

Youth participation in watermelon production in Yamaltu-Deba Local Government Area of Gombe State Nigeria

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Received: 14.7.2022

• Accepted: 20.7.2022

Abstract: The study was carried out in Yamaltu-Deba Local Government Area of Gombe State in Nigeria. Questionnaires were administered to one hundred respondents (100). Data were gathered on the respondents, socioeconomic traits, the motivation for their participation, the challenges they faced during the production of watermelons and the extent to which young people participated in the production of watermelons. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentages were used to analyze data. The majorities (89%) of the respondents were between the ages of 15- 35 years, 69.4% of them were educated and 67% were married. Problems with land acquisition were the respondents, most serious obstacle (82 percent). The main reasons for youth participation in watermelon production were because of readily available market (94%) and high return on investment (96%). The youth had high level of participation (79%). Based on the findings, the respondents, most significant challenge was land acquisition, it is recommended that government make land available through leasehold in order to encourage participation in watermelon production, particularly among youth.

Keywords: Youth, participation; challenges, watermelon.

1. Introduction

Some academics describe youth as the phase of a person's life that occurs between the end of childhood and the beginning of maturity. The United Nations definition of youth begins at the age of 17 and ends at the age of 39. Youth are characterised by zeal, exuberance, dynamism, and a volatile personality. In Nigeria, youths account for approximately 40% of the population (NPC, 2006), and they are the primary group required for agricultural transformation. The government cannot meet the needs of all of the nation's youth on its own. Therefore, the participation of youth in agriculture through which the spirit of self-help is promoted is of paramount importance. Despite the roles played by most youths in their communities, some of them are being faced by series of problems (United Nations Youth Agenda, 2004). These problems encountered by youths are great challenges not only for the societies of today, but future generations. There is a mass rural-urban migration of young people, the majority of who lack vocational or technical skills and

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are seeking scarce white-collar jobs. (National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy, 2004). This migration has resulted in increased unemployment in urban areas, as well as social ills and vices, while farming activities in rural areas have been left to the care of the elderly. Every day, the unemployment rate rises, with roughly 54 percent of young people unemployed (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Though, successive governments have come up with policies geared towards youth's participation in economic activities some of which include young farmers club and farm settlement scheme. However, these programs are no longer in place and as a result of poor governance and political instability. Water melon production seems to be an option towards reducing unemployment among young people as studies have shown the viability and economic importance of the crop. According to United State Development Agency (USDA) (2001) report water melon requires little start-up capital, gives high return on investment, has very short growth cycle period, readily available market and can be easily cultivated. Adeoye and Badmus (2011) also affirmed that the crop is a very good income source because of its high demand for consumption. Watermelon is well-known for being low in calories while also being highly nutritious and thirst-quenching. It also has vitamins A and C in the form of disease-fighting "beta-carotene" lycopene. Beta-carotene interacts with other plant chemicals that are not found in vitamin/mineral supplements. It is evident from the foregoing that this crop needs to be produced on large scale in order to meet the demands of the Nigerian population and one of such ways is by considering youth's participation in its production. Past study (FAO, 1997) has shown that youth play significant vital roles in social and economic development. Ekong (2003) argued that the limited available research on food crop production has primarily focused on children's parents, while youths, who constitute the majority of the population, a significant portion of the labour population, have been neglected. Consequently, the amount of their participation has not been determined scientifically (Akwiwu et al., 2005). The resulting knowledge gap has prevented the formulation of lucid policies for advancement. In addition, numerous youth agriculture programmes have failed owing to a lack of data and information on the factors that determine youth participation, particularly in watermelon production, for the development of effective intervention strategies. In addition, earlier research has not addressed young participation in agricultural production, particularly watermelon production. Rather, attempts were made to examine ways to exploit Youth migration (Angba, 2003), agricultural discipline preference, and potentials (Akwiwu et al., 2005) (Ajaero and Njoku, 2005), young restlessness (Akwiwu et al., 2005) and (Adesope, Agumagu and Chiefson, 2000). Hence, it became imperative to carry out a study to assess youth participation in watermelon production in the study area.

2. Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study was to assess youths' participation in water melon production in Dadin kowa Yamaltuy-Deba Local Government Area of Gombe State Nigeria. Following are the specific objectives: (i) Describe the personal characteristics of the respondents in the study area, (ii) Identify the constraints affecting the youths involved in water melon production in the study area and (iii) Ascertain the reasons for youths' participation in water melon production.

3. Methodology

The study was carried out in Dadin- Kowa Yamaltu- Deba Local Government Area (LGA) of Gombe State, Nigeria. Yamaltu-Deba is a Local Government Area in Gombe state. The L.G.A lies between "10⁰-12.42⁰N to 23⁰ 11⁰E" with the headquarters situated at the town of Deba (Harper

2009). The L.G.A shares border with kwaya Local Government of Borno State. The southern part of Lake Dadin-kowa lies within the area. Yamaltu-Deba comprises of some major towns such as Deba, Zambuk, Shinga, Difa, Hinna, Dadin-Kowa, Nono, Kurjale, Pata, Lano, Wade, Kwadon, Baure, Kanawa, Kurri, Zamfarawa, and Liji with which together they make up the complete L.G.A (Harper 2009). Yamaltu-Deba L.G.A occupies a land mass of 1,981 km². The major tribes are Tera and Fulani with some few diverse tribes: Kanuri, Hausa, Jara and Waja. Yamaltu - Deba has the population of 221,836 according to population census of 1991. (Harper, 2009).

Yamaltu-deba is immensely endowed with natural resources; Gypsum, kaolin, coal, limestone, uramine, and salt are among the mineral resources (Harper 2009). Farming is the people's main occupation, but they also carve, paint, and craft. Yamaltu-Deba Major agricultural products include maize, guinea corn, millet, and beans (Harper 2009). The major livestock found in the area are cattle, sheep, goat and poultry. Dadin-kowa is the major attraction, while Dadin-kowa water treatment plant, Dadin- kowa fish pond, Liji Hill, Wade Hill, Irrigation Pilot Farm, Kanawa plantation, and Baure Orchard (Harper 2009). Arabic gum and Dadin- kowa Dam are the core resources of Yamaltu-Deba. Comparative advantage products are cowpea, fish, Arabic gum, livestock, maize, pepper, poultry, sorghum, tomatoes, gypsum, marble, bay rite, limestone, and kaolin (Harper 2009).

The Gombe state Government is making every effort to boost the Local Government's economy by exploiting its solid mineral deposits. Agriculture remains the bedrock of the Local Government, these includes cultivation of millet, maize, cowpea, groundnut, cotton and horticultural crops. Large amounts of livestock are also produced. Yamaltu- Deba Local Government's produces almost 90,000 herds of cattle, representing a little percentage of Nigeria total cattle production, vegetables are also produced in commercial quantity. Yamaltu-Deba has remained among the undisputed national producer of maize and sorghum, yamaltu- daba is at the forefront in tomato production in the state with the establishment of the canning company in the local government area, vegfru situated at jaura- Garga near Dadin-Kowa. The study was conducted with the rural farmers of four districts within the Local Government Area. The population size of the study area is large this makes it difficult to reach all the farmers. In view of this a stratified sampling techniques was adopted to group the population into starter. The study area has a total of 56 villages and this villages are group into district which include Yamaltu-district with 24 villages, Deba district with 18 villages and Jara district with 14 villages systematic random sampling procedure was used to select 20 villages out of the 56 villages in the study area, 9 villages were sampled out of Yamaltu, 6 villages were sampled out of Deba while 5 villages were sampled out of jara district respectively. A simple random sampling technique was finally adapted to sample out 45 farmers from Yamaltu district, 30 farmers from Deba district and 25 farmers from Jara district. Thus, a total of 100 respondents from the sample frame.

