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ANALYSIS OF RURAL YOUTHS PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY FARMING IN BENUE STA' NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

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ABSTRACT

The survey analyzed rural youths participation in family farming in Benue State, Nigeria. Structured questionnaire/interview schedule were 6sed in collecting data for the study. Frequency, percentage, mean score, standard deviation, factor analysis and binary logistic regression model were used for data analysis. Findings revealed that about 75.00% of the respondents were males, single (63.70%), had formal education (98.90%), having farming as a major occupation (92.40%). Major roles performed by the respondents in family farming include site selection (M = 2.70), harvesting of crops (M = 2.61), applying fertilizer to crops (M = 2.55), clearing of farm land (M = 2.54), soil tillage (M = 2.51), among others. These were further classified as land preparation, management and technical roles. The study recommends that rural youths should be encouraged to remain in agriculture by ensuring that they are provided with improved technologies for greater productivity. Basic amenities such as electricity, pipe borne water, good roads, etc should be made available in rural areas where they reside to prevent rural-urban youth migration and sustain agriculture.

Keywords: Rural youths, Participation, Roles, Family, Farming, Nigeria

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Contribution/ Originality

This study documents that rural youths are involved in family farming for household food security. They participate actively in family farming playing key roles in land preparation, management and technical areas of crop and livestock production. Efforts of these youths should be sustained for them to remain in family farming.

1. INTRODUCTION

Family farming has been contributing significantly to global food security. Indeed, 70% of food supply today comes from more than 500 million family farms all over the world [1]. According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) [1] family farming includes all family-based agricultural activities, linked to several areas of agricultural development, namely; crop and livestock production, forestry, fisheries, and aquaculture. It is observed that family farm differs from one country/region to another in terms of farm size, type of production, etc. About 70% of the world's food products are produced by family farmers, whose activities are therefore crucial to combating hunger and malnutrition. In addition, small farms are often more productive than large industrial agricultural operations in terms of output per unit of land and energy use [2].

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According to Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) [3] family farms represent a large percentage of the total agriculture sector in most African countries. It is a means of organizing crop, forestry, fisheries, pastoral and poultry production which is managed and operated by a family and primarily dependent on family labour, including both men and women, the elderly and the youths. In addition, family farmers are instrumental in selecting a wide range of varieties of crops and breeds of animals which are more adapted to the diversity of the agro-ecological conditions (combination of soil, climate, altitude, etc.). Family farmers are creating, promoting and conserving the biodiversity of food crops and livestock, transferring the knowledge from the current generation to the next. At the same time, many family farmers are also developing quality products not only for their self-consumption, but also available in niche markets [3].

Family farming is currently the biggest employer of labour and has the potential to remain as such [4]. Young farmers constitute a formidable force for development of family farming in any nation particularly the agrarian ones. Youths are directly involved in farming activities through planting, weeding, livestock keeping and harvesting [5].

Youths have been noted to play a vital role in family farming especially in developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, where their contribution is paramount. Studies have shown that youths contribute significantly in agricultural activities [6, 7].

Many countries in Africa for instance Nigeria have realized that in order to reduce food insecurity there must be policies for rural youths integration in family farming. This is through providing incentives to young people who are engaged in agriculture, availing fair market opportunities for youths, providing training opportunities in new technologies and presenting agriculture as a profitable venture [8].

Akpan [9] and Rutta [10] observed that perceptions of greater job opportunities, poor physical infrastructures, lack of social amenities, use of local farming tools in rural areas and general dislike of village life are some of the factors hindering youths' participation in family farming. According to Ayanda, et al. [11] in spite of the roles performed by rural youths, agriculture remains unattractive to the youths leading to their movement to other sectors of the economy for better employment opportunities. In recent times, migration of young and vibrant people to cities in search of greener pastures has reduced availability of labor force for agricultural production in Nigeria. Despite all these challenges being faced by rural youths, there is no choice but to remain in agriculture.

