

INFLUENCE OF AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION AGENDA POLICIES ON CASSAVA PRODUCTION AMONG YOUTH IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the influence of Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) policies on cassava production among youth in Ekiti State for sustainable agrarian reform. A total of 103 respondents were surveyed for the study using well-structured questionnaires. Analysis of data was done using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results showed that majority (71.8%) of the respondents' were males and all had a form of formal education. Influence of ATA policies was high among the respondents while the major constraints to cassava production under ATA were bureaucracy of government, lack of confidence in investors and poor extension services. Respondents age ($p=0.029$), farm size ($p=0.035$) and membership of Youth Commercial Agriculture Development group ($p=0.041$) were significantly related to influence of ATA policies ($p>0.05$). It is recommended that government must provide appropriate extension services on ATA benefits to beneficiaries and potential users, and remove bureaucratic processes that hinder beneficiaries' accessibility to ATA policies.

Keywords: Policies, Youth, Influence, Cassava, Agricultural Transformation Agenda, Sustainable

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is one of the major sectors of the Nigeria's economy and a major contributor to Nigeria's GDP. Agriculture provides food for the growing population, income to the farming families, foreign exchange earnings to the nation, generate raw materials for agro-allied industries and employs substantial labour force. It is a sector propelled basically by the rural population with many intervention foci on economic and poverty alleviation strides in the country by various development agencies and governmental policies. According to UNICEF (2008), about 76% of Nigeria population lives in the rural areas and about 90% of the rural dwellers are engaged in agricultural production. Agriculture is a renewable source of revenue to farm operators and provides a comparative advantage to the nation in the areas of yet untapped large expanse of land for arable farming, grazing of animals and large water bodies for aquaculture practice, potent for economic activities.

However, the country has evolved several failing intervention programmes as policies after oil discovery in the 1970s to prioritized attention on mono-cultural and crude-oil based economy, reducing diversification options of the economy without consideration of the possibility of depletion of the oil reserve, leading to the reality of the non-sustainability of the oil exploration business with the recent global oil price. These flurry intervention programmes were occasioned to increase food production, achieve food security and empower the rural youth economically but never sustainable. However, the concentration of agricultural practice remains in the hands of ageing population possibly perceived by many youth to be exclusive. Nwachukwu (2008) reported that one of the problems for non-realization of our goal for food sufficiency is the condition of the Nigerian farmer and the farming environment. The Nigerian farmer is ageing with an average of 50 years. Prominent existing policies to rekindle youth interest in farming include the farm settlement scheme, Youth-In-Agriculture and National Directorate of Employment which are producing marginal results with the increasing food import bills in the country and increasing youth unemployment.

The fewer youth into agricultural practice has led to mass unemployment and lack of sustainable livelihood activities among the youth (Brietenbach, 2006) apparently to the influence of agricultural-support facilities as policies and ineffective practical skills worthy of youth identification with agriculture for career path, competitive and a profitable job in the present day.

Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) was inaugurated in 2011 on the inspiration of making farming a competitive business for optimal financial gains along the value chain and not just a development intervention scheme bearing exclusiveness and less desirability in many youth. It has policies designed to encourage stakeholders; government, private sector, farming operators and intending farmers in agricultural business to improve agricultural production sustainably, raise household food security and increase farmers income by providing direct subsidy through discounted seeds, fertilizers, agro-chemicals and farm machinery equipment on hire through growth enhancement design of Electronic wallet (E-wallet). It is borne out of concern by the federal government to eradicate the corrupt government dominated fertilizer procurement and distribution to farmers through its agro-input corporation agencies in the states of the country.

Ekiti State, predominantly have farming as a major occupation among its rural dwellers, adopted the Youth Commercial Agricultural Development (YCAD) project as a drive to fascinate and draw the embattled populated youth yearly jostling for a few white collar jobs as an entrance approach to ATA under the Ministry of Agriculture on a sustainable basis. The programme started in 2012 and up till date, its area of major food production focus remains cassava production, to its

resilience to harsh climatic conditions constituting drought and diseases in the face of climate variation. Cassava combines abilities to produce high yields under poor conditions and store its harvestable portion underground until needed, making it a classic “food security crop” (Nweke 2003). It is one of the most important food crops grown in Nigeria and a valuable source of cheap calories to many Nigeria populace, used in production of flour, starch, paper, pellets for agro-allied industries, ethanol and pharmaceutical production, making it a cash goldmine. ATA is an agricultural policy implemented to redress spotted failed attempts of past agricultural policies, through treatment of agriculture as a business, sustainably driven through public private partnership and not mere government developmental programme for rural areas habiting old and young deprived of no other means of livelihood but farming as erroneously conceived in the past.

