



Original Research Article

Socioeconomic Impact of Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurial Programme (YAGEP) on Beneficiaries in Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the socioeconomic impact of the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurial Programme (YAGEP) on beneficiaries in Delta State, Nigeria. A total of 60 YAGEP beneficiaries from the 2019/2020 programme cycle were used for the study. The objectives of the study were realized using descriptive statistics, and presented as percentages, means and with frequency distribution tables. The result from the study showed that the mean age of the YAGEP beneficiaries was 36 years. A majority (78.3%) of the beneficiaries were married, while the average farming experience of the beneficiaries was 8 years. The average annual income earned by respondents before and after participation in the YAGEP programme were ₦653,155.56 and ₦925,555.56 respectively. The major constraints identified by the respondents in participation in the YAGEP programme were poor capital base ($\bar{x} = 2.85$), Diversion of farm inputs ($\bar{x} = 2.78$), Inadequate provision of farm inputs ($\bar{x} = 2.72$) and poor project financing ($\bar{x} = 3.13$). The study recommended the provision of financial support from the Federal government and non-governmental organizations towards boosting the capital base of the project. Since there was a confirmation of improved income level of beneficiaries after the programme, policymakers should as a matter of urgent National importance allocate substantial financial resources to training in youth entrepreneurship to absorb the increasing number of unemployed youths to reduce their involvement in crimes and improve the economy through technical innovation.

Keywords: Youths, empowerment, agricultural entrepreneurship, socioeconomic, beneficiaries

Introduction

Nigeria desires to be one of the greatest economies by 2030, and to have the option to stand and contend amongst the numerous nations of the world. To this end, the attainment of independence through entrepreneurship advancement by connecting with the youths to reduce joblessness should be viewed in a serious way to build exports and reduce dependence on imports (Okoye *et al.*, 2014).

Economic sabotage through pipeline vandalization, violence, kidnapping of oil workers, armed robbery, and internet fraud amongst the youths will never again win in our society. The youths occupy a huge portion (around 70%) of the entire population, and the tertiary institutions (universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and so forth) are turning out graduates consistently into an economy where jobs are not available to engage them (Okeke *et al.*, 2020). In situations like this, entrepreneurship education that creates inventive abilities, vocational capacities, empowerment, provision of foundations, and other fundamental skills are exceptionally basic (Oghojafor *et al.*, 2009; Okeke *et al.*, 2020). Entrepreneurship education in schools is not sufficient; youthful entrepreneurs should be completely prepared to pivot the economy (Thakkar, 2013). There is now strong evidence from studies that self-employment increases the happiness of individuals through an increase in the standard of living (Okeke *et al.*, 2020).

Numerous youths in Nigeria cannot secure jobs anywhere because of the absence of job opportunities arising from factors such as expansion in population, poor attention by government to developing the education sector, and excessive dependence on imports among other factors. The situation has turned out to be more terrible with the economic recession experienced in Nigeria during the Covid-19 pandemic.. Job creation through specialized innovation, innovativeness, entrepreneurship education, opportunity recognition, and infrastructural improvement will increase the economic possibilities to lessen the degree of joblessness, and will support the expectation for everyday comforts of the youths, and drastically diminish the involvement of youths in criminal activities (Odoh and Eme, 2014).

In previous years, policymakers perceived the importance of utilizing entrepreneurship to achieve economic advancement of the country. However, not much resources were devoted to it, essentially because the country's over-dependence on revenue from oil (Salami, 2011). The excessive dependence of Nigeria on oil revenue has led to a neglect of other sectors of the nation's economy, reduced agricultural and industrial productivity, increased dependence on imported goods, increased unemployment, especially among the youths, and tied the country's economy to the vagaries of international oil price fluctuations. National income and Nigeria's foreign reserves have, as a result, decreased steadily over the years, thus creating economic difficulties, widespread poverty, joblessness, under-employment and youth restiveness all around the country.

In the face of the foregoing difficulties which Nigerian youths currently encounter, developing youths to be entrepreneurs appears to be a possible solution (Okeke *et al.*, 2020). It is for this reason that the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAGEP) was set up by Nigeria's Delta State government in the year 2016 to prepare and advance youth entrepreneurship in farming and agribusiness, and prepare beneficiaries to be self-employed. This plan was a vital piece of the administration's plan to control youth joblessness and foster the agricultural economy of the State for job creation. Alumni of the program are branded and promoted as "YAGEPreneurs". Under YAGEP, unemployed youths are prepared and trained in their choice of agricultural endeavours, including poultry, piggery, fishery and crop production. The theoretical and hands-on practical agricultural training takes place at accredited agricultural training centres over a given period, depending on the enterprise. The scope of training covers agricultural 'subject matter' knowledge, enterprise management, leadership and life skills, group organization, and group farming (YAGEP, 2021).