This raises the following pertinent questions. What are socio-economic characteristics of the respondents? What are roles performed by rural youths in family farming?

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. describe socio-economic characteristics of the respondents; and
2. identify roles performed by rural youths in family farming.

1.1. Hypothesis of the study

Based on the specific objectives of the study, the following null hypothesis were stated and tested.

H_{01}: Socio-economic characteristics of rural youths have no significant relationship on the roles performed in family farming.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The survey was carried out in Benue state, Nigeria. Benue state was created in 1976 from the former Benue-Plateau state. It lies within the lower river Benue through the middle belt region of Nigeria. It shares boundaries with five other states namely; Nasarawa state to the North, Taraba state to the East, Cross-River state to the South, Enugu state to the South-West and Kogi state to the West. The state has a tropical climate made up of wet and dry seasons. The state has three agricultural zones, namely; Zone A (Eastern zone), Zone B (Northern zone) and Zone

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C (Central zone). Benue state has a land area of 2,882km² with a population of 4,253,641 people. The state is inhabited by the Tiv, Idoma and Igede as the major ethnic groups. The study area consists of twenty three (23) local government areas as shown with the map in Figure 1. Benue State lies within the lower river Benue in the middle belt region of Nigeria. Agriculture is the mainstay of the state. It has agricultural development potentials and the major crops produced are yam, cassava, rice, sesame, maize, sorghum, millet, groundnut, soybeans, fruits and vegetables.

