

## **Farm Settlement Scheme Revitalization and Unemployment Reduction in Edo State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*This thesis is on farm settlement scheme revitalization and unemployment reduction in Edo state from 2007 till date. The Farm settlement scheme, originally designed to promote agricultural development and employment generation, has deteriorated over time. Essentially, the research investigated the factors accounting for the deterioration of the scheme and proffer solutions that would help to revitalize it. To guide this study, three research questions and three objectives were formulated. Related literature comprising the conceptual and empirical were reviewed. The study adopted the conflict theory by Karl Marx and The High Payoff Input Model of Agricultural Development by Schultz. The study relied on mixed research design comprising the quantitative and qualitative methods. The questionnaire was distributed through snowballing sampling technique to collect the quantitative data. The purposive sampling technique was used to select participants for the key person's interview and focus group discussion. The population of the study was 444 which is the current population of farmers in the three farm settlements at the time of this study, while the sample size is 448. Simple percentage was used to analyze the socio-demographic data, while Mean and Standard Deviation was used to analyze the research questions. The KPIs and FGDs were transcribed and analyzed thematically. The results revealed that the farm settlement scheme created lots of employment in the past in Edo state as more than four thousand jobs were created annually. It was also revealed that several factors such as massive insecurity, inadequate infrastructures, amongst others, accounted for the inability of the scheme to address unemployment in contemporary Edo state. From the findings, the thesis concludes that the revitalization of the farm settlement scheme would help tremendously in reducing the unemployment challenge in Edo state. The thesis recommends amongst others, that government should tackle insecurity, provide the necessary infrastructures, provide adequate funding, and provide modern farming equipment.*

**Keywords:** Farm Settlement, Revitalization, Unemployment Reduction

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## Introduction

Dudley Seers cited in Todaro & Smith (2009), characterized underdevelopment challenges as a situation when a country is experiencing increasing poverty, widening inequality, and rising unemployment. According to Seer (1969), the questions to ask about a country's development are therefore, What is happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What is happening to inequality? If all three have reduced considerably, then beyond all reasonable doubts, this has been a period of development for the country. If one or two of the three central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result development, even if per capita income doubles. Nigeria as a developing county is experiencing a high level of the above central issues of development, especially unemployment.

Unemployment is a global challenge and plays a key role in global poverty. There is some evidence for this. In 2008 and 2009, the Great Recession triggered by the collapse of the housing industry in the United States devastated the local labour market and the national economy so much that unemployment soared, reaching 13.2 percent nationally and 5.6 percent globally (Verick & Islam, 2010). According to a United Nations (2020) report on global unemployment, the rise in the global unemployment rate was due largely to trade tensions.

In addition to the above UN report, the international labour organization (ILO) report on the Global employment trends for youth (2022): investing in transforming futures for young people states that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the numerous labour market challenges facing those aged between 15 and 24 years, who have experienced a much higher percentage loss in employment than adults since early 2020 (ILO, 2022). In its new report, titled 'World Employment and Social Outlook Trends 2023 (WESO Trends)' published on its website (2023), (ILO) says global unemployment rate will rise by 5.8 per cent in 2023. The report mentioned that the global unemployment rate was at 5.7 percent in 2022, with an estimated 205 million people worldwide without jobs. This number was observed to be considerably higher than the pre-COVID-19 number, where 187 million people worldwide were found to be unemployed (ILO, 2023).

The Federal Government of Nigeria has tried to tackle unemployment through several policies, sectoral programmes and strategies. Whereas some were focused solely to tackle the problem, many of them were indirect through poverty alleviation programmes, and others were incorporated into national development plans. Examples of such programmes include National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) established in 1972 to make Nigeria self-sufficient in food production, Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) established in 1975 to provide funding to farmers, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) established in 1976 to create awareness on food shortage, Green Revolution established in 1980 towards achieving mechanized farming, Back-to Land programme established in 1984, directed towards aggressive graduate involvement in agriculture. Others are Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) established in 1986 to provide infrastructure to rural areas, National Directorate of Employment (NDE) established in 1986 to combat youth unemployment, People's Bank established in 1987, Better Life for Rural Women established in 1987 to uplift the rural women, and Family Support Programme established in 1994, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) established in 2001 for

poverty/unemployment reduction, Nigerian Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) established in 1993 geared towards large scale farming (Isiani, 2020).

However, agriculture has been seen as one sector that could generate employment for our teeming population. Before the discovery of crude oil in Nigeria, agriculture had been the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. Many people, especially those who live in the rural areas were employed in the agricultural sector, which was then the major source of the country's foreign exchange earnings. Awoyinfa, (2019) reporting for Punch Newspaper quoted the MD of Jumia Foods Mr. Guy Futi as saying...

*“Agriculture is one of the few sectors that can employ many hands at the same time because the agricultural value chain is quite expansive. This chain comprises land, labour, water, technology, production, post-harvest handling, processing, storage, and market. There are lots of jobs each value chain is creating and with stakeholders in the industry embracing technology, 61.6% of Nigerian youths who are currently unemployed according to the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS) would have something to do, notwithstanding if they are skilled or unskilled.”*

For any meaningful agricultural development to occur, it must be consciously driven and strengthened by special policies to achieve desired results. On this note therefore, it is generally theorized that a pragmatic policy that would ensure availability of land, provision of infrastructures, adequate training of the farmers, adequate financing, reduction of cost of production, distribution and marketing of the farm produce should be adopted. One such agricultural policy that has been widely celebrated in the past is the farm settlement policy, though there has been claims and counter claims that challenge the suitability of the policy.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Unemployment is a global challenge especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. The major causes of unemployment in Nigeria and by extension Edo State includes unproductive and unskilled large population, falling standard of education, corruption, currency devaluation, failure of the power sector, insecurity, unfavourable environment for doing business and visionless leadership. Internal migration from the rural to the urban areas in search of the proverbial greener pasture is a major factor causing unemployment in Edo state. Unfortunately, the employment opportunities existing in the urban areas are too limited to absorb the migrants from the rural areas hence many of them are left redundant and unemployed (Oviasuyi et al, 2012).