Participants are supported to establish and run their own enterprises through the provision of starter packs which, in the case of livestock enterprises, include livestock houses, operating facilities,

amenities and inputs. In addition, participants receive buffer stipends during the enterprise gestation period and some working capital to purchase inputs and/or working materials. YAGEP has run five successful cycles (year 2016 to year 2021) with a total of 1,174 YAGEP beneficiaries who have been trained, established and supported in various agricultural enterprises including poultry, crop production, piggery, fish production, agro-processing and agribusiness (YAGEP, 2021).

Delta State Government sponsorship through the YAGEP has been established to affect farmers' investment behaviour and productivity. However, there is presently insufficient evidence of the effects to credit or facilities so far expended in the programme on the beneficiaries' performances. It is against this backdrop that this study aimed to examine the socioeconomic impact of the YAGEP on beneficiaries of the programme in Delta State. Specifically, this study tried to describe the socioeconomic characteristics of the beneficiaries of the YAGEP programme, examine the income of beneficiaries before and after participation, identify the problems militating against youth empowerment in the YAGEP programme; and further test the null hypothesis that there was no significant difference in the incomes of beneficiaries before and after participation in the YAGEP programme.

Materials and Methods

Study Area

The study was conducted in Delta State. The State has three agricultural zones, namely Delta South, Delta Central and Delta North, and is located in the South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria, with a population of approximately 6,037,667 people, according to the Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC, 2021). The State lies approximately within longitudes 5°00¹ and 6°45¹ East and latitudes 5°00¹ and 6°30¹ North. It is bounded in the North and West by Edo State, the east by Anambra, Imo and River State, Southeast by Bayelsa State and on the Southern by Benin which covers about 160 kilometers of the State's coastline. It has a total square meter of 17,10km². The State Consist of 25 Local Government Areas. The state has a tropical climate marked by two distinct seasons, the dry and rainy seasons. The dry season occurs from November to March, while the rainy season begins in April and last till October. Arable and permanent crops are cultivated in the various farming communities in the zone. Fish and livestock of various types are also farmed in the agricultural zone (NIPC, 2021).

Sampling Procedure

The target population of this research comprised the 245 beneficiaries of the 2019/2020 YAGEP programme cycle. A multi stage sampling procedure was used to map out samples for this study. First, one local government area (LGA) was randomly selected from each of the three Agricultural Zones of the State. Then one community was selected from each of the three (3) LGAs. This gave three (3) communities that were sampled. Thereafter, twenty (20) YAGEP beneficiaries were randomly selected from each of the selected communities. This gave a total of 60 YAGEP beneficiaries that were used for the study.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected for the study and these were obtained through the use of a structured questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The objectives of the study were realized using descriptive statistics, and the results were presented as percentages, and means and in frequency distribution tables. The various problems militating against youth empowerment in the YAGEP programme were measured with the use of a four-point likert type scale. The four-point Likert-type scale had responses ranging from:

Strongly Agreed	4 points
Agreed	3 points
Disagreed	2 points
Strongly Disagreed	1 point

The mean value of the scale of 2.5 was used as a cut-off point to rank the responses. Responses from 2.5 and above were considered *Agreed* while responses below 2.5 were considered as *Disagreed*.

Results

Socioeconomic Characteristics of YAGEP Beneficiaries

The socio-economic characteristics studied were sex, age, marital status, level of education, household size, farming experience and membership of farmers association. From the result in Table 1 it was shown that 63.3% of the respondents were male and 36.7% were female. According to the age distribution of the respondents, the study revealed that about 35.0% of the respondents were aged 31–36 years while 20.0% and 31.7% of the respondents were aged 25-30 years and 37-42 years respectively. Only about 13.3% of the respondents were between 43 and 48 years.

