

The Role of Agriculture in Rural Development and Poverty Reduction in Ukanafun Local Government Area, Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study analyzed the role of agriculture in rural development and poverty reduction in Ukanafun local government area, Akwa-Ibom State. The objectives were to: describe the socio-economic characteristics of respondents, identify agricultural activities, examine the contribution of agriculture in rural development and poverty reduction, and identify the constraint of agricultural sector in the study area. The survey research method was adopted for this study, simple random sampling technique was used to select 12 villages and 100 farmers. Interview schedule and structured Questionnaire was used to obtain information from the farmers. Data collected for this study was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques including, percentages and mean score analysis. The result showed that agriculture contributes significantly to rural development and poverty reduction through provision of improved standard of living, youth empowerment, increased income and aid in provision of readily available home-made food, reduction of rural urban migration and emigration, promote communal stability and economic stability and increases communal growth. The constraints hindering agricultural development included poor funding and lack of storage/warehouse facilities, poor marketing /infrastructure, access to modern mechanism/inputs and credit facilities, inadequate access to markets, land and environmental degradation and low technology levels, rural-urban migration/immigration, inadequate research and extension services and land fragmentation. The study concluded that agriculture have the potentials to reduce poverty, improve rural livelihoods and reduce rural-urban migration and lead to sustainable development in Ukanafun, and recommended the promotion of savings among farmers and farmer groups, as well as encouraging social organizations to secure loans for their members from agricultural banks, establish commodity market, produce user programme and processing industries should be established by government to handle excess farm produce, linking farmers to available marketing channels.

Keywords: Rural Development, Agriculture, Poverty Reduction

INTRODUCTION

The agricultural sector contributes significantly to the nation's economic development by increasing government revenue through tax, improving the standard of living; infrastructural growth; contribution to Gross National Product (GNP); employment generation; enhance man

power development; it plays a key role by sourcing of food for man, animals and providing raw materials for the industrial sector, provision of employment and foreign exchange to the government among others (Okoro, 2011).

Agricultural income growth is more effective in reducing poverty than growth in other sectors because: the incidence of poverty tends to be higher in agricultural and rural populations than elsewhere, and most of the poor live in rural areas and a large share of them depend on agriculture for a living (World Bank, 2008b; Christiaensen and Demery, 2007; Ravallion and Chen, 2007). However, even if the incidence of poverty is lower within the population of non-farm people (whether rural or urban) growth in income from non-farm sources could be proportionally more effective in reducing poverty. Moreover, it could be that even for poor farm families, growth in income from non-farm sources is more important than growth in farm income.

Agriculture's importance to poverty reduction goes far beyond its direct impact on farmers' incomes, as it is the driver for the economy and the best hope for the food security in Nigeria, Africa and world at large. Agricultural development has benefited millions through higher income, more plentiful and cheaper food and generates patterns of development that are employment-intensive and benefit both rural and urban areas (Eliamoni, *et al*, 2015).

One of the major problems facing rural areas, both in Nigeria and other developing countries of the world, is the rural to urban migration. As young and energetic men and women migrate to the urban areas, the rural areas instead of developing tend to slide more and more into underdevelopment. Various government and agencies have been endeavoring in one way or the other to develop the rural areas of Nigeria, especially Ukanafun Local Government Area which is the focus of this research. These include the provision of electricity, pipe borne water supply, access roads, etc. However, these measures have not fully stemmed the rural urban migration and the continuing decline of rural areas of which when developed will tend to reduce poverty to a large extent.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to determine Agriculture's role in rural development and poverty reduction in Ukanafun local government area, Akwa Ibom State, Specifically, the objectives are to:

1. Describe the socio-economic characteristics of respondents
2. Identify the agricultural activities in the study area
3. Examine the contribution of agriculture in rural development/poverty reduction
4. Identify the constraint of agricultural sector in the study area

Theoretical Literature

This research work was hinged on two theories and they are:

Unbalanced Growth Theory

The unbalanced growth theory was formulated by Hirschman in 1990. Hirschman points out that the industrialized countries of the world did not achieve their development via the growth of the entire economy at one time but their achievement is the culmination of the economy and then communicated to other sectors. That is, from one industry to another and from one form to another. Through forward and backward linkages, the entire economy will end up being developed and growth will be witnessed.