Edo State is characterized by a predominantly civil service-based economy, with the state government being the largest employer of labour and a limited number of small and medium scale enterprises providing employment opportunities to the local population. Unemployment question in Edo State has been a source of worry and the state government at various times has keyed into the several reforms, policies and programs of the federal government of Nigeria to tackle it, but most of these policies experienced abysmal failure (Amalu, 2018). The farm settlement policy is one such policy that has suffered a huge setback in implementation, administration, and sustainability. The objectives of farm settlement scheme in Nigeria include bringing about rural

progress, to demonstrate that by careful planning, farms can be established and operated by young, educated farmers which will provide a comfortable standard of living for the owners, and to solve the unemployment problem of school leavers and graduates. Unfortunately, despite the success recorded when the policy was first introduced several years ago by the regional government of the Southwestern Nigeria, it has suddenly gone into oblivion (Adebulu, 2019).

Several studies have been carried out by other scholars in relation to unemployment reduction in different areas at different times. For instance, Kayode (2021) examined the rising rate of unemployment in Nigeria and the concomitant Socio-Economic and political implications. Kayode's study reveals that corruption in both public and private sectors, as well as indulgence of individual contacts, industrial decay, and neglect of the agricultural sector and many other factors are responsible for rising unemployment in Nigeria. The study also reveals that widespread poverty, youth restiveness, high rate of social vices and criminal activities are prevalent because of unemployment and if not controlled, apathy, cynicism and revolution might become the consequences. The study, therefore, recommends urgent intervention in the sensitive sectors of the economy such as power, industry, and agricultural sectors in order to stimulate employment opportunities.

Abiola (2020) also carried out an evaluation of the Farm Settlement Scheme in Nigeria from 1999 to 2021. The study critically examines the farm settlement policy using a case study methodology that was based on South-West geopolitical zone comprising five states of Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Lagos states. According to Abiola (2020), these states were used because they were considered a rallying point for farm settlement implementation in Nigeria. He asserted that, despite the failure and collapse of the farm settlement programmes, it has continued to be reintroduced by successive governments due to some of its recorded successes and perceived importance in employment generation and food production. Abiola's study revealed that the farm settlement policy has contributed immensely to food production and improved socioeconomic well-being of the people despite its challenges. This study is being done to contribute to the body of literature on the subject and address the gap in knowledge. Therefore, the following research questions are formulated to aid the study.

- i. To what extent has farm settlement scheme been effective in reducing unemployment problems in the past in Edo state?
- ii. What factors accounted for the inability of the farm settlement scheme in addressing unemployment in Edo state from 2007 till date?
- iii. How can farm settlement scheme be revitalized to reduce unemployment in Edo state?

The general objective of this study is to investigate how farm settlement schemes can be revitalized to contribute to the reduction of unemployment in Edo state. However, the specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the extent to which farm settlement scheme has been effective in reducing unemployment problem in the past in Edo state.

- ii. Investigate the factors that accounted for the inability of the farm settlement scheme to address unemployment in Edo state from 2007 till date.
- iii. Examine how farm settlement scheme can be revitalized to reduce unemployment in Edo state.

### **Literature Review**

Himayatullah & Mahmood (2012) examined Irrigation, Farm Productivity, and unemployment Reduction in Pakistan. The analysis of data suggests that there are strong linkages between irrigation, crop productivity and unemployment reduction. The linkages between irrigation and unemployment reduction are both direct and indirect. Irrigation has benefited the poor through higher agricultural productivity; higher yields, increased cropping intensity, increased income, consumption, and savings as well as higher farm and off-farm employment.

Husin, et al (2021) examined unemployment crisis among fresh graduates in Malaysia. The two main objectives of the study were to examine the factors responsible for the unemployment among fresh graduates and the primary determinants of policy implications for higher education. The finding demonstrated a significant association between employer preference, candidate attributes, and economic instability with graduate unemployment crisis. The study recommended a revision in the academic curriculum of higher institutions to meet the requirements in job market's and stakeholders' needs for better graduate employability.

Morris (2012) evaluated a government programme on revitalization of smallholder irrigation schemes for poverty alleviation and household food security in South Africa. There seems to be a consensus that improving agriculture and enhancing agricultural productivity through irrigation will remain a key strategy for rural poverty and unemployment alleviation in most of the low-income countries, where most of the rural poor depend directly or indirectly on agriculture and income generation. Smallholder Irrigation Schemes (SIS) in South Africa have performed poorly and have not delivered on their development objectives of improving rural livelihoods through sustainable crop production for food security and poverty alleviation. For a long time, dilapidated irrigation infrastructure was viewed as the single major cause of the poor performance and the government invested huge sums of money towards repairing infrastructure. Consequently, research and expenditure tended to focus on irrigation infrastructure, but often this proved fruitless because the human capital was not developed to effectively utilize and maintain the infrastructure.

Iwuchukwu & Igbokwe (2012) carried out a study titled “review of agricultural programmes and policies in Nigeria” where they analyzed the effects of government agricultural reforms on Nigeria’s agricultural development with the objective of assessing agricultural programmes and policies in Nigeria. The study revealed that the growth in the agricultural sector in Nigeria has not been significantly constant and sustainable over the years. The study recommended that there should be policy consistency to ensure continuity while programmes and policies should be effectively monitored, reviewed and modified according to circumstances.

Amaechi (2018) did a study titled “Food Security and Sustainable Agricultural Development in Nigeria” where he discussed the concepts of food security and various policies and strategies to be

embarked upon by the government for sustainable agricultural development to ensure adequate food security. The need for agricultural sustainability was looked at by the study. The study concluded by recommending an improved policy execution, monitoring/evaluation, and support to agriculture by the federal government as the measures for a sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria.

Ani, Maxwell & Ecoma (2017) conducted a study on “Rice Production and unemployment reduction in Nigeria” where they specifically focused on the Ikwo brand of rice. Ikwo is a LGA in Ebonyi State. The study examined the challenges confronting rice production in Ikwo, the evolution of rice de-stoning, bagging of rice and change from production of short species of rice to long species. The study revealed that poverty and lack of technical know-how were some of the factors militating against the rise of a robust farming culture. Also, it was discovered that rice production can bring about unemployment reduction.

