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INVESTIGATING STRATEGIES FOR RETENTION AND COMPLETION OF BASIC SCHOOLS AMIDST FARMERS-HERDERS' CONFLICT IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA

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Abstracts

This study investigated the availability, effectiveness, and influence of continuity strategies on pupils' retention and completion of basic education amidst farmers–herders' conflict in North-Central Nigeria, with specific focus on Benue and Nasarawa States. A descriptive survey design was adopted, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data were obtained using interview guides and proforma records covering fifteen years of pupils' retention and completion. Twenty-four stakeholders were selected using multistage sampling techniques comprising purposive, stratified, and simple random sampling. Qualitative data were thematically analysed, while longitudinal proforma data provided trend-based evidence of retention and completion outcomes. Findings revealed five major continuity strategies used to sustain retention and completion of basic education in conflict-affected communities: Organised Community Efforts, Temporary Learning Centres, Educational Support Services, Technological/Remote Education Programmes, and Monitoring and Evaluation Platforms. OCEs emerged as the most prominent and sustainable strategy, reflecting strong grassroots initiatives such as parental support, flexible school schedules, and community-led monitoring. TLCs were found to be the most effective in preventing total educational disruption, despite challenges related to overcrowding and inadequate facilities. The results further showed that continuity strategies positively influenced pupils' retention and completion; Nasarawa State recorded consistent improvements compared to fluctuating outcomes in Benue State. There were no significant differences in perceptions based on status or location, but duration of stay significantly influenced respondents' perceptions of strategy effectiveness. The study concluded that community-driven resilience, supported by institutional and technological interventions, is critical for sustaining basic education in conflict-affected settings.

Keywords: *Farmers–Herders' Conflict; Basic Education; Continuity Strategies; Pupil Retention; School Completion; Community Participation; North-Central Nigeria*

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INTRODUCTION

Agricultural activities encompass the cultivation of soil, the planting of crops, the growth of fruit trees, the harvesting of farm produce, and various other farming practices. These activities are carried out by farmers or other individuals, whether natural persons or legal entities, as part of farm operations. Beyond these core tasks, agricultural activities extend to other essential farming practices, such as irrigation, fertilization, pest control, and land management, all aimed at optimizing productivity and sustainability. These operations are carried out by individuals or entities, which may include individual farmers, farming cooperatives, or corporations.

The term agricultural activity means any activity directly related to the production or processing of crops, dairy product, poultry, or livestock for initial commercial sale or as a principle means of personal subsistence. It could also be any activity directly related to the cultivation or harvesting of trees and also any activity directly related to fish farm.

Most rural household are involved in agricultural activities as their main source of livelihood, however, they also engage in other income generating activities to augment the main source of income (Adepoju and Obayelu, 2013). Due to land scarcity as a result of population density, farm sizes have become very small especially where they are no functioning land market and credit market is very thin. Access to farmland is the most important factor that determines whether a rural youth can depend on an agricultural livelihood and remain in place of origin or migrate.

Agricultural activities involve a wide range of tasks necessary for the production of crops and other farm products. These include the cultivation of soil, planting and nurturing of crops, growing fruit trees, and harvesting mature produce. In addition to these core activities, agriculture involves essential practices such as irrigation, fertilization, pest control, and land management, which aim to optimize productivity and sustainability. These tasks are carried out by individuals or entities, including individual farmers, farming cooperatives, and corporations. Such activities are

fundamental to food production and align with broader farm operations that prioritize efficiency, resource management, and environmental stewardship.

Seasonality in agricultural activities significantly influences labour allocation and migration patterns in rural areas. During off-farm seasons, the lack of income-generating opportunities drives households into off-farm sectors, engaging in activities that supplement their income. This phenomenon, termed seasonal or temporal migration, often sees individuals temporarily relocating to urban or industrial areas (Mezid, 2014). In other cases, youth, particularly those without land or expecting to inherit land, migrate permanently to urban areas, typically for periods exceeding 12 months (IOM, 2016). These migration patterns reflect the socioeconomic challenges faced by rural households and highlight the role of agriculture in shaping labour mobility.