The result also shows that most of the YAGEP beneficiaries were married (78.3%), while others were widowed (5.0%) and divorced (1.7%). The percentage distribution of YAGEP beneficiaries according to level of education reveals that the percentage of respondents who had no formal education was 3.3%, those with primary education constituted 28.3%, while those with secondary and tertiary education were 35.0% and 33.3% respectively. The household size distribution of respondents showed that about 46.7% of the respondents had 3-4 persons in their families while 28.3% and 23.3% of the respondents had 1-2 persons and 5-6 persons respectively. The study further revealed that the average household size was 4 (four) persons.

Majority (78.3%) of the beneficiaries had farming experience of 7-9 years while 1.7% and 10.0% had 1-3 years and 4-6 years farming experience. The average farming experience in the study was 8 years. The study revealed that 41.7% of the respondents traveled 1-4km to their farms. 40.0% of the farmers traveled 5-8km to their farms while only 1.7% of the farmers traveled 1-4km. The Table also reveals an average distance travelled by the respondents to their various farms was 5.5km. About 43.3% were non-members of farmers associations, while 56.7% were members of farmers association.

Incomes of beneficiaries before and after participation

The incomes of beneficiaries before and after participation in the YAGEP programme are presented in Table 2. The result revealed that 53.3% of the beneficiaries earned less than ₦500,000 before participation. About 31.7% of the respondents after participation in the YAGEP programme earned between ₦500,000 and ₦1,000,000 while only 6.7% and 8.3% of the beneficiaries earned

Table 1: Socioeconomic characteristics of YAGEP beneficiaries

Variable	Frequency	Percent	Mean/mode
Sex			
Male	38	63.3	Male
Female	22	36.7	
Age (years)			
25 – 30	12	20.0	36 years
31 – 36	21	35.0	
37 – 42	19	31.7	
43 – 48	8	13.3	
Marital status			
Single	9	15.0	Married
Married	47	78.3	
Divorced	1	1.7	
Widowed	3	5.0	
Educational level			
No formal	2	3.3	Secondary
Primary	17	28.3	
Secondary	21	35.0	
Tertiary	20	33.3	
Household size (persons)			
1 – 2	17	28.3	4 persons
3 – 4	28	46.7	
5 – 6	14	23.3	
Above 6	1	1.7	
Farming experience (years)			
1 – 3	1	1.7	8 years
4 – 6	6	10.0	
7 – 9	47	78.3	
Above 9	6	10.0	
Distance to farm (km)			
1 – 4	25	41.7	5.5km
5 – 8	24	40.0	
9 – 12	10	16.7	
Above 12	1	1.7	
Membership of farmers association			
Yes	26	43.3	No
No	34	56.7	

from ₦1,500,100 – ₦2,000,000 and ₦2,000,100 – ₦2,500,000 respectively. The average income earned by respondents before participation in the programme was ₦653,155.56. Also, the study showed that 31.7% of the beneficiaries earned less than ₦500,000 after participating in the YAGEP programme. About 35.0% of the beneficiaries earned ₦500,000 - ₦1,000,000, 3.3% earned ₦2,000,100 - ₦2,500,000 while only 5.0% of the respondents earned above ₦2,500,000 after participating in the YAGEP programme. The average annual income earned by respondents after participation in the YAGEP programme was ₦925,555.56.

Table 2: Income of beneficiaries before and after participation

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Mean
Income before participation (₦)			
< 500,000	32	53.3	₦653,155.56
500,000 – 1,000,000	19	31.7	
1,000,100 – 1,500,000	4	6.7	
1,500,100 – 2,000,000	5	8.3	
2,000,100 – 2,500,000	0	0.0	
Above 2,500,000	0	0.0	
Income after participation (₦)			
< 500,000	19	31.7	₦925,555.56
500,000 – 1,000,000	21	35.0	
1,000,100 – 1,500,000	8	13.3	
1,500,100 – 2,000,000	7	11.7	
2,000,100 – 2,500,000	2	3.3	
Above 2,500,000	3	5.0	

Note: \$1 = ₦416.75 (<https://www.cbn.gov.ng/rates/exchratesbycurrency.asp>)

Test of hypothesis

The difference between the incomes of beneficiaries before and after participation in the YAGEP programme is presented in Table 3. The result reveals that there was a statistically significant difference in income of beneficiaries before and after participation in the YAGEP programme at 1% level of probability. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that there was no significant difference in the income of beneficiaries before and after participation in the YAGEP programme was consequently rejected.