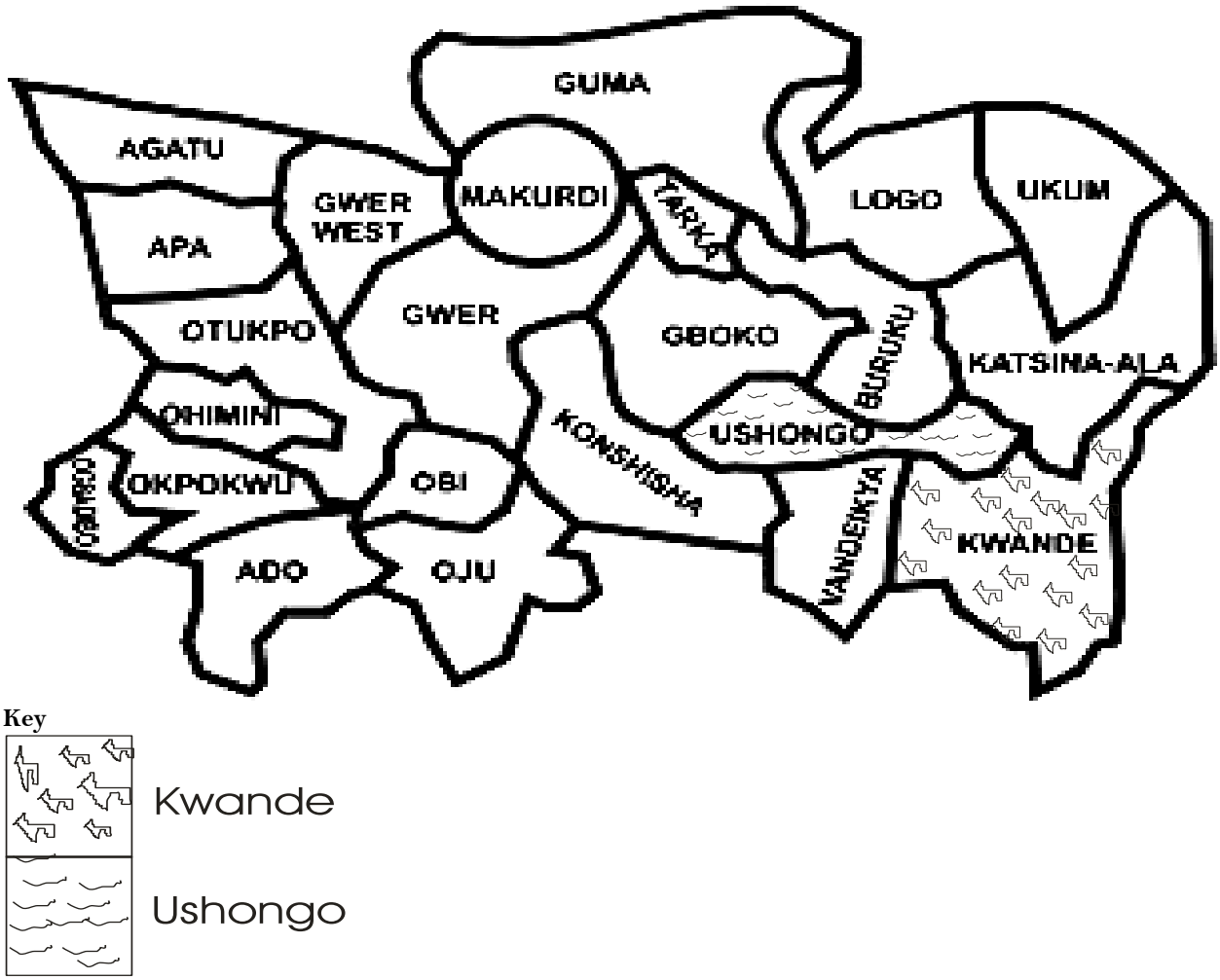

Figure-1. Map of Benue State showing the study area

Source: Wikipedia, 2014

The population of this study comprises youths who are actively involved in farming activities in Benue State, Nigeria. Benue state is divided into three (3) zones namely; A, B and C. Zone A which represents Benue North East was selected purposively for the study. Zone A comprises seven (7) Local Government Areas (LGAs) namely; Logo, Ukum, Katsina-Ala, Vandeikya, Konshisha, Kwande and Ushongo. Two (2) LGAs in zone A namely; Kwande and Ushongo were selected from the seven (7) LGAs using simple random sampling technique. Two (2) communities were selected from each of the LGAs, giving a total of four (4) communities namely; Mbakwen and Mbawer from Kwande LGA and Mbayegh and Utange from Ushongo LGA. Twenty (20) respondents were selected from each of the communities, giving a total of eighty (80) respondents used for the study.

Data were collected using a well structured questionnaire/interview schedule. The questionnaire was divided into two (2) sections (A-B) based on the specific objectives of the study. Section A focused on socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. Section B centered on roles performed by rural youths in family farming. Data

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for this study were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean score, standard deviation, factor analysis and binary logistic regression model.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents

3.1.1. Sex

About 75.00% of the respondents were males, while 25.00% of the respondents were females (Table 1). There were more male youths in the study area who are involved in farming. This may be as a result of strenous nature of farming activities. This finding agrees with Okogun [12] who stated that males are more interested in farming activities because of the tedious nature of it.

3.2. Age (Years)

Results in Table 1 show that majority (67.50%) of the respondents were within the age bracket of 21 - 40 years, while 32.50% falls within the age bracket of ≤ 20 years. The mean age of the respondents was 24 years. This implies that the respondents were energetic and in their productive years, hence greater involvement in farming activities for economic empowerment. This finding agrees with Okwoche, et al. [13] who stated that youths in their active years are energetic and innovative to participate more in agriculture.

3.3. Marital Status

Majority (63.70%) of the respondents were single, while 36.30% were married. This implies that there were more unmarried youths participating in family farming than married youths in the study area. This finding is in contrast with the study of Proctor, et al. [14] which stated that married youths have the potentials to participate more in agriculture due to the fact that they have more family responsibilities than unmarried youths.

3.4. Level of Education (Years)

Results in Table 1 reveal that majority (73.80%) of the respondents had secondary education, while 13.80% and 11.30% had tertiary and primary education, respectively. The mean number of years spent in school was 11.36 years. This shows that majority of the respondents were literate. The need for education in agriculture cannot be over emphasized since the level of education of a farmer do not only increase his productivity but also enhances his ability to adopt innovations. The findings disagree with Abdullahi, et al. [15] who noted that farmers do not need any formal education.