Labour demand in agriculture is heavily affected by the seasonality of farming activities. Seasonal variations determine the quantity of labour required and the wages paid for farm labour. Advanced economies mitigate these effects through investments in technologies and innovations, such as irrigation machinery, that stabilize agricultural productivity year-round. As a result, labour allocation in such economies is less dependent on seasonal fluctuations. Odoemenen and Odom (2011) note that the demand for hired labour tends to remain consistent across different farming activities, emphasizing the importance of technological and organizational advancements in reducing the impacts of seasonality on agricultural labour.

Sustainability in agriculture is achieved when farming practices are ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just, and culturally appropriate. A holistic approach to agriculture emphasizes working with nature rather than against it, enabling farms to maintain productivity and profitability without causing environmental harm. By integrating science that considers the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, and social factors, a truly sustainable agricultural system can be established (Sundberg, 2017). Such practices not only address the challenges posed

by seasonality and labour allocation but also promote long-term resilience and resource conservation in farming communities.

Youth contribute a formidable labour force for sustainable agricultural development of any nation. This is because they possess a lot of energy and other inestimable assets for productivity and sustainable socio-economic development. Youth charter of the African Union, (2006) defined youth as individuals within the age bracket of 15-35 years of age. The youth constitute the major resource base for any country who wants to embark on any meaningful agricultural and rural development. Onuekwusi, (2005) also noted that youth have been part of the overall agricultural development process in Nigeria because of the immense contribution of agriculture to the economy.

Recent evidence suggest that agriculture is still the largest employer of labour in most African countries especially Nigeria. This sector would continue to employ majority of the labour force in the next decade, but the share of those youth working in the agricultural sector, especially in the production of value chain is slowly declining (Yeboah and Jayne, 2016).

The Nigeria government over the years has attempted to stimulate youth interest in agriculture. According to Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2023) the combined rate of unemployment and time related underemployment as a share of the labour force population was 15.5% in the second quarter of 2023. Youth unemployment rate in Nigeria increased to 7.20% in the second quarter of 2023 from 6.90 percent in the first quarter. As part of efforts to reduce youth unemployment accounting for over 70% of the population, special incentives such as credit facilities has been provided by the government for youth who are involve in agricultural production and processing. Despite the laudable initiatives, the involvement of youth in the agricultural sector remains pitiable at best. With the current farming population consisting largely of the aged and barely illiterate farmers, the need to attract the younger folk becomes even more compelling. Nigeria's population stands at

217,079,601. According to (Worldomter 2022) with the Youths accounting for 70 percent of the 217 million, which stands at a huge 151 million youths.

Agriculture holds high potential for inclusive growth in Nigeria. It generates food for the people and produces raw materials needed for the country's industrial production and development. Increased agricultural activities hold high promises for a shift away from the current high dependence on oil to a more sustained and stable diversified economy. Agriculture has potential for creating wealth, for substantial poverty reduction and food sufficiency, and also capable of managing rural-urban migration with its attendant improved livelihood in both rural and urban areas through reduction in urban unemployment, crime and city slums.

On-farm agricultural activities especially those related to crop production are seasonal in most areas of Nigeria. Consequently, youth involvement in agriculture during the production season often tends to exit this sector to take non-farm jobs to ensure stable income in the off-season (Nagler and Naude 2014).

The Nigerian agricultural sector is characterized by seasonal activities because farming activities especially crop production is skewed toward certain times of the year-planting and harvesting season. This is associated with variation in employment of youth which create in-balance in the labour.

Some of these youths are forced to migrate to urban areas until the next planting season. Records of youth exiting the agricultural sector are higher compared to other sectors since the discovery of oil. A study by Maiga, *et al.,* (2015) indicates that youths in Nigeria now spend less time employed in agriculture than adults.

Youth migration to urban centers is often driven by a lack of job opportunities in rural areas, particularly during the dry season. This seasonal migration significantly impacts agricultural

production in Nigeria, as it leads to a shortage of labor in rural areas. The departure of energetic and productive youth from their communities results in reduced food production and increased costs of farm labor. This widespread phenomenon negatively affects agricultural output and exacerbates challenges in maintaining a sustainable and efficient farming system.