Kaasa, Shuaibu & Micheal, (2021) studied Unemployment and Poverty and its Alleviating Strategies among Rural Farming Households in Benue State, Nigeria. The study revealed that unemployment/Poverty in the area is positively associated with the age of the household head and household size, while gender, educational level, off-farm activity, membership of a group, farm size, and land ownership are negatively associated with poverty. The common poverty alleviation strategies identified were agricultural wage labour (48.6%), rental services (45.0%), and transportation business (36.7%). Therefore, it was recommended that the government and other stakeholders should initiate sustainable social protection schemes that can assist rural residents in alleviating poverty until their condition improves and to reduce unemployment.

Ashagidigbi, Yusuf & Agboola (2019) did a research article on Productivity of Arable Crop Farmers as Panacea to Youth Unemployment. The study revealed that majority of the farmers are old. Youth farmers cultivates 1.249ha compared to 1.628ha cultivated by old farmers. The output of youth farmers (10194.74kg/ha) is significantly higher than that of the aged arable crop farmers (7897.816kg/ha). All the inputs used positively influence productivity, likewise, access to credit has a direct effect on the technical efficiency of the arable crop farmers. It is recommended that youths should be encouraged to venture into arable crop farming in order to increase productivity and reduce youth unemployment. Income smoothening policy option such as credit provision should also be executed to enhance the efficiency of the youths in crop production.

Adekoya, Ayuba, & Sokunbi, (2018) analyzed employment in agriculture and youth unemployment in the West Africa. The paper averred that agriculture is a momentous sector of the real economy but youth unemployment in recent time has ballooned in the West African region. Hence the study examined the relationship between employment in agriculture and youth unemployment and economic growth. The result revealed that employment in agriculture reduces youth unemployment and a positive improvement in the economy led to a reduction in youth unemployment. For policy implications, this study recommended that, West African nations should give priority attention to agricultural sector, which has a positive linkage with economic growth. This is because agriculture can boost employment and income thereby reducing youth unemployment in the entire region.

Abiola, (2020) Reviewed the Farm Settlement Scheme in Nigeria from 1999 till Date. This thesis critically examined the farm settlement policy in Nigeria using the Western Nigeria states as case study. The study showed that the challenges militating against the success of the policy includes bad politicking, poor political structure, instability in government, lack of policy consistency amongst others. The study recommended therefore that in order to strengthen the policy towards achieving desired objectives, it is important to establish special departments whose sole responsibility is the continued implementation of the policy regardless of political affiliation or government in power. In addition, the study recommended that adequate funding be provided for the effective implementation of the policy especially in the provision of facilities and farm inputs; and the judicious utilization of such funds must be ensured amongst others.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws upon two theoretical frameworks to understand the relationship between farm settlement scheme revitalization and unemployment reduction. They include Karl Marx's Perspective of Conflict theory and The High Payoff Input Model of Agricultural Development (Schultz, 1964).

Firstly, Karl Marx's Conflict Theory posits that unemployment is a result of the capitalist system's inherent class struggle, where the pursuit of profit and the concentration of wealth in the hands of the bourgeoisie lead to job insecurity, inequality, and systemic unemployment for the working class.

Secondly, the High Payoff Input Model of Agricultural Development (Schultz, 1964) suggests that transforming traditional agricultural sectors into modern productive sources of economic growth requires investing in high-payoff inputs to make modern agricultural practices available to farmers in poor countries. According to this model, peasants are viewed as rational and efficient resource allocators, but their poverty is due to limited technical and economic opportunities.

By combining these theoretical frameworks, this study aims to explore how revitalizing farm settlements can lead to increased agricultural productivity, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities. By making modern agricultural inputs and innovations available, farmers can adopt improved technological approaches that enhance agricultural productivity, leading to increased demand for labour in the farms and production industries. This, in turn, can reduce unemployment and promote economic growth.

### **Methodology**

In this study, descriptive (survey) design was used as it helped in gathering opinion of respondents through the quantitative and qualitative means with a population of **444** which is the current population of farmers in the three farm settlements in Edo state.

A sample size of 448 respondents was used for this study. This is in accordance with Total Enumeration Sampling (Census Sampling) where the entire population for the study was considered as the sample size with an addition of four (4) Key Persons from the Ministry of Agriculture who has oversight functions over the farm settlements.

The study adopted purposive sampling technique to select three local governments and three communities where the farm settlements are established in Edo state. These communities are: Iguoriakhi in Ovia Southwest local government area; Ekpoma in Esan West local government area and Sobe in Owan West local government area. These communities were purposively selected for this study because the farm settlements in Edo state are located there. Also, the purposive sampling technique was used for the KPIs and FGDs.

Again, the study adopted snowballing technique to distribute questionnaire to respondents in the farm settlements at Iguoriakhi and Ekpoma farms. Also, snowballing technique was used to distribute questionnaire to farmers in Sobe community because the settlers are currently residing in the community because of insecurity in the farm. The primary data was collected using our study instrument (questionnaire) and (interview schedule sheet) while the secondary data was sourced via the internet, books, journals etc.

The researcher adopted the simple percentage as the method to analyze the socio-demographic factors, while Mean and Standard Deviation was used to analyze the research questionnaire. The KPIs and FGDs were transcribed and analyzed with thematic analysis in accordance with the interview guide. Thematic analysis is a research technique that researcher uses for the identification of patterns in recorded communication. According to Krippendorff (2004), thematic analysis is a technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

### Analysis of Research Questions

**Research Question 1:** To what extent has farm settlement scheme been effective in reducing unemployment problem in the past in Edo state?