The unbalanced growth theory is seen as fit for basing this research on. This is largely because it supports investment in key sectors of the economy which when developed will influence and precipitate growth in other sectors through benefits accruing from the developed sector via forward and backward effects. It implies then that if the government can

focus on agricultural sector especially now that there is dwindling oil prices, it will be used to develop other sectors and this can lead to overall economic growth.

The Basic Approach/Theory

This theory is the earliest approach of rural development in Nigeria, according to Paul and Samuel (2013), it assumes that development depends on the existence the magnitude and quality of basic natural resources. The exploration and development of such natural resources will naturally attract large volumes of investment capital and economic activities to their area where they exist, and thereby increase income and employment.

Empirical Review

Azuh and Matthew (2010), in their work titled “Role of agriculture in reducing poverty vis -a-vis economic development in Nigeria” researched how agriculture can reduce poverty and lead to economic development. Using OLS regression method and co-integration techniques, the results showed that agricultural productivity has a positive impact on economic development and poverty reduction. They further recommend the establishment of agricultural funds to finance and facilitate medium scale agriculture and development of rural infrastructure to encourage people to stay in rural areas and participate in agriculture.

Iorchir (2006) did a research titled “Reducing the menace of poverty in Benue state via cassava production”, using secondary data and carrying out a survey, using questionnaire to generate data. Her findings revealed that poverty has a damaging effects and socio-economic disadvantages that could be curtailed through involvement in cassava production. She recommended that government should create a conducive environment and provide incentive that will entice people actively participate in agriculture.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

Ukanafun is located in the South-South of Nigeria and is a local government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Oil Palm production used to be the major economic activity of the people.

Research Design

Survey research method was adopted for this study.

Population of the Study

The population for this study comprised of farmers who are resident in Ukanafun Local Government Area.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

There are four (4) Clans in Ukanafun Local Government area, and a total of 92 villages. Simple Random sampling technique was used to select 12 villages and 100 respondents. From the ninety-two (92) villages that made up the Ukanafun, 3 villages from each Clan, the villages that was selected includes:

Table 1 Sample Size for the Study

| S/N | No. Of Selected Clans – 4 | Villages | No. of Respondents (100) |
|-----|---------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 1. | Southern Ukanafun | Nkek Ikot Udo Abia Ikot Akpa Nkuk | 25 |
| 2. | Northern Ukanafun | Nkek Idim Afaha Obo Ikot Uko Ikot Akpa Ntuen | 25 |
| 3. | Afagha Southern | Ikot Akai Idung Nneke Ikot Etim | 25 |
| 4. | Northern Afagha | Adat Ifang Ikot Akpan-Ebo Ikot Edem Ewa | 25 |
| | Total | 12 | 100 |

Source: Authors Computation, 2021

Data Collection Method and Sources

Primary data was used for this study. Interview schedule and structured Questionnaire was used to obtain information from the farmers.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected for this study was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques including, percentages, mean score and multiple regression analysis. A four point Likert scale was used to determine the mean score.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2: Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Farmer Respondents

| Characteristics | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Sex | | |
| Male | 45 | 56.2 |
| Female | 35 | 43.8 |
| Total | 80 | 100.0 |
| Age | | |
| 20 – 29 | 10 | 12.5 |
| 30 – 39 | 19 | 23.8 |
| 40 – 49 | 34 | 42.5 |
| 50 – 59 | 17 | 21.2 |
| Total | 80 | 100.0 |
| Marital Status | | |
| Married | 43 | 53.8 |
| Single | 8 | 10.0 |
| Divorced | 13 | 16.2 |
| Separated | 5 | 6.2 |
| Widow | 7 | 8.8 |
| Widower | 4 | 5.0 |

| | | |
|---------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Total | 80 | 100.0 |
| Educational Level | | |
| No formal education | 13 | 16.2 |
| Primary | 26 | 32.5 |
| Secondary | 6 | 7.5 |
| Tertiary | 35 | 43.8 |
| Total | 80 | 100.0 |
| Household Size | | |
| 2-3 | 26 | 32.5 |
| 4-5 | 31 | 38.8 |
| 6-7 | 10 | 12.5 |
| 8-9 | 7 | 8.8 |
| 9 and above | 6 | 7.5 |
| Total | 80 | 100.0 |
| Farming Experience | | |
| 1-5 years | 37 | 46.2 |
| 6-10 years | 30 | 37.5 |
| 11-15 years | 5 | 6.2 |
| 16-20 years | 5 | 6.2 |
| 21 years and above | 3 | 3.8 |
| Total | 80 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Survey 2021