In recent times youth have migrated from rural agricultural sector to the urban and non-farming sector due to the crude method of agriculture and the seasonal farming nature to find greener pasture. Although government and the private sector have made efforts to develop the Agricultural sector by providing credit facilities, improved varieties of seeds, equipment, irrigational facilities and fertilizer to keep farmers glued to agriculture, accessing these provisions have been a challenge to the youth. (Marilou, 2015).

Studies like that of Ngatigwa *et al*., (2020) evaluated the assessment of factors influencing youth involvement in horticulture agribusiness in Tanzania: A Case Study of Njombe Region. Nnadi and Akwiwu (2008) focused on the determinants of youth' participation in agricultural production in Imo State, Nigeria. Adekunle *et al*; (2009) worked on the constraints to rural youth's involvement in agricultural production in Kwara State, Nigeria. None of these studies specifically analyse the effect of seasonal agricultural activities on youths migration in Benue State Nigeria, this study therefore intends to fill this gap. The study was guided by the following objectives: 1, to describe the socio-economic characteristics of the youth and to analyse the determinants of youth migration. It was hypothesized that seasonal agricultural activities has no significant effect on youth migration.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Benue State, Nigeria located in the Middle-Belt region of Nigeria, Benue State lies within the lower river Benue trough in the Middle-Belt region of the country. Its geographic coordinates are longitude $7^{o}47^{1}$ and $10^{o}0^{1}$ East Latitude $6^{o}25^{1}$ and $8^{o}8^{1}$ North; and it

shares boundaries with five other sates namely Nasarawa State to the North, Taraba State to the East, Cross-River Sate to the South, Enugu State to the South-West and Kogi State to the west. The state also shares a common boundary with the Republic of Cameroon in the South-east. Benue State occupies a landmass of 34,059 square Kilometres. (Climate Benue 2023). Based on Koppen (2019) climate classification Benue State lies within the All Weather (AW) climate and experiences two distinct seasons. The rainy season lasts from April to October with annual rainfall in the range of 100-200mm. The dry season begins in November and ends in March. Temperature fluctuates between 21-37 degrees Celsius in the year. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, engaging over 75% of the state farming population.

Agriculturally, the state is divided into three Zones namely, Zone A, Zone B and Zone C respectively [Benue Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (BNARDA 1998)]. The Zonal Headquarters of the three Zones are Adikpo, Gboko and Otukpo respectively in that sequence. The state has a total land area of about 30, 995 square kilometers and administratively; it is divided into 23 Local Government Areas.

Benue state has an estimated population figure of 6,141,300 inhabitations (National Population commission, 2022). Youth in Benue State are projected to have a total population of 2,260,290 (Benue State Bureau of statistics 2023). A multistage random sampling procedure was adopted. In the first stage, Benue state was stratified into three agricultural zones; Zone A, Zone B and Zone C. In the second stage due to the intense agricultural activities in these local governments, purposive selection of Ushongo, Konshisha, from Zone A, Gwer-West and Gboko from Zone B and Agatu, Okpokwu and Ogbadibo from Zone C was done.

Stage three involved the selection of one community from each of the local government by simple random sampling. Sampling proportion of 5 percent of the population was used to select a total of 90 households across the population for the study and 271 youth were randomly selected using 5%

of the sampling frame. This research work used primary data which was collected through a well-structured questionnaire to obtain the desired information based on the objectives. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Model Specification

Probit model analysis

In order to analyse the factors that determines the migration of youth, a probit model analysis was used specified as follows:

$$logit\ (Y) = ln\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + \beta_7 X_7 + \beta_8 X_8 + \beta_9 X_9 + \beta_{10} X_{10} + \varepsilon_i$$

Y = the probability of the event occurring (probability of youth migration)

$\frac{p}{1-p}$= odds of the event occurring

$ln\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right)$=logit (natural log of the odds)

Where Y= probability of migration (1 if youth migrate and 0 otherwise)