3.5. Household Size (Numbers)

Entries in Table 1 reveal that 55.00% of the respondents had a household size of 6 - 10 persons, while 23.80% had household size of 1- 5 persons, among others. The mean household size was 9.08 persons. Having large household size is advantageous because it provides labour used in family farming.

3.6. Farming Experience (Years)

About 42.50% had 6 -10 years of farming experience, while 21.30% and 18.80% had 11- 15 years and 1-5 years, respectively (Table 1). The mean farming experience was 10.50 years. This implies that respondents in the study area had been farming for quite a number of years and have acquired enough knowledge and experience in family farming. This finding agrees with Abdullahi, et al. [15] who reported that a good number of youths in family farming had farming experience of 10 years and above and acquired experience and skills through informal sources such as parents, relatives, neighbors, etc.

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3.7. Farm Size (Hectares)

Entries in Table 1 show that 50.00% of the respondents had 1.1 - 2.0 ha of farmland, while 43.80% had less than 1.0 ha, among others. The mean farm size was 1.48 ha. This implies that the respondents had access to small portion of farmland which they use in farming activities. This agrees with World Farmers' Organization (WFO) [16] who noted that a large proportion of rural youths farm on a smaller scale which could be due to shortage of resources for production such as land, finance, labour, etc.

3.8. Type of Farming

Data in Table 1 show that more than half (57.50%) of the respondents engaged in crop production, 36.30% engaged in both crop and livestock production, while 6.20% of the respondents were livestock farmers. This indicates that majority of the respondents engaged in crop production. This could enable them sustain their families economically.

3.9. Major Occupation

Data in Table 1 reveal that majority (92.40%) of the respondents had farming as a major occupation, while 3.80% were commercial drivers, among others. This indicates that farming is the major occupation of the respondents in the study area. This finding agrees with Abdullahi, et al. [15] who stated that majority of the youths in the study area had farming as their major occupation.

3.10. Non-Farm Occupation

About 41.30% of the respondents were petty traders, while 18.50% and 7.50%, were hair dressers and carpenters, respectively (Table 1). This indicates that petty-trading is the predominant non-farm occupation of respondents in the study area. This may be attributed to the fact that petty-trading requires less start-up capital than other non-farm occupations which they need to be economically stronger to meet family responsibilities.

3.11. Membership of Formal Organization

Majority (87.50%) of the respondents did not belong to any formal organization, while 12.50% belonged to formal organizations (Table 1). This indicates that the respondents did not have interactions from formal organizations which can help them to improve productivity in family farming. Membership of formal organization could enhance putting resources together for easy access to credit facilities, production inputs and training opportunities for improved productivity. This study contradicts Mangal [17] who stated that most youths in rice production were members of formal organization.

3.12. Contact with Extension Agents

About 81.00% of the respondents did not have extension contact in the last one year, while 19.00% had extension contact. This may be attributed to low extension- farmer ratio in Nigeria. Lack of access to extension services deprives the youths opportunities of embracing the use of improved technologies that will boost their productivity in family farming.

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Table-1. Distribution of socio-economic characteristics of the respondents (n=80)