4. Results and Discussion

Selected Personal Characteristics of Respondents Table 1 shows that 78.4% of the respondents were male, while women made up only 22.6%. This suggests that there were more men working in the region's watermelon fields. This could be due to male farmers' greater access to land, as research indicates that men farmers have greater access to land than their female counterparts, as well as more energy to conduct farm operations (Oladeji and Oyesola, 2000). The study reveals that the majority (89%) of the watermelon farmers were between the ages of 17-35 years, while 11% were above 36 years. The implication of this is that watermelon farming is practiced basically

by youths and young adults that are still active. It also shows that many youths and young adults are being forced into agriculture due to the current trend of unemployment in the society. This is in line with Adeoye et al (2011) that many of the people involved in water melon farming are youths. Table 1 also shows that 67% of the respondents were married, 28.4% were single and 4.6% were divorced. This implies that watermelon production is not limited to the married people alone but includes both singles and divorced. Table 1 show that 69.4% of the respondents attained tertiary education followed by secondary school education with 18.5%, 6.5% had adult education while 5.6% had primary education. The implication of this is that more educated people were involved in watermelon production. The educational status of the farmer will influence their adoption of hybrid varieties of watermelon. The ability of farmers to evaluate any innovation that is conveyed to them fairly and to evaluate the technology more effectively has been found to be impacted by sound education. (Ekwe et al, 2008).

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by selected personal characteristics

selected personal characteristics	Variables	%
Sex	Male	78.4
	Female	22.6
	Total	100
Age	18- 36	89
	>36	11
	Total	100
Marital Status	Married	67
	Single	28.4
	Divorced	4.6
	Total	100
Educational status	Primary	5.6
	Secondary	18.5
	Tertiary education	69.4
	Adult education	6.5
	Total	100

Field survey: 2019

Reasons for Youths Involvement in Watermelon Production. The result in Table 2 shows that the major reason why respondents in the study area cultivates water melon is because of its nutritional value (89.8%), this is because many people are now aware of the its nutritional which in turn

brings about increase in production. Another reason is the readily available in market (89.8%), this probably because watermelon can be planted more than once in a year, so it is readily available in market. Respondents participate in watermelon production because of its short cycle (82.8%), this is because it is a fast-growing crop. Another reason is the little start-up capital (74.2%). This finding is in line with Isibor and Ugumba that water melon is a marketable and profitable enterprise. The finding also agrees with Oguntola (2006) who affirmed its nutritional and health values.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents on Reasons for youth's involvement in watermelon production

Reasons for involvement	frequency	percentage %
High return on investment	96	96
Low return on investment	4	4
There is readily available market for watermelon	94	94
No readily market	6	6
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, 2019

Level of youth participation in watermelon production. Table 4 shows the level of participation in watermelon production by the respondents. At planning stage, 52.3 % the respondents showed interest in cultivating water melon, 51.6 % attended meetings. However less than half (38.3 %) mobilized their colleagues as regards participating in water melon production. Also, at the execution stage, 60.2 % of the respondents carried out physical works at their farm sites, 59.4 % provided land for demonstration. Considering the roles on utilization of knowledge, 68.8 % took part in the identification of problems and devised local measures to tackle the problems while 47.7 % shared information with fellow farmers Table 3 shows that 68 % of the respondent had high level of participation in water melon while 32 % had low level. The fact that about 32 % youths in Yamaltu - Deba local government had low level of participated in water melon production suggest the need to create more awareness on the viability and economic importance of water melon in the study area.

Distribution of Respondents on Level of Youth Participation in Watermelon Production

Table 3. Distribution of respondents Based on level of youth's participation in watermelon production

Level of Participation	frequency	%
High level	68	68
Low level	32	32
Total	100	100

Source: Field survey, 2019

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed that youth in Yamaltu- Deba Local government area, highly participated in water melon production. However, they were faced by constraints such as land acquisition problem inadequate visitation by extension agents, poor road network, perish ability nature of the crop, land acquisition, pest and diseases infestation and in adequate storage facilities. Based on the findings of the study, there is a convincing rationale to conclude that much still need to be done in the study area so as to ensue youth's active participation in water melon production. Hence, the study recommends the need for government to make land available through leasehold to promote involvement in watermelon cultivation, especially among youths so as to reduce the rate of unemployment. In addition, since extension agents serves as a bridge between the researchers and the farmers, government extension officers and university agricultural extension should make it a point of duty to visit the farmers regularly. Finally, governments should put in place basic infrastructure for the youths so as to appreciate their immediate environment.

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