The result shows that the male gender is actively involved in farming than the females in the study area, this may be attributed to the fact that rural agriculture is mostly carried out with crude implements and rigorous. The age descriptive statistics shows that most of the farmers are still in the productive age. Yunusa (1999) and Onyeneke (2017) observed that farmers within the age bracket of 31 to 50 years are usually more innovative, motivated and adaptive individuals. The implication of this is that most of these farmers are still in their active age, and therefore have the tendency to be more productive in farming in the study area. A high percentage (53.8%) of the respondents were married. This could be attributed to the fact that marriage provides social and economic security in the area (Ovwigho, 2011). This finding agrees with the finding of Abdullahi, (2010) who reported that large proportions of small scale farmers in Nigeria are male and are married. For educational qualification, most respondents had attained certain level of formal education. Education is important for easy understanding of improved methods of agricultural production and makes farmers more receptive to advice from extension agencies or be able to deal with technical recommendations that require a certain level of numeracy and literacy, (Abdullahi, 2010). Each family therefore has sufficient number of people and consequently sufficient work force to enhance their agricultural production which in turn can guarantee steady income flow and consequently improved level of living. The result therefore corroborates Ejembi and Ejembi (2005) who discovered that most families use their family members for working in their farms and or for further agricultural development and or expansion of farms. Farming experience is very vital in the profile of farmers as cognate experience in any field of endeavor can lead to expertise. The result in Table 1 also revealed that majority (46.2%) had 1 – 5 years farming experience. Some (37.5%) had 6 – 10 years' experience. According to Amaza *et al.* (2009), farming experience is an important factor determining both the productivity and the production level in farming. Generally, it would appear that up to a certain number of years, farming experience has a positive impact. Adebayo (2011) agrees with this when he stated that years of experience in farming has great influence on

production, storage and marketing of farm output because it is an indication of the farmer's expertise in farming.

Agricultural Activities in the study area

The types of agricultural activities engaged in by respondents in the study area are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Types of Agricultural Activities

| Types of Agriculture Activities | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Cassava Processing and Production | 38 | 17.5 |
| Fishery/fish Farming | 13 | 16.3 |
| Harvesting of palm fruit | 34 | 42.5 |
| Poultry Production | 34 | 42.5 |
| Bush clearing | 26 | 32.5 |
| Watering crops | 42 | 52.5 |
| Staking of Yams | 27 | 33.8 |
| Slashing | 20 | 25.0 |
| Cropping Watering | 16 | 20.0 |
| Crops harvesting | 58 | 72.5 |

Source: Field Survey 2021

Contribution of Agriculture in rural development/poverty reduction

The contributions of Agriculture in rural development/poverty reduction were analyzed using a four point likert scale as were identified by the respondents. The results on the perceived contributions are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Contributions of Agriculture in Rural Development/Poverty Reduction (n=80)

| S/N | Contributions | Total Score | Std. Deviation | Mean (\bar{x}) | Remark |
|-----|--|-------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Reduction of Rural urban Migration and emigration | 259 | 0.67 | 3.2 | Agreed |
| 2 | Improve standard of living | 296 | 0.56 | 3.7 | Agreed |
| 3 | Increased income | 273 | 0.68 | 3.4 | Agreed |
| 4 | Increased of Production | 126 | 0.54 | 1.5 | Disagreed |
| 5 | Creates Employment opportunity | 152 | 0.88 | 1.9 | Disagreed |
| 6 | Youth Empowerment | 284 | 0.57 | 3.5 | Agreed |
| 7 | Promote communal stability | 229 | 0.58 | 2.8 | Agreed |
| 8 | Increases communal growth | 222 | 0.77 | 2.7 | Agreed |
| 9 | Aid in provision of readily available home-made food | 273 | 0.65 | 3.4 | Agreed |
| 10 | Preservation of the rural landscape | 135 | 0.66 | 1.6 | Disagreed |
| 11 | Economic stability | 228 | 0.59 | 2.8 | Agreed |