### Summary of Descriptive Statistics on how farm settlement scheme has been effective in reducing past unemployment problem in Edo State (N=392)

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	M	StD	Remark
1	Farm settlement scheme has been in existence since the creation of Edo state	80	262	40	10	3.05	0.64	Agreed
2	Farm settlement scheme contributed significantly to unemployment reduction in the past in Edo state	92	250	36	14	3.07	0.68	Agreed



3	Farm settlement scheme did not contribute to unemployment reduction in the past in Edo state	69	31	236	56	2.29	0.92	Dis-Agreed
4	Farm settlement scheme provided employment and income indirectly to host and surrounding communities	80	262	40	10	3.05	0.64	Agreed
5	Farm settlement scheme boosted the overall economy of Edo state which enhanced employment generation	80	262	40	10	3.05	0.64	Agreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>						<b>2.90</b>	<b>0.70</b>	<b>Agreed</b>

**Source:** Researcher's Field Work Data (2023).

**Research Question 2:** What factors accounted for the inability of the farm settlement scheme in addressing unemployment in Edo state since 2007 till date?

**Summary of Descriptive Statistics on the factors that accounted for the inability of the farm settlement scheme in addressing unemployment in Edo state since 2007 till date**

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	M	StD	Remark
6	Participants were not fully involved in the decision-making process regarding the operation of the farms	80	262	40	10	3.05	0.64	Agreed
7	No recreational facilities were provided for settlers in the farms	92	250	36	14	3.07	0.68	Agreed
8	Poor Funding	94	236	45	17	3.04	0.73	Agreed
9	Poor implementation of the farm settlement scheme	98	247	27	20	3.08	0.72	Agreed
10	Political interference in the management of the scheme	96	249	22	25	3.06	0.74	Agreed
11	Poor maintenance culture of the infrastructural facilities in the farms	95	250	18	29	3.05	0.76	Agreed

12	Inadequate extension workers to teach participants on new methods of farming	110	255	28	19	3.06	0.80	Agreed
13	Inadequate land for expansion due to poor land tenure system.	109	256	27	0	3.21	0.55	Agreed
14	Insecurity	90	255	24	23	3.05	0.72	Agreed
15	Some of the equipment provided were not fit for purpose	112	218	42	20	3.08	0.77	Agreed
16	Lack of follow-up training for the settlers	95	200	57	40	2.89	0.89	Agreed
17	Certificates to operate the farm plots were not issued to settlers	112	218	42	20	2.97	0.96	Agreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>						<b>3.05</b>	<b>0.75</b>	<b>Agreed</b>

Source: Researcher's Field Work Data (2023).

**Research Question 3:** How can farm settlement scheme be revitalized to reduce unemployment in Edo state?

#### Summary of Descriptive Statistics on how farm settlement scheme can be revitalized to reduce unemployment in Edo State

S/N	Statements	Mean	Std	Remark
18	There should be robust security architecture that will protect the farms and the settlers	3.05	0.64	Agreed
19	Proper funding through government and private partnership	3.07	0.68	Agreed
20	More land should be procured by government for expansion in the existing farm settlements	3.04	0.73	Agreed
21	New, high yield seedling should be provided for settlers	2.57	1.09	Agreed
22	Provisions of necessary infrastructure e.g roads, electricity, schools, health center etc.	3.05	0.64	Agreed
23	Participants should exhibit the spirit of entrepreneurship and take ownership of the scheme	3.05	0.64	Agreed
24	Provision of well-trained extension workers that would in turn teach the settlers of new innovations	3.07	0.68	Agreed
25	Processing of the produce to avoid wastages should be enhanced by government	3.04	0.73	Agreed
26	Fit - for -purpose equipment should be provided for the settlers	2.57	1.09	Agreed

27	Training and retraining of the farmers is necessary	3.05	0.64	Agreed
28	Government should facilitate partnership between farmers and off-takers	3.05	0.64	Agreed
29	Provision of recreational facilities such as hotels, clubs, guest houses, sports arena etc for young adults to stay in the farm	3.08	0.72	Agreed
30	Left over products from the farms should be bought by government and stored away in food banks and silos	3.06	0.74	Agreed
31	Establishment of farm settlement scheme in each local government area in Edo state	3.05	0.76	Agreed
32	Internet infrastructure/connectivity be provided in the farms to attract youths and young participants	3.21	0.55	Agreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>		3.00	0.73	<b>Agreed</b>

**Source:** Researcher's Field Work Data (2023).

### **Thematic Analysis of Key Persons Interviews (KPIs)**

Four Key Persons were purposively selected for the interview session. Participants were Acting Permanent Secretary/Director of Agric and Extension services; Director, Cluster Farming; Director, Agriculture Development Programme (ADP) and Manager (Government Representatives at the Farm Settlements).

### **Theme 1: How farm settlement scheme has been effective in reducing unemployment in the past in Edo state**

According to the Acting Permanent Secretary/Director of Agric Extension Services.

...it is a well-known fact that unemployment is generally high in Nigeria including Edo state. Government has tried to reduce the level of unemployment through several policies and programmes. According to the acting PS, farm settlement scheme is one of such policies. The farm settlement in Edo state was inherited from the old Mid-Western/Bendel State after it was divided into Delta and Edo states.

The primary purpose of setting up the farm settlement was to create an ecosystem where people who are willing to take agriculture as a means of livelihood were recruited by government, and the necessary infrastructures including land were provided initially for the settlers to assist them in cultivation. The scheme operated as a cooperative to enable the produce to be marketed. At some point the facilities in the settlements deteriorated, but government tried to

revive the system. Essentially, the farm settlement was geared towards employment generation through live-stock farming, food crops and cash crops production. To this end, it has helped in reducing unemployment as most people were engaged in the process. In addition, it was a means of socialization between people of different background which acted as a cluster that bring people together. In each farm settlement there were different practices in terms of crop cultivation. That means, some settlements plant cash crops such as rubber and palm, and arable crops, while others plant only arable crops e.g. Sobe Farm Settlement (KPI/PS/54). When asked about the number of persons employed by the farm settlements, he said, those figures are available with the farm settlement leadership.