Socio-economic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Mean score
Sex			
Male	60	75.00	
Female	20	25.00	
Age (years)			
≤20	22	32.50	
21 – 40	58	67.50	24.11
Marital status			
Married	29	36.30	
Single	51	63.70	
Level of education (years)			
No formal education	1	1.10	
Primary education	9	11.30	11.36
Secondary education	59	73.80	
Tertiary education	11	13.80	
Household size (numbers)			
1-5	19	23.80	
6-10	44	55.00	9.08
11-15	9	11.20	
Above 15	8	10.00	
Farming experience (years)			
1-5	15	18.80	
6-10	34	42.50	10.50
11-15	17	21.30	
Above 15	14	17.40	
Farm size (hectares)			
≤1.0	35	43.80	
1.1-2.0	40	50.00	1.48
2.1-3.0	2	2.40	
Above 3.0	3	3.80	
Type of farming			
Crop production	46	57.50	
Livestock production	5	6.20	
Mixed farming	29	36.30	
Major occupation			
Commercial driving	3	3.80	
Farming	74	92.40	
Teaching	2	2.50	
Trading	1	1.30	
Non-farm occupation			
0kada riding	7	8.80	
Hair dressing	15	18.50	
Carpentry	6	7.50	
Petty trading	33	41.30	
Road-side mechanic	3	3.80	
Shoemaking	2	2.50	
Tailoring	4	5.00	
Teaching	7	8.80	
Commercial driving	3	3.80	
Membership of formal organization			
Yes	10	12.50	
No	70	87.50	
Contact with extension agents			
Yes	15	19.00	
No	65	81.00	2.07
Estimated annual remittance from family members/relations			
Yes	8	10.00	
No	72	90.00	
Amount of money received (Naira)			
≤ 5000	5	6.30	
5001-10000	2	2.50	8125.00
Above 10000	1	1.30	

Source: Field Survey, 2016

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3.13. Estimated Annual Remittance from Family Members/Relations and Amount of Money Received (Naira)

Majority (90.0%) of the respondents did not receive remittance from family members/relatives, while 10.0% received remittance from family members/relatives. This indicates that many of the respondents did not receive remittance from family members/relatives which may lead to lack of proper and adequate farm resources/inputs such as land, fertilizer, agrochemical, etc. Findings further revealed that those who received remittance from family members/relations 6.30% got less or equals to ₦5000, while 2.50% and 1.30% had ₦5001-₦10000 and above ₦10000.00 respectively with a mean score of ₦8125.00 (Table 1). This implies that the respondents were unable to get reasonable amount of money from their family members/relations annually which could assist them in buying farm inputs for greater productivity.

3.14. Roles Performed by Rural Youths in Family Farming

Results in Table 2 show roles performed by rural youths in family farming which include site selection (M = 2.70), harvesting of crops (M = 2.61), applying fertilizer to crops (M = 2.55), clearing of farm lands (M = 2.54), soil tillage (M = 2.51), herding/shepherding of animals (M = 2.46), irrigation of farm lands (M = 2.45), sowing of seeds/planting materials (M = 2.43) and gathering of fruits (M = 2.42), among others. The standard deviations of all the roles performed by rural youths in family farming were less than 1 except for one variable whose standard deviation was 1.08. This shows the disparity in terms of the responses on roles performed by rural youths in family farming. This indicates that rural youths perform key roles in farm activities. This agrees with Umeh and Odom [18] who reported that the youths play major roles in family farming with which rural development emerge as they provide greater percentage of the total workforce in agricultural production.

Table-2. Mean score of respondents according to roles performed in family farming

Roles	Mean score	Std. deviation
Site selection	2.70	0.64
Clearing of farm lands	2.54	0.61
Stumping of trees on farm lands	2.39	0.83
Cuting of fodder for feeding goat, sheep and cattle	2.25	0.86
Soil tillage such as making ridges, mounds, etc	2.51	0.72
Sowing of seeds/planting materials	2.43	0.72
Irrigation of farm lands	2.45	0.72
Digging of drainages farm lands	2.31	0.73
Manual weeding of farm lands	2.40	0.73
Applying fertilizer to crops	2.55	0.69
Staking of crops such as yams, beans, etc	2.39	0.75
Application of agrochemicals such as herbicides, pesticides, etc	2.41	0.80
Detuberization of yams	2.25	0.84
Harvesting of crops	2.61	0.64
Gathering of fruits	2.42	0.86
Making of storage barns for yams	2.38	0.71
Sorting/grading of farm produce	2.21	0.79
Dressing of crops for storage	2.19	0.84
Milling of farm produce	2.24	0.88
Driving farm tractors	2.06	0.91
Operating of farm equipment e.g knapsack sprayer	2.35	0.82
Haulage of farm produce	2.33	0.79
Feeding of animals	2.38	0.76
Herding/shepherding of animals	2.46	0.67
Cleaning of pens	2.26	0.83
Brooding of chicks in poultry farm	2.22	0.87
Collection of eggs in poultry farm	2.30	0.86
Milking of dairy animals	1.83	1.08