Table 3: Differences in income of beneficiaries before and after participation in the YAGEP programme

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Income of beneficiaries before and after participation	272,400.00	37917.236	3461.3543	20.686***	59	0.000

Problems militating against youth empowerment in the YAGEP programme

Major constraints identified by the respondents in participation in YAGEP programme were poor capital base ($\bar{x} = 2.85$), Diversion of inputs ($\bar{x} = 2.78$), Inadequate provision of farm inputs ($\bar{x} = 2.72$) and poor project financing ($\bar{x} = 3.13$).

Table 3. Problems militating against youth empowerment in the YAGEP programme

Problems militating against youth empowerment	SA(4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Score	Mean	Remark
Poor capital base	24 (40.0)	12 (20.0)	15 (25.0)	9 (15.0)	171	2.85	Agreed
Diversion of inputs	19 (31.7)	17 (28.3)	16 (26.7)	8 (13.3)	167	2.78	Agreed
Inadequate provision of farm inputs	16 (26.7)	23 (38.3)	9 (15.0)	12 (20.0)	163	2.72	Agreed
Poor communication of ideas	12 (20.0)	7 (11.7)	18 (30.0)	23 (38.3)	128	2.13	Disagreed
Poor project finance	29 (48.3)	17 (28.3)	7 (11.7)	7 (11.7)	188	3.13	Agreed
Inefficient training session	7 (11.7)	12 (20.0)	25 (41.7)	16 (26.7)	130	2.17	Disagreed

Note: SA = Strongly Agreed, A = Agreed, D =Disagreed, SD = Strongly Disagreed; Values in parentheses are percentages

Discussion

The results of the study revealed that the proportion of male beneficiaries was higher than female beneficiaries. During the interview process it was observed that male youths in the study area were more eager to go into agriculture than the females were. The females complained of the laborious activities associated with agricultural practices, and that they would prefer other occupations such as trading or handcraft-making. This result conforms to those of Akenbor and Ike (2015), who in their study found that male farmers were more (88.3%) than females (11.7%). The average age of the YAGEP beneficiaries was 36 years which indicated that the YAGEP beneficiaries were in their youthful age. The age of a farmer is an important factor in agriculture because younger farmers have the ability to put in more working hours than the elderly ones. This finding concurs with that of Goreux (2003) that younger farmers are more willing to participate and adopt new innovations which in turn enable them generate more income and thereby improving their living standards.

The study revealed that there was a high proportion of the YAGEP beneficiaries with formal educational background. This could be that the YAGEP programme was initially targeted towards graduates of tertiary institutions who are below 40 years of age. According to Murtala *et al.* (2004) education plays an important aspect in farmers' adoption of improved technologies and decision-making and also improves their ability to evaluate and manage risk. These qualities of education can also influence their level of production. The study further revealed that the average household size was 4 (four) persons. Household size is important in providing rural farmers with labour required for agricultural activities. The average farming experience in the study was 8 years. This result implies that YAGEP beneficiaries in the study area were relatively old in the business of farming.

The result of the income distribution of YAAGEP beneficiaries before and after participation revealed that the average income earned by respondents before participation was ₦653,155.56 while an average of ₦925,555.56 was earned after participation. The mean income difference was therefore ₦272,400.00. This result clearly shows that the beneficiaries experienced a noticeable increase in their income levels. This could be as a result of the intensive training given to the beneficiaries during the programme, coupled with the various starter packs that were given to them at the end of training.

The study showed that the major problem militating against youth empowerment in the YAGEP programme was poor project financing. According to the beneficiaries, the use of credit was for hiring labour and meeting expenses. This implied that capital investments were small and modern inputs such as fertilizers, chemicals and improved seeds were generally in short supply and scarcely made available to participants in the YAGEP programme. This affected the level of participation of the youths in YAGEP programme. This supports the finding of Ovharhe and Gbigbi (2016) who reported that poor distribution of technological inputs could seriously hamper adoption of innovations.

Conclusion

This study focused on the socioeconomic impact of the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurial Programme (YAGEP) on beneficiaries in Delta State, Nigeria. It was observed that beneficiaries experienced increases in their income after participation. Poor project financing and poor access to capital were seen as the most serious problems militating against youth participation in the programme.

Recommendation

This study therefore recommends the provision of financial support from the Federal government as well as non-governmental organization towards boosting the capital base of the project. Since there was a confirmation on improved income level of beneficiaries after the programme, policy makers should as a matter of urgent national importance allocate substantial financial resources to youth entrepreneurship to absorb the increasing population of youths who are in need of training to shun crime and improve the economy through technical innovation.

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