An interview session with The Director, Cluster Farming, she remarked thus:

The Farm Settlement Scheme generated a lot of employment in the past. This is more so when one looks at the value chain ranging from land preparation, planting, harvesting, and processing (KPI2/DCF/40).

Director, Agric Extension Services, Agriculture Development Programmes (ADP) also remarked:

Indeed, the farm settlement scheme is a veritable means of job generation because of value chain inherent in it. However, it has decline overtime in this function due to many factors.

## **Theme 2: Factors accounting for the inability of the farm settlement scheme in addressing unemployment in Edo state since 2007 till date**

According to the Acting Permanent Secretary/Director of Agric Extension Services...

Policy changes towards farm settlement is one of the factors that accounted for the inability of farm settlement scheme to address unemployment reduction in Edo state. Every successive administration has a priority area in terms of policy implementation; whereas some are favourable to farm settlement scheme, others are not favourable.

He further remarked that government encroachment into the lands that were originally allocated to settlers also contributed to the challenges. Government took some land and used it for other development purposes. At the beginning of the scheme, there was enough land for farming, however, the encroachment problem led to the reduction of the farm size.

Inadequate market, the delay in issuing certificate of right to operate the farms to the settlers contributed to the inability of the farm settlement scheme to address unemployment in Edo state. Although this issue is being resolved and the certificates are being issued out now.

Also, the religious bodies are not helping matters. The church leaders do not encourage their followers to engage in productive hard work like farming; rather the religious leaders encourage their followers to just have faith and believe in whatever they want, and they will have it. You will understand what I am saying if you go to new Benin market. You see young people hustling for customers for electronic sellers instead of embracing more productive ventures like farming.

An interview session with The Director, Cluster Farming, she remarked thus:

Several factors could account for the inability of farm settlement scheme to address unemployment in Edo state. For instance, Rural-Urban drift or migration from the rural to urban areas is a major factor. The youths leave the farm settlement to the towns and even abroad in search of greener pastures.

She further remarked that Lack of infrastructural facilities such as internal roads, schools, health facilities, internet facilities etc is also a factor. In addition, recreational facilities such as playgrounds, malls, guest houses etc are not available.

Again, she noted that insecurity from herdsmen is another big factor militating against the farm settlement scheme in Edo state. Settlers are afraid to go to their farms for fear of being kidnapped or even killed. Others include poor price regulation by government, poor mechanization of farming, land dispute between farmers and host communities and a lack of storage facilities leading to spoilage of produce that cannot be sold immediately.

An interview session with The Manager (Government Representatives at the Farm Settlements)

According to the manager, even if government is not showing enough interest, the settlers themselves are not showing enough capacity in managing the farms. That spirit of entrepreneurship and the readiness to make the farm work better are not there. The youths do not even show interest in farming. In addition to the lack of modern farming equipment and infrastructural amenities in the farms, the government's inability to maintain peace and security in the farm settlements has also contributed to the challenges.

Director, Agric Extension Services, Agriculture Development Programme (ADP) in an interview remarked thus:

The lack of synergy between ADP and the Farm Settlements is a big challenge. The ADP ought to bring new innovations and inputs into the farm settlement scheme. This function has been thwarted due to lack of synergy between the ADP and the Farm Settlements. He further remarked that people don't want to be seen as farmers rather they look for white collar jobs which are non-existent. Insecurity is a big challenge in the farm settlements especially in Sobe Farm where herders attack farm settlers and members of the community on frequent basis.

### **Theme 3: How farm settlement scheme can be revitalized to reduce unemployment in Edo state**

According to the Acting Permanent Secretary/Director of Agric Extension Services.

The state government is making efforts to improve farm settlement programme to enable youths to work. Efforts are being made through the Land Development programme, to make more land available so that people can work. Diversification of crops to be cultivated should be done. Farm settlements that are good for cash crop production should specialize in cash crop production, while areas that are good for arable crops should specialize in Arable cropping.

Also, the acting PS noted that mechanization of farming is very important as this will help to improve production. Experienced farmers should teach the young ones so that they can stay in the farms to continue with the scheme. Serious advocacy on the benefits of farm settlement scheme cannot be overemphasized. Both the government and private individuals and religious bodies should sensitize the youths and their members of the need to embrace farming. Commercial farming should be encouraged instead of farming for subsistence. In this regard, Edo state government is emphasizing on backward integration in agriculture. By this, the government will be encouraging settlers to produce in high quantity for private organizations that will then transform the produce into other industrial uses. That way, a lot of employment will be generated. For example, farm settlers and other farmers are being encouraged by government to produce cassava for private organizations who are seeking for it to produce other products such as industrial starch.

Government is also trying to bring in financial support through private organizations who wants to collaborate with the farm settlements. According to the acting PS, improving security architecture in the farm settlements will also help to revitalize the farm settlement scheme. Expansion of farm will also create more employment opportunities.

When asked if it is possible to establish farm settlement scheme in each of the Local Government Areas in the state, the acting PS noted that to establish farm settlement in each LGA, the ministry would need partnership with private individuals and willing communities.

An interview session with The Director, Cluster Farming, she remarked thus:

Improvement in security architecture is one important area that must be considered in revitalization of farm settlement scheme in Edo state. To this end, she suggested that hunters should be incorporated into the security architecture to collaborate with the Agro rangers which were set up by the state government in the past to protect farms and settlers. She furthered that the hunters are very brave and effective because they know the terrain more. Other factors to be considered include tax waivers for farmers. Government officials should facilitate linkages between off takers and farm settlers. Price regulation is also important to keep the price competitive so that farmers will be encouraged to continue to produce. Government should invest in infrastructure such as internal roads, provision of health facilities, internet connectivity to attract youths to the farms, provision of storage facilities to prevent spoilage of produce amongst others.

Director, Agriculture Development Programme (ADP) noted thus:

The linkage between ADP and Farm Settlements should be revived so that they can bring in their inputs to the development of the farms; also, he opined that provision of infrastructure and recreational facilities are very important for the revitalization of the farm settlement scheme. One thing is the provision of infrastructure, but another thing is to get the settlers and youths to embrace and stay in the farms. He remarked that Edo youths will rather travel out than stay in the farm. To stop this trend, he emphasized the need for advocacy and awareness creation on the importance of agriculture and farming. He said this can be done through the media, religious bodies, NGOs, teacher/lecturers etc. He also emphasized the need for improvement in the security systems so that farms and farmers will be protected.