It is implemented to deliver subsidized farm inputs to accredited farmers by government certified and accredited agro-dealers, bringing the seed and fertilizer companies to sell directly to the farmers, blocking the saboteur effort of middle-men in agro-inputs dealership and corrupt government officials. The state government partners with ECO-BANK PLC to fund recruited youth with a loan of 1.4 million naira spread by the government on agricultural inputs, involving 5-30 hectares of land allocation to employee, supplies of cassava stem, fertilizer, farm machinery to plough the land and agro-chemicals to reduce the operating cost for a worth-while farming enterprise and provide farmers with a ready market while reducing post-harvest losses at the same time. Beneficiaries of the programme receive messages on agro-input delivery through E-wallet system, gets 80% of the money invested and 20% is paid back to the government as interest rate and telecommunications bill on the adopted E-Wallet system for disseminating disbursement and venues for collection of farm inputs to the recruited farmers. It is essential to sustain production at an increased rate to measure up with the demanding increasing population in the country as a food security crop required for bakery, laundry and agro-allied industries, equally as export market for foreign exchange. There are no economically viable small and medium scale cassava-based industries in the state, leading to the sales of cassava produce to Matna Food Company, Akure in Ondo State, a medium scale cassava company, processing the cassava to industrial starch.

However, effort to promote the interest of the youth into commercial agriculture as a credible and sustainable means for employment creation and boosting the food staple productivity in the state decries interest but apathy with many youth surviving on less or non- sustainable livelihood activities of motor cycling “okada”, street begging, labourers in construction sites and prostitution. The projected far reaching end of ATA in the study area needs an understanding of its policy awareness, constraints to utilization, and influence among the youth. It is against this background that this study was carried out.

The general objective of the study was to assess the influence of Agricultural Transformation Agenda policies on cassava production among youth in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives include to:

1. determine the personal characteristics of the farmers,
2. ascertain the level of awareness of farmers of the Agricultural Transformation Agenda of the government,
3. determine the constraints influencing the respondents level of cassava production and
4. identify the extent of the influence of selected Agricultural Transformation Agenda policies on the youth cassava farmers.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Ekiti State. The majority of farm operators in Ekiti State are rural dwellers carrying out subsistence farming for livelihood primarily above other livelihood activities. Ekiti State is located between latitudes $7^{\circ} 25^1$ and $8^{\circ} 5^1$ East of Greenwich Meridian and between longitude $4^{\circ} 45^1$ and $5^{\circ} 46^0$ North of the Equator. The State is bounded to the North by Kwara and Kogi States while it is bounded by Osun State to the west, Edo to the East, and Ondo to the South. Ekiti State is a landlocked State, having no coastal boundary. The Ekiti people are culturally homogenous and speak a dialect of the Yoruba language known as Ekiti. The population of the inhabitants of the state, according to a 2006 population census, was 2,737,186 (NPC, 2006). The population of the study is made up of youth cassava farmers in Ekiti State registered in the Youth Commercial Agricultural Development (YCAD) project, as an entrance into the ATA programme, set up for sustainable agricultural production through their engagement and participation in the programme for sustainable agricultural reform. Eight farm settlements were developed for ATA, namely; Ayede, Eyemero, Oke-Ako, Ipao, Osin, Orin, Eporo and Erio. Simple random technique was used to select 103 youth cassava farmers through a list of youth cassava farmers compiled by the Ekiti State Ministry of Agriculture from each of the settlement and a probability proportional sample size method was used to select respondents for the study. This includes 23 youth farmers from Ayede, 15 youth farmers from Eyemero, 14 youth farmers from Ipao, 11 youth farmers from Orin, 13 youth farmers from Osin, 17 youth farmers from Eporo and 10 youth farmers from Erio to give 103 youth cassava farmers used for the survey. Primary data was obtained through the use of structured questionnaire consisting of both open and close ended questions. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages, likewise, inferential statistics such as, Chi-square (χ^2) and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used to analyse the study hypotheses.

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between the personal characteristics of the cassava farmers and the influence of ATA policies for cassava production

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between farmers' awareness of farmers on policies attached to ATA and the influence of ATA policies for cassava production

Ho3: There is no relationship between the constraints faced by respondents in utilisation of farm inputs and the influence of ATA policies for cassava production.

