000	

Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$

Results of Table 4 showed the critical value for participation in cassava farming and youth empowerment as 0.000 which fell within the acceptance region of 0.05. This indicates that participation in cassava farming is a significant factor in youth empowerment at $p < 0.05$. The null hypothesis of no significant relationship between participation in cassava farming and youth empowerment is rejected.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between participation in cassava farming and sustainable development.

Table 5: Correlation between participation in cassava farming and sustainable development.

Variable	N	Mean	Sig.(2tailed)	Decision
participation in cassava farming	1200	0.941	0.021	Significant
sustainable development	1200	0.816	0.021	

Correlation is significant at $p < 0.05$

Results of Table 5 showed the critical value for participation in cassava farming and sustainable development, as 0.021 which fell within the acceptance region of 0.05. This indicates that participation in cassava farming is a significant factor in sustainable development at $p < 0.05$. The null hypothesis of no significant relationship between participation in cassava farming and sustainable development is rejected.

Discussion of Findings.

The result of hypothesis 1 shows that there is a significant relationship between participation in cassava farming and youth empowerment. This finding is in agreement with Kolade, Towobola, Oresanya, Ayeni and Omodewu (2014) who observed that farming is a gainful venture for youth empowerment. This finding collaborates with that of Abdulsalami (2015) who maintained that cassava farming can be encouraged among youths in order to enhance self-employment and financial sustainability so as to reduce the over dependence on the government for white-collar jobs.

This also supports the finding of Adeyemo and Uchenna (2015) who maintained that the relationship between participation in cassava farming and youth empowerment are positive and significant. The youths constitute the most important sector in any society. They serve as channels for the transmission of farming culture and the perpetuation of recognizable identity and are also the manpower for the socio-economic development of the society.

Edamissan, Taiwo, Igbekele and Adengan (2017) noted that participation in cassava farming by the youths who have the energy to take up agricultural production is a profitable venture. Thus, there is urgent need to educate youths to know the importance and prospects in cassava farming and take to it, thereby increasing the farming population and enhancing sustainable development.

Also the study revealed a significant relationship between participation in cassava farming and sustainable development. The finding is consistent with those of Akintayo and Aidat (2013), and Oluwasusi and Akanni (2015) who observed that there is a strong positive correlation between participation in cassava farming and sustainable development.

The likely explanation for the out-come may not be unconnected with the fact that cassava is one of the important food crops grown in Nigeria providing energy from its roots and protein, minerals and vitamins from leaves. Cassava plays an important role as food reserve, rural food staple, cash crop, urban food staple; industrial raw material and livestock feed. Therefore, it plays an important role in employment and revenue generation as well as in the provision of sustainable development for all populations. Cassava farming remains a family enterprise in Nigeria, as youth, women and men of all ages are involved one way or the other in the production process.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is therefore, concluded that:

The identification of militating factors against the success of youth in cassava farming in states in Nigeria is very critical to the efforts of reducing unemployment, alleviating poverty, empowering the youth and ensuring a sustainable development. The outcome of this study has revealed lack of adequate start-off funds or grants, lack of prompt access to farm inputs, implements and machines, marketing challenges and wrong perception of farming as a primitive venture. Sustainable development can be attained through youth empowerment in cassava farming. The implication of these findings is that unless these problems are addressed with a holistic approach, youths, particularly the educated ones may never accept cassava farming as a worthy and sustainable venture but rather, that of low class, illiterates, aged and rural people.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research work, the following recommendations were deemed necessary:

1. Stakeholders in agriculture should encourage cassava farming and subsidize farm inputs which could assist in meeting the market demands and providing the youths with the set of competencies needed for global challenges.
2. Promote individual smallholder cassava farmers and policy directives so that they can be in a position to produce in large quantity.
3. Create Market opportunities for cassava farmers
4. Investment into cassava micro-processing as well as encouraging both small and large-scale processing industries.
5. Direct involve in the promotion of the cassava subsector and sometimes policy directives enhance development of Cassava.
6. The youth should be encouraged to venture into cassava farming businesses to alleviate poverty and enhance sustainable development.
7. The Government through Ministry of Agriculture should supply agriculture inputs such as fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides at appropriate time and at a subsidized price to encourage greater percentage of use.

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