According to the Manager (Government Representatives at the Farm Settlements):

In addition to the provision of security, provision of infrastructure and recreational facilities, getting the youths to embrace farming through strong advocacy and awareness creation will help in revitalization. Also, he suggested that settlers should take full ownership of the farms to operate it as a personal business even when government tends to pull back rather than seeing it as a means of government employment.

### **Thematic Analysis of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

Three FGDs were conducted in the three farm settlements with the settlers with 25 participants.

#### **Theme 1: How farm settlement scheme has been effective in reducing unemployment in the past in Edo state**

In response to the above theme, settlers at Iguoriakhi farm remarked thus:

Farm settlement brought “Generational Employment” (President, Iguoriakhi farm). By this I mean farm settlement generated employment not just for the settlers but also for the generations that would follow. He further said families have benefited from farm settlement; and if the farm settlement scheme is established in each Local Government Area in Edo state, it will reduce unemployment (FGD). According to the president, we grow Palm tree, Rubber and Arable crops. Each farmer is assigned 10 hectares of land by the government. Each settler employs an average of 15 persons during land preparation, planting, weeding, harvesting, and processing of the produce in the past.

In response to the above theme, settlers at Ekpoma farm remarked thus:

From 1964-1999 a total of 157 settlers were employed by the government. Each settler employs an average number of 15 and sometimes more casual workers annually; this shows that farm settlement scheme has generated significant employment in Edo state in the past. Here in Ekpoma farm, we have a total of 2,677 hectares of land. Each settler is allocated 10 hectares of land for crops and 1 acre for compound farm.

In response to the above theme, settlers at Sobe farm remarked thus:

Farm settlement scheme started in Nigeria in 1963 from the Western Region with the aim of generating employment. The planners of the scheme planned it adequately. This was handed over to old Bendel state down to Edo state. Our farm settlement covers 6 square miles.



There are 80 settlers employed by the government and we employ an average of 15 and sometimes more casual workers per year during land preparation, planting, weeding harvesting and processing; this shows the level of employment created by farm settlement scheme in the past. However, insecurity by herdsmen has chased us out of the farm settlement; hence we are taking refuge in Sobe town.

**Theme 2: Factors that accounted for the inability of the farm settlement scheme in addressing unemployment in Edo state since 2007 till date**

In a Focus Group Discussion with settlers at Iguoriakhi farm they remarked thus:

The delay in the issuing of certificate to operate the farm made people to lose interest in the farm. Also, the issue of insecurity is a contributing factor; people are being killed or harmed in their farms. Another factor is lack of farming tools like tractors, fertilizers etc. ‘Government has abandoned us to our fate. We sometimes take our produce to the market, in the absence of patronage, our goods go bad because there are no off takers and there is no provision for storage facilities such as silos to keep the produce.

Again, the lack of infrastructure like houses, access and internal roads, health facilities, recreational centers, schools among other have contributed to the failure of the scheme. Several youths are not ready to come and reside in this settlement and just do domestic farming; they rather travel out of the country to look for greener pastures.

In reaction to the above theme, settlers at Ekpoma farm listed the following:

-Government negligence in terms of poor funding, lack of soft loans, lack of tractors and other equipment such as plowing machine. According to the president of the farmers’ cooperative, some tractors were removed from the settlement during the tenure of former governor Igbinedion and they were never replaced as promised. The multi-million palm oil milling plant was removed for repairs at the beginning of this present administration, and it was never brought back.

-Lack of interest by youths is a big challenge. The youths would rather move from the farms to the cities.

-Insecurity from Herdsmen suspected to be Fulani’s is a worrisome factor. They allow their animals to eat your crops. When you try to stop them, it leads to fight. We have had series of crises with the herdsmen and even court litigations.

-Lack of training on modern farming practices

-Adulterated inputs such as fertilizers, chemicals, and insecticides are another factor. Some of the input we bought last farming season did not work because they were adulterated. It was not so when government agents were supplying at subsidized rate.

-In terms of marketing, there is difficulty in securing partnership with organization due to government refusal to sign surety. According to the president of the farmers' cooperative, PRESCO used to come in here in the past to buy palm produce from us. Right now, they no longer come because the farm is not functioning well.

The secretary to the Cooperative said there is difficulty in securing loan from the banks. The president of the cooperative remarked "Before the banks could give you loan, they will check to see if you have what it takes to be given loan. That is, what are you producing that could bring money to the bank? Are you bankable?". Many of us do not have the collateral to secure loan so the government need to help us.

-Decayed and dilapidated infrastructures such as residential and office apartments with no portable water and health center are also factors

-Lack of recreational centers

- Certificate to operate have not been issued to settlers although they have started issuing it now.

In reaction to the above theme, settlers at Sobe farm remarked thus:

Insecurity is our biggest problem in Sobe farm; Herdsmen have taken over the entire farm and its environs. The herders even enter the community to kill and kidnap residents in the community for ransome. We used to plant cocoa yam, maize, cassava, and other arable crops in large quantity, but insecurity has made us to leave the farms, we cannot go there regularly as we use to. We are even looking for alternative land to farm just for subsistence. The high level of insecurity has made every other factor to be secondary. One of the FGD members remarked thus 'as at this time last year, I had already sold about 4 million naira from watermelon alone. Right now, the farms are under siege. You cannot go there alone and if you must go there, we go in group".

When we entered the farm in group during this field work, the secretary to the cooperative remarked thus" this is an experimental

site by an organization for a cassava specie. I had to cut low these cassava stems otherwise the herders would come here to harvest the tubers and feed it to their cows” The Secretary who led us to the farm pointed at the dilapidated houses, and other infrastructures such as silos that were all burnt down and not functioning.