The hypothesis was rejected if the P -value was $\leq \alpha = 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal Characteristics

Table 1, reveals that more than half (57.3%) of the respondents were between 21-30 years of age. This suggests that the liveliness of individuals to take risks and exhibit civil and economic responsibilities as they enter into the labour market is overwhelming at the youthful stage of life. Skuza (2005) corroborated this finding that youth is an important and vital segment of human resources which not only today but in future have to shoulder the responsibility for development including agriculture and rural sectors. The majority (71.8%) of the respondents were males, suggesting that males are more into cassava farming than females plausibly to their more energetic prowess for agronomic exercises than the female counterparts.

The result is in agreement with Roy (2003) that active involvement of the youth in cassava production activities is due to so much energy, zeal and innovativeness of the youths.

More than half (54.4%) of the respondents are single. This shows that the singles are more venturesome and daring to take risks may be due to lesser socio-economic responsibilities compared to the married, which is in support of the a priori belief that innovators are eager to try new ideas requiring risks. In terms of education, large percent (60.2%) had tertiary education while others had either primary or secondary education. This implies that education contributes to adoption of new technology, participation of people in developmental programmes and sustainable usage of innovation for a long time until a new innovation is discovered as the best course of action by adopters. Oluwatosin (2011) corroborated this finding that more educated farmers are more likely to adopt progressive farming practices and new technologies and thus increase their overall efficiency. Barely half (42.7%) cultivated 4 to 6 hectares of cassava farm while 27.2% and 30.1% respectively had 2 to 4 hectares and 6 to 8 hectares. This results shows that the respondents were into mechanized cassava production having potential to reduce cost of production and influence their output with more harvest. This holds implication for sustainable use of the environment for future generation unlike the crude method of farming that involves ignorant burning of bush as land preparation method, before slashing of the remnant left over bush that precedes land cultivation among many old illiterate farmers.

All the respondents (100%) belonged to Youth Commercial Agriculture Development project. This implies that registration and association with the Youth Commercial Agriculture Development project subsumed in the ATA programme provided opportunities to member youth to sustainably access farm credit, guaranteed market for cassava produce, enjoy profitable farming while the government sustainably takes the youth out of unemployment state. This finding is consistent with (Nsikak-Abassi *et.al*, 2011) that established a positive relationship between adoption of innovation and membership of group.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents based on their personal characteristics

Variable	Frequency	%	Mean
Age (years)			
21 – 30	59	57.3	42
31 – 40	44	42.7	
Sex			
Male	74	71.8	
Female	20	28.2	
Marital status			
Single	56	54.4	
Married	43	41.7	
Divorced	4	3.9	
Educational status			
Primary education	14	13.6	
Secondary education	27	26.2	
Tertiary education	62	60.2	
Family size			
1 – 3	38	36.9	3
4– 6	9	8.7	
Farm size (ha)			
2 – 4	28	27.2	
4 – 6	44	42.7	3
6 – 8	31	30.1	
Membership of Youth Commercial Agriculture Development			
	100	100	

Source: Field survey, 2014

Table 2 shows that majority of the cassava farmers were aware of most of the government's policies on farm input and cassava production under ATA. It is shown that all the farmers indicated awareness of the government's policies on fertilizers (100%), improved stem cuttings (100%) and tractor and mechanized farming services (100%) while most of the farmers were aware of government policies for farmers organization (97.1%), credit facilities (88.3%), accessibility to land (95.1%) among others. On the other hand, few (47.6%) were aware of policies aimed at stabilizing the price of cassava commodity. These imply that significant proportion of the respondents were aware of the government's effort to improve cassava production in the country and create sustainable employment for the youth through Agricultural Transformation Agenda programme. It may be due to the high level of education among the youth.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents based on their awareness of ATA policies of the government for Cassava Production

Awareness	Frequency	%
I am aware of government's effort to promote access of farmers to fertilizers	103	100
I am aware of government effort to support access of farmers to improve cassava stem	103	100
Are you aware of government effort to tactorise and facilitate mechanized cassava production	103	100
I am aware of government effort to facilitate equitable access of farmers to credit facilities	91	88.3
I am aware of what government is doing to promote farmers organization for data capturing	100	97.1
Are you aware of what government is doing to maintain high yields of cassava produce	95	92.2
Do you know what government is doing to provide cultivable land to farmers	98	95.1
Are you aware of government effort to disseminate information on improved production practices to farmers	92	89.3
Are you aware of government effort to provide market information to farmers and circumvent risks and uncertainties in farming	89	86.4
Are you aware of government effort to provide efficient commodity market for cassava production	84	81.6
Are you aware of government effort to support cassava production through advocacy for cassava flour for bakery products	79	76.7
Are you aware of what government is doing to stabilize price of cassava as a food commodity	49	47.6

*Multiple responses

Source: Field survey, 2014

Table 3 shows that on a general note, there was high level of awareness of ATA policies of the government for cassava production among the respondents.