Source: Field Survey, 2016

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3.15. Factor Analysis of Roles Performed by Rural Youths in Family Farming

Results in Table 3 represent factor analysis of roles performed by rural youths in family farming. Based on the item loadings, factors 1, 2 and 3 were named land preparation, management and technical roles, respectively.

Variables which loaded high under land preparation roles were site selection (0.41), stumping of trees on farm lands (0.57), sowing of seeds/planting materials (0.63), digging of drainages in the farm (0.57), manual weeding of farm lands (0.51), applying fertilizer to crops (0.62), staking of crops such as yams, beans, etc (0.58), detuberization of yams (0.55), sorting/grading of farm produce (0.61) and dressing of crops for storage (0.52). Sowing of seeds/planting materials, applying fertilizer to crops and manual weeding of farm lands remain key roles performed by rural youths in family farming.

Loadings under management roles were cutting of fodder for feeding goats, sheep and cattle (0.60), soil tillage such as making ridges, mounds, etc (0.43), irrigation of farm lands (0.43), gathering of fruits (0.67), milling of farm produce (0.51), feeding of animals (0.58) and herding/shepherding of animals (0.51).

Technical roles comprised making of storage barns for yams (0.46), driving farm tractors (0.57), operating of equipment (0.67), brooding of chicks in poultry farm (0.56), collection of eggs in poultry farm (0.60) and milking of dairy animals (0.46).

Table-3. Factor analysis of respondents according to roles performed in family farming

Roles	Factor 1 (Land preparation roles)	Factor 2 (Management roles)	Factor 3 (Technical roles)
Site selection	0.411	0.376	0.003
Clearing of farm lands	0.132	0.352	0.112
Stumping of trees on farm lands	0.579	-0.103	0.284
Cuting of fodder for feeding goats, sheep and cattle	0.150	0.604	0.144
Soil tillage such as making ridges, mounds etc	0.132	0.438	0.108
Sowing of seeds/planting materials	0.639	0.131	-0.126
Irrigation of farm lands	0.296	0.593	-0.065
Digging of drainages farm lands	0.572	0.028	0.154
Manual weeding of farm lands	0.513	0.227	0.036
Applying fertilizer to crops	0.627	0.252	-0.069
Staking of crops such as yams, beans etc	0.581	0.380	-0.056
Application of agrochemicals such as herbicides, pesticides, etc	0.366	0.164	0.375
Detuberization of yams	0.558	-0.105	-0.078
Harvesting of crops	0.392	0.305	0.073
Gathering of fruits	0.254	0.672	0.083
Making of storage barns for yams	0.391	0.138	0.467
Sorting/grading of farm produce	0.612	-0.032	0.200
Dressing of crops for storage	0.528	0.165	0.118
Milling of farm produce	0.104	0.510	0.338
Driving of farm tractors	0.212	0.126	0.676
Operating of farm equipment e.g knapsack sprayer	0.064	-0.054	0.732
Haulage of farm produce	0.000	0.549	0.012
Feeding of animals	-0.174	0.583	0.264
Herding/shepherding of animals	-0.047	0.519	0.295
Cleaning of pens	0.058	0.496	0.552
Brooding of chicks in poultry farm	0.135	0.011	0.561
Collection of eggs in poultry farm	-0.123	0.151	0.605
Milking of dairy animals	-0.133	0.240	0.465

Source: Field Survey, 2016

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The three factors which loaded high based on roles performed by rural youths in family farming agrees with the findings of World Farmers' Organization (WFO) [16] who reported that rural youths play a significant role in acting as a catalyst for change in family farming development, given their propensity and willingness to adapt new ideas, concepts and have the energy to implement innovation.