The chairman remarked; thus, “due to the insecurity, we have relocated our children from the school in the settlement to the SUBEB School in Sobe town so they can continue with their education.”

Other challenges include poor funding, lack of equipment such as tractors, ploughing or plowing machine. One of the FGD members remarked that “OWENA River Basin Development authority used to hire equipment to us at cheaper rates, but they no longer do that for us”. However, these problems are secondary to the problem of insecurity.

### **Theme 3: How farm settlement scheme can be revitalized to reduce unemployment in Edo state**

In a Focus Group Discussion with settlers at Iguoriakhi farm the settlers highlighted the following on how farm settlement scheme can be revitalized to reduce unemployment in Edo state.

- Farm settlement scheme should be funded properly by government.
- Government should partner with Private Corporation to aid the farmers.
- There should be provision of infrastructure such as power supply, good houses, good access and internal roads, recreation, and entertainment. Facilities etc.
- There should be provision of tractors, fertilizers, and other modern farming inputs to enhance mechanized farming.
- Strong advocacy and awareness creation on the need for people especially the youths and the educated to embrace farming and key into the farm settlement.
- There should be provision of modern infrastructure with internet connectivity to attract the youths
- Agriculture entrepreneurship should be promoted
- There should be land development
- Government should facilitate partnership with off takers to aid the farmers in selling their produce

-Security challenges should be addressed

In reaction to the above theme, settlers at Ekpoma farm listed the following:

- There should be provision of infrastructural amenities like health centers, secondary school, portable water, and recreational centers
- Reintroduction of permanent crops such as rubbers, Palm tree, poultry should be reintroduced
- Proper funding from government should be enhanced
- Provision of necessary equipment for mechanized farming is also very important.
- Training and retaining of settlers for modern best farming practices
- Advocacy and awareness creation on the need for people especially the youths to key into agriculture and the farm settlement scheme.
- The government should facilitate linkages between the farm settlers and off takers in order to create more value to farmers.

In reaction to the above theme, settlers at Sobe farm listed the following:

- The issue of insecurity should be given maximum attention; before anything can be done in Sobe farm, security must be restored
- There is a need for good internal road and other infrastructure to attract young people when security is restored
- When security is restored, proper advocacy and awareness campaigns should be done to restore the hopes of the people to come back to the farm.

### **Discussion of Findings**

From the presented data on the questionnaire on how farm settlement scheme has been effective in reducing past unemployment problem in Edo state, it was discovered that: Farm settlement scheme contributed significantly to unemployment reduction in the past in Edo state; Farm settlement scheme provided employment and income indirectly to host and surrounding communities and it boosted the overall economy of Edo state which enhanced employment generation.

In addition to the above, findings from the KPIs with the Acting Permanent Secretary/Director of Extension services and others revealed that: Essentially, the farm settlement was geared towards employment generation through live-stock farming, food crops and cash crops production. To this end, it has helped in reducing unemployment as most people were engaged in the process. Also, it was a means of socialization between people of different background which acted as a cluster that bring people together. This agrees with the position of the results from the FGDs where participants

remarked that farm settlement brought “Generational Employment.” By this they meant farm settlement generated employment not just for the settlers but also for the generations that would follow. To buttress this fact, each of the FGD participants remarked that they used to employ an average of 15 persons annually during land preparation, planting, harvesting, and processing. These findings are in tandem with several other studies. For instance, Mwale and Kamninga (2022) did a study on Land rights and the impact of farm input subsidies on unemployment convergence in Malawi. The study found that farm input subsidies led to unemployment convergence, only in settlements where men hold rights to land and receive the subsidies on behalf of their households. Similarly, Adekoya, Ayuba, & Sokunbi, (2018) analyzed employment in agriculture and youth unemployment in the West Africa. The result revealed that employment in agriculture reduces youth unemployment and a positive improvement in the economy led to a reduction in youth unemployment. Also, Himayatullah & Mahmood (2012) examined Irrigation, Farm Productivity, and unemployment Reduction in Parkistan. The analysis of data suggests that there are strong linkages between irrigation, crop productivity and unemployment reduction. The linkages between irrigation and unemployment reduction are both direct and indirect. Irrigation has benefited the poor through higher agricultural productivity; higher yields, increased cropping intensity, increased income, consumption, and savings as well as higher farm and off-farm employment.

From the above analysis on the questionnaire responses which presents data on factors that accounted for the inability of the farm settlement scheme in addressing unemployment in Edo state since 2007 till date, it was discovered that: Participants were not fully involved in the decision making process regarding the operation of the farms; Recreational facilities were not provided for settlers in the farms; Poor Funding; Poor implementation of the farm settlement scheme; Political interference in the management of the scheme; Poor maintenance culture of the infrastructural facilities in the farms; Inadequate extension workers to teach participants on new methods of farming; Inadequate land for expansion due to poor land tenure system; Insecurity; The equipment provided were not fit for purpose; Lack of follow-up training for the participants and Certificates to operate the farm plots were not issued to participants as agreed.

Besides the above questionnaire responses, results from the KPIs also revealed that: Policy change towards farm settlement is one of the factors that accounted for the inability of farm settlement scheme to address unemployment reduction in Edo state. Every successive administration has a priority area in terms of policy implementation; whereas some are favourable to farm settlement scheme, others are not favorable. Encroachment by government into the land originally meant for the scheme for other development purposes is also a factor. However, results from FGDs revealed that the major factor responsible for the failure of farm settlement scheme in Edo state is high level of insecurity which is perpetuated by Herdsmen. For instance, settlers in Sobe farm have fled and abandoned the farm settlement due to the activities of the herders.