Table 3: Categorisation of respondents based on their level of awareness of ATA policies for cassava production

Awareness categories	Scores	Frequency	Mean
Low	1 – 5.3	34 (33.0)	5.4
High	5.4 – 12	69 (67.0)	

*Figures in parentheses are percentages

Source: Field survey, 2014

Table 4 reveals that bureaucracy involved in benefiting from government’s policy on ATA ranked high among the constraints faced by the farmers. Also, low confidence in investors, inadequate extension agents, inconsistent government policies and late supply of farm inputs were barriers to the well intended and articulated policies expected to trickle down to beneficiaries of this ATA programme. This imply that government’s protocols of operation hold bureaucratic measures that could discourage many registered youth and prospective interested youth for the Youth Commercial Agriculture Development project under ATA to stay put on the project or join the membership, which could defeat the objective of sustainable integration of youth into profitable agriculture and enterprise development of youth through agriculture if not checked. This finding is in consonance with Idachaba (2006) that “Good intentions are not enough” where it was asserted that the seemingly well-articulated and well-designed policies in Nigeria ended up producing policy mistakes, unintended policy consequences and unintended beneficiaries.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents based on the constraints faced in utilising Agricultural Transformation Agenda policies

Constraints	Mean	Rank
Stiff bureaucracy of the government	2.14	1
Low confidence in investors	2.12	2
Late supply of farm inputs	2.02	5
Inadequate extension agents	2.08	3
Low technical know-how on the part of the extension agents	1.63	8
Inconsistency of the government policies	2.05	4
Insufficient credible sources of information on ATA policies	1.75	7
Poor mobile network for E-wallet operation	1.60	8
Inefficient Cassava market	1.51	9
Lack of disease and pest diagnostic trainings and demonstration	1.98	6

Source: Field survey, 2014

Influence of Agricultural Transformation Agenda policies on cassava production

Table 5 reveals that all (100%) of the respondents into cassava production experienced an increased influence in accessibility to farm machineries and improved cassava stem for planting since inception of the Agricultural Transformation Agenda of the government. The result shows that majority of the respondents (98.1% , 96.1%, 96.1%, 96.1%) experienced increase accessibility to farm credit, decrease in loss of crop productivity, increase availability of farm inputs and affordability of

fertilizer and agro-chemicals respectively among other benefits of ATA to their cassava production. This implies that ATA favours improved cassava production, choice of farming as a venture, leading to increase in farm yield and consequently poverty reduction among the youth, having a far reaching end of sustainable interest of youth in agriculture and availability of youth for government supportive efforts towards agriculture.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents based on the influence Agricultural Transformation Agenda policies

Variables	Increase Influence In Farming		Decrease Influence In Farming		No Influence	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Policy Utilisation						
Increased production level	64	62.1	35	34.0	4	3.9
Accessibility to farm machineries	103	100	0	0.0	0	0.0
Farming as a lucrative venture	83	80.6	20	19.4	0	0.0
Market opportunities in subsisting imports with local production	89	86.4	11	10.7	3	2.9
Mobile telephony for agricultural information	91	88.3	2	1.9	10	9.7
Wider opportunity to improved production information	72	69.9	4	3.9	27	26.2
Integrated pest and disease management	96	93.2	2	1.9	5	4.6
Accessibility of credit facilities	101	98.1	0	0.0	2	1.9
Loss in crop productivity	0	0.0	99	96.1	4	3.9
Dignity in farming	85	82.5	12	11.7	6	5.8
Availability of farm inputs	99	96.1	0	0.0	4	3.9
Fertilizer and agro-chemicals affordability	99	96.1	0	0.0	4	3.9
Minimum price guarantee for cassava produce	84	81.6	6	5.8	13	12.6
Incentivize farming for entrepreneurship development	70	68.0	17	16.5	16	15.5
Close partnership of research with enabling technologies	67	65.0	0	0.0	36	35.0
Accessibility to improved varieties of cassava stem	103	100	0	0.0	0	0.0
Linkage with extension services	52	50.5	0	0.0	51	49.5

Source: Field survey, 2012

The finding in (Table 6) shows that influence of ATA policies on cassava production in the study area is high. This implies that policies are driving forces to scaling up an environment's comparative advantage to economic growth and poverty reduction among its residents. Hence, ATA is a demonstration of sustainable agricultural policy for youth employment and drive for unregistered youth to become a member of Youth Commercial Agriculture Development project as entrance point to benefit from ATA.