3.16. Test of Hypothesis

The result of the binary logistic regression which was used to analyze the influence of socio-economic characteristics on level of youth participation in family farming is presented in Table 4. The non significance of Hosmer and Lemeshow Chi-square (X^2 = 8.521, P = 0.10) implies that the model is not significantly different from the standard model. The result further reveals that the likelihood Chi-square test or model coefficient (22.194) was statistically significant at 1%. This implies that the socio-economic characteristics included in the model are significantly related to the roles in family farming. Hence, the null hypothesis which states that the socio-economic characteristics of rural youths have no significant relationship on the roles performed in family farming was rejected.

The influence of the individual coefficient shows that age (0.054), household size (0.017), farming experience (0.007) and access to credit (0.044) had a significant influence on the roles performed in family farming. Specifically, coefficient of age was positive and statistically significant at 10%. This implies that increase in age of the youths increases the probability of greater involvement in family farming. This goes to buttress the facts that as the youths advance in age they become more energetic and productive to carry out tedious activities in the farm. Although farming experience is gained with age, farming needs not to be dominated with aged population in any region as this could have negative implication on the future of food production in such region. This study is in consonance with the findings of Mangal [17] who stated that rural youths in their prime age have physical and mental ability to participate in agriculture and are the most productive people in any society. The coefficient of household size was positive and statistically significant at 10%. This implies that increase in household size of respondents enhances the probability of performance in family farming.

Table-4. Binary logistic Regression analysis showing the relationship between socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and roles performed in family farming

Variables	B	S.E	Wald	Sig.	Exp.(B)
Age	-0.179	0.091	3.712	0.054	0.839
Sex	-.1.002	0.697	2.069	0.150	0.367
Level of education	-0.120	0.130	0.846	0.358	0.887
Household size	-0.134	0.056	5.669	0.017	0.875
Farming experience	-0.203	0.075	7.372	0.007	1.225
Farm size	-0.133	0.407	0.106	0.744	0.876
Extension visits	0.596	0.485	1.512	0.219	1.815
Access to credit facility	3.246	1.609	4.069	0.044	25.692
Membership of formal organization	-0.201	0.954	0.044	0.833	0.818
Constant	2.691	2.956	0.829	0.363	14.746
Likelihood Chi-Square	22.194				
Probability > X^2	0.000				
Nagelkerke R Square	0.330				
Hosmer and Lemeshow Chi-Square	8.521				
Probability Chi-square	0.384				

*,**,*** = wald test significant at 1%, 2% and 10% levels respectively.

This may be due to the fact that as household size increases there will be more mouths to feed hence greater involvement in family farming. The coefficient of farming experience was positive and statistically significant at

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10%. This implies that increase in the farming experience increases the probability of high level of youth performance in family farming. This goes to buttress the fact that as youths participate in family farming over time they acquire enough experience that will enable them to cope with challenges in farming.

The coefficient of access to credit was positive and statistically significant at 10%. This implies that increase in access to credit increases the probability of high level of performance in family farming. This is because when these youths have access to credit facilities they have the start-up capital to use for farming.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Majority of the respondents were males, single and in their productive age. They were also engaged in non-farm occupations such as petty-trading in order to be economically stronger to take care of their responsibilities. Site selection, harvesting of crops, applying fertilizer to crops, clearing of farm land, soil tillage, among others were major roles of rural youths in family farming. These roles were further grouped into land preparation, management and technical activities. There arises the need for rural youths to be encouraged to remain in agriculture by ensuring that they are provided with adequate improved technologies for greater productivity. Basic amenities such as electricity, pipe borne water, good roads, etc should be made available in rural areas where they reside to prevent rural-urban youth migration and sustain agriculture.

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Contributors/Acknowledgement: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

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