The above findings are in tandem with several other works by scholars. For instance: Abiola, (2020) Reviewed the Farm Settlement Scheme in Nigeria from 1999 till Date. His study showed that the challenges militating against the success of the policy includes bad politicking, poor political structure, instability in government, lack of policy consistency amongst others. Also, Nwaenyi, (2021) highlighted why the farm settlement scheme failed in (Eastern and Western Regions, 1962-1968). He opined that: The mechanical farming equipment provided in the

settlements were not suitable for local conditions; It was utopia to expect the local peasants to avail themselves of the mechanical equipment used in the settlement, so the new farming methods envisaged could not be achieved; The settlement turns out to be a failure or better still a contradiction of being job creations to acute unemployment as some of the peasants who could not cope with the new skills abandoned the programme etc. Similarly, Iwuchukwu and Igbokwe (2012) carried out a study titled “Review of Agricultural Programmes and Policies in Nigeria” where they analyzed the effects of government agricultural reforms on Nigeria’s Agricultural Development. The finding revealed that the growth in the agricultural sector in Nigeria has not been significantly constant and sustainable over the years due to lack of political will, proper funding, and corruption. Also, Ani, Maxwell and Ecoma (2017) conducted a study on “Rice Production and unemployment reduction in Nigeria. The study revealed that poverty and lack of technical know-how were some of the factors militating against the rise of a robust farming culture.

From the presented data on the questionnaire responses on how farm settlement scheme can be revitalized to reduce unemployment in Edo state, it was revealed that: There should be robust security architecture that will protect the farms and the settlers; Proper funding through government and private partnership; More land should be procured by government for expansion in the existing farm settlements and establishment of farm settlement scheme in each local government area in Edo state; New, high yield seedling should be provided for participants; Provisions of the necessary infrastructure (roads, electricity, schools etc) and facilities that would attract participants to stay in the Farms; Participants should exhibit the spirit of entrepreneurship and take ownership of the scheme; Provision of well-trained extension workers that would in turn teach the participants of new innovations; Processing of the produce to avoid wastages should be enhanced by government; Fit - for -purpose equipment should be provided for the participants; Training and retraining of the farmers is necessary; Government should facilitate partnership between farmers and off-takers; Provision of recreational facilities such as hotels, clubs, guest houses, sports arena etc for young adults to stay in the farm; Left over products from the farms should be bought by government and stored away in food banks and silos; and Internet infrastructure/connectivity be provided in the farms to attract youths and young participants.

In addition to the above questionnaire responses, results from one of the Key Persons Interview states that: Improvement in security architecture is one important area that must be considered in revitalization of farm settlement scheme in Edo state. To this end, the interviewee suggested that hunters should be incorporated into the security architecture to collaborate with the Agro rangers which were set up by the state government in the past to protect farms and settlers.

Also, the acting PS noted that mechanization of farming is very important in the revitalization of farm settlement in Edo state as this will help to improve production. Commercial farming should be encouraged instead of farming for subsistence. In this regard, Edo state government is emphasizing on backward integration in agriculture. By this, the government will be encouraging settlers to produce in high quantity for private organizations that will then transform the produce into other industrial uses. That way, a lot of employment will be generated. For example, farm settlers and other farmers are being encouraged by government to produce cassava for private organizations who are seeking for it to produce other products such as industrial starch.

Furthermore, other Key Persons Interviewees remarked that strong advocacy and creation of awareness on the importance of farm settlement scheme will help to conscientize the youths on the significance of embracing farm settlement scheme in Edo state. This agrees with responses from the FGDs where participants noted that: The issues of insecurity should be given maximum attention; Proper funding from government should be enhanced; Provision of necessary equipment for mechanized farming is also very important; Training and retaining of settlers for modern best farming practices amongst others.

The above findings are in tandem with the works of several scholars. For instance, Ashagidigbi, Yusuf & Agboola (2019) did research on Productivity of Arable Crop Farmers as Panacea to Youth Unemployment. The study revealed that majority of the farmers are old and could not work on the farm anymore, while the youths have left the farms. All the inputs used positively influence productivity, likewise, access to credit has a direct effect on the technical efficiency of the arable crop farmers. The study recommended that youths should be encouraged to venture into arable crop farming to increase productivity and reduce youth unemployment. Income smoothening policy option such as credit provision should also be executed to enhance the efficiency of the youths in crop production.

Similarly, Onime and Tamuno (2021) carried out a study on Poverty, Unemployment and Food Insecurity: Empirical Evidence from Nigeria. The findings suggest that dealing with poverty and unemployment in the country is only a necessary condition to resolving food insecurity and unemployment. Therefore, it recommended a multi- sector specific approach to solving the issue of poverty and unemployment reduction in Nigeria targeting agriculture and its employment generating capacity, creating the enabling environment through infrastructure development. On his own part, Alonge (2016) in his study titled, “Food Processing, Preservation and Storage for Economic Development in Nigeria” states that after crop has been harvested, the next thing to do is to process the agricultural produce to the end product for consumption or storage. The study recommended among others that there should be Ban on importation of some crops like rice by the government and with a commensurate effort to encourage local production, processing, and marketing of such crops.

## **Conclusion**

The study has investigated Farm Settlement Scheme Revitalization and Unemployment Reduction in Edo State, Nigeria. From the study, it has been shown that farm settlement is a veritable means of generating employment opportunities. Indeed, in the past it generated lots of employment opportunities for the settlers and those willing to work in farms. However, the farm settlements are unable to perform this function in contemporary times due to several factors. The major factor among other factors responsible for the failure of the farm settlement scheme in the past and even at present is insecurity as evident in Sobe Farm where the settlers have all left the farm settlement to the host community because of incessant attacks from herders. The herders even come to the community to attack, kidnap, and kill the people in the village. It is very worrisome to see that the government cannot revitalize the farm settlement policy which has the capacity to create huge employment opportunities for the masses to address the high unemployment rate in the state.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in accordance with the findings of the study.

- i. Adequate security should be provided in each of the farm settlements by the government to protect the farms and the settlers. It is therefore, recommended that government should recruit the local hunters to work with the agro rangers and the police to curb insecurity in and around the farm settlements.
- ii. Government, NGOs, and religious organizations should engage in strong advocacy and awareness creation on the importance of farm settlement scheme to enable the youths to embrace the scheme.
- iii. There should be provision of infrastructural facilities such as internal roads, schools, health centres as well as recreational facilities such as guest houses, playgrounds, and internet connectivity amongst others. This will enable settlers to stay in the settlements.

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