Table 6: Categorization of respondents based on the influence of ATA policies for cassava production

Influence categories	Scores	Frequency	Mean
Low	1 – 16.9	22 (21.4)	17
High	17 – 23	81 (78.6)	

*Figures in parentheses are percentages

Table 7: Analysis of personal characteristic of respondents and the influence of Agricultural Transformation Agenda policies for cassava production

The findings in (Tables 7 and 8) indicate that association of respondents with Youth Commercial Agriculture Development project, age of respondents and farm size influence improved livelihood and enhanced farm income opportunities to subscribers of Agricultural Transformation Agenda policies. This implies that identification of youth with Youth Commercial Agriculture Development project offers increased beneficial gains of efficient production and assured market as government intervention programme to its member group. (Shehu *et al.*, 2010) supported this finding that membership of farmer’s association or cooperative societies creates an avenue for farmers to pool their risks, in addition to providing access to resources and information that will improve their production practices.

Age of respondents is a driving force conducive to positively target economic gains that can be promoted by the government to a target audience for sustainable development through involvement and participation in government intervention programmes for improved agricultural production in the country. The youth may likely be innovative farmers, as agility, abled-body, physical strength and less societal burden on them may pre-dispose them to change old farming practices to new improved practices offering more rewarding economic gains. This is because a larger population of youths represents the link between the present and the future as well as a reservoir of labour (Okeowo, Agunbiade and Odeyemi, 1999). Farm size is an important variable for profit margin determination and boost of youth interest in farming, as it offers rationale for efficient and worthwhile farming investment sustainably. This implies that farm size is instrumental to farm output on a sustainable basis, as much as the farmer remains in the farming business.

Table 7: Chi – square analysis of farmers’ personal characteristics and influence of ATA policy

Utilisation			
Variables	d.f	X ² value	p-value
Sex	1	0.162	0.706
Marital status	3	2.194	0.591
Membership of Youth Commercial Agriculture Development group	1	0.041	0.049*
Educational status	3	3.451	0.174

nificant at $p \leq 0.05$

Source: Field survey, 2012

Table 8: PPMC analysis of farmers’ personal characteristics and influence on ATA Policy Utilisation

Variables	N	r – value	p-value
Age	103	0.123	0.029*
Family size	103	0.149	0.189
Farm size	103	0.130	0.035*
Constraints	103	0.178	0.201

Source: Field survey, 2014

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This can be concluded from the findings that there is high level of awareness of Agricultural Transformation Agenda and its policies' influence on cassava production among the registered youth in the study area. In addition, influence of ATA policies on accessibility to farm machineries, improved cassava varieties for planting, increased accessibility to farm credit, decrease in loss of crop productivity, availability of farm inputs and affordability of fertilizer and agro-chemicals were high among the respondents. Only policy on linkage with extension services had poor influence on the registered youth. Moreover, association of respondents with Youth Commercial Agriculture Development project as the integration channel into the ATA programme, age, level of education of respondents and their farm size influenced the adoption benefits of Agricultural Transformation Agenda policies (ATA). It can be inferred that in spite of government policy challenges of stiff bureaucracy, low confidence in investors among other challenges experienced by the youth that participated in the Youth Commercial Agriculture Development project, as entrance into ATA programme, ATA policies still hold a comparative advantage for economic growth and poverty reduction among its participants if its implementation is improved consistently, lowering bureaucracy and sustaining the accessibility of farm inputs to beneficiaries for many years to come.

The study recommended that:

1. Efforts should be made by the government to facilitate more extension contacts, cassava crop campaign and increased awareness of the opportunities that abound in youth engagement with Agricultural Transformation Agenda to boost youth confidence and sustainable engagement in the programme.
2. Government at local and state levels should increase enlightenment programmes through the mass media of the importance of farm operators in all farming communities to join a registered farmers' group in order to access the benefits of government initiative programmes sustainably, at no or low cost for enhancement of profitable farming enterprise.
3. Government should conscientiously provide adequate sensitization for the youth on Agricultural Transformation Agenda through the mass media of the provisions of huge benefits embedded in the programme for participants, like accessibility to farm inputs and minimum price guarantee for cassava farmers.
4. Government should increase the monitoring, coordination and implementation of the ATA programme, ensuring the removal of bureaucratic procedures that may restrict its beneficiaries from enjoying the positive influence of ATA policies sustainably.
5. The incentives provided to the youth through ATA should be made sustainable in order to gear the interest of many youth into farming and incorporate them into the ATA programme, as a means of employment provision and reduction of vulnerability of unemployed youth to crimes and other social vices in the country.

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