Source: Field survey 2021

Multiple Responses

≥ 2.5 - Agreed; < 2.5 -

Disagreed

The contributions of Agriculture in rural development/poverty reduction as presented in Table 4, showed that the respondents agreed to eight out of eleven contributions of agriculture listed as those that influenced rural development/poverty reduction. Variables with the highest means included Improve standard of living ($\bar{x}=3.7$), Youth Empowerment ($\bar{x}=3.5$), Increased income and Aid in provision of readily available home-made food ($\bar{x}=3.4$), Reduction of Rural urban migration and emigration ($\bar{x}=3.2$), Promote communal stability and Economic stability ($\bar{x}=2.8$) and Increases communal growth ($\bar{x}=2.7$). The implication of this findings is that agriculture contributes significantly to development and poverty reduction in Ukanafun local government area.

Constraints in Agricultural Sector

The constraints of agricultural development in Ukanafun local government area were analyzed using a four point likert scale as were identified by the respondents. The results on the perceived constraints are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Constraints in agricultural sector (n=80)

| S/N | Constraints | Total Score | Std. Deviation | Mean (\bar{x}) | Remarks |
|-----|--|-------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Poor funding | 303 | 0.49 | 3.7 | Agreed |
| 2 | Poor Marketing /Infrastructure | 291 | 0.55 | 3.6 | Agreed |
| 3 | Access to modern mechanism/inputs and credit facilities | 283 | 0.67 | 3.5 | Agreed |
| 4 | Inadequate access to markets, land and environmental degradation | 282 | 0.59 | 3.5 | Agreed |
| 5 | Low technology levels | 285 | 0.65 | 3.5 | Agreed |
| 6 | Inadequate research and extension services | 271 | 0.77 | 3.3 | Agreed |
| 7 | Land fragmentation | 259 | 0.67 | 3.2 | Agreed |
| 8 | Lack of Storage/Warehouse Facilities | 296 | 0.56 | 3.7 | Agreed |
| 9 | Rural-urban migration/Immigration | 273 | 0.68 | 3.4 | Agreed |
| 10 | Poor practice of afforestation/deforestation | 126 | 0.54 | 1.5 | Disagreed |
| 11 | Communal Crisis | 152 | 0.88 | 1.9 | Disagreed |

Source: Field survey 2021 Multiple Responses ≥ 2.5 - Agreed; < 2.5 - Disagreed

The constraints in agricultural sector as presented in table 5, showed that the respondents agreed to nine out of the eleven constraints listed as those that affected agricultural sector in the study area. Variables with the highest means included Poor funding and Lack of Storage/Warehouse Facilities ($\bar{x}=3.7$), Poor Marketing /Infrastructure ($\bar{x}=3.6$), Access to modern mechanism/inputs and credit facilities, Inadequate access to markets, land and environmental degradation and Low technology levels ($\bar{x}=3.5$), Rural-urban migration/Immigration ($\bar{x}=3.4$), Inadequate research and extension services ($\bar{x}=3.3$) and Land fragmentation ($\bar{x}=3.2$). The respondents ($\bar{x}=3.7$) reported poor funding and lack of storage/warehouse facilities as a major constraint in the agricultural sector. The importance of credit and storage facilities to agricultural development cannot be overemphasized. Credit

enables farmers to advantageously use inputs and factors of production by granting farmers more access to resources through the removal of financial constraints. The provision of credit will reduce the costs of capital intensive technology and assets relative to family labour. Thus, instead of growing low yielding local crops, for example, access to credit may allow an increased use of improved seeds and fertilizers leading to higher crop output per unit of labour and land (Ammani *et al.* 2010). However, it is an established fact that inadequate storage facilities often lead to perishability of some crops, pest attack of farm products, farmers fumigating their products wasting. This led to great loss in farm revenue and the risk involved in losing revenue by farmers from their investments could reduce the level of production in agriculture. The finding of this study agrees with the findings of Chikezie (2015) who studied impact of community based agriculture and rural development project on crop production and other forms of rural livelihoods in Kaduna and Bauchi States, Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concluded that agriculture have the potentials to reduce poverty, improve rural livelihoods and reduce rural-urban migration and lead to sustainable development in Ukanafun local government area, and recommended the promotion of savings among farmers and farmer groups should be encouraged, as well as encouraging the social organizations to secure loans for their members from agricultural banks, establish commodity market, produce user programme and processing industries should be established by government to handle excess farm produce, linking farmers to available marketing channels.

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