X_1= Lack of access to modern farming equipment and technology (1 or 0)

X_2= Limited economic opportunities in the agricultural sector. (1 or 0)

X_3= Insufficient government support for young farmers.(1 or 0)

X_4= Low income (naira)

X_5= Unfavorable working conditions in farming. (1 or 0)

X_6= Inadequate access to land for farming purposes. (1 or 0)

X_7= Desire for better education and career prospects. (1 or 0)

X_8= Lack of access to markets or buyers for agricultural produce. (1 or 0)

X_9= Climate change-related challenges affecting agriculture. (1 or 0)

X_{10}= Perception of agriculture as unprofitable or not prestigious (1 or 0). It is expected that those variables: X_1 to X_{10} will affect have negative effects on youth migration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic Characteristics of the Respondents in the Study Area

The results of the socio-economic characteristics of youth involved in agricultural activities in the study area are presented in Table 1.

The study found that most (69.0%) of the youth involved in agricultural activities are within the age of 26-33 years old while few (7.7%) are greater than 33 years. The average age of the respondents is 28years and this implies that most of the respondents are still within active years for farming activities. This study is in collaboration with the findings of Ogah et al (2024) who noted that majority of farming households in Nigeria are within the productive age.

From the results, 64.6% of the youth involved in agricultural activities are female while 35.4% of them are male. This implies that more females are involved in agricultural activities compared to their male counterpart. Higher education level and pursuit of work has been found to be positively associated with increased migration for men.

The result further showed that majority (73.1%) of the youth is single, 20.3% are married and 6.6% are separated. The findings disagree with that of Lyock et al (2013) who found that married people are more involved in agricultural activities compared to single people.

The study also found that most (55.7%) of the youth had secondary education, 24.4% had tertiary education, 14.4% had primary and 5.5% had no formal education. The findings agree with that of Umunnakwe and Adedamola (2015) who found that most youth involved in agricultural activities have acquired secondary education. This finding also agrees with that of Mbah et al (2016) who revealed that majority (73.80%) of those involved in agricultural activities had secondary

education, while 13.80% and 11.30% had tertiary and primary education, respectively. The finding also supports Ayinde et al., (2014) assertion that education is one of the major causes of youth migration from rural to urban cities.

The results from Table 1 further shows that 64.6% of the youth are not salary earners while 35.4% are. Davidson and Brown (2022) observed a trend toward non-salaried forms of work among young adults, including freelancing and gig economy roles, due to limited access to salaried employment. This study's high rate of respondents without salaried income aligns well with their findings. Contrarily, Green (2020) suggests that in stable economic environments, salaried positions remain dominant. The low proportion of salaried workers here might therefore indicate economic instability or a strong informal sector presence and the reason for migration.

Findings from Table 1 revealed that the major means of land acquisition are inheritance (35.8%), rent (27.7%), owned (19.2%), purchase (9.96%) and gift (7.38%). The findings agree with that of Nmadu et al., (2013) conducted a study on "Acquisition and Management of Land Resources for Agricultural Production in Benue State Nigeria", it was found that a greater per cent (48.75%) of the respondent acquired land through inheritance indicating that no change has taken place in method of land acquisition over the years.

The results from Table 1 revealed that 59% of the youth owned a farm size of 4-6 hectares, 29.2% owned 1-3 hectares while 11.1% owned 7 hectares and above. The findings revealed that the average farm size owned by the youth is 5 hectares and this is an indication that land is readily available for agricultural activities. Viswanatha *et al*; (2014) revealed that, nearly half (45.72%) of the rural youth had medium land holding, followed by small land holding (34.28%) and large land holding (20.00%). Results from Table 1 further showed that 32.8% of the youth are into crop farming, 28.8% are into mixed farming, 16.6% are into livestock, 13.3% are into other farming activities while 8.49% are into fish farming. The findings support that of Umunnakwe and

Adedamola (2015) who found that crop farming and livestock farming are prevalent among farmers.

Table 1, Distribution osf Respondents According to their Socio-economic Characteristics in the Study Area n=270

Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Age (years			28.0
18-25	63	23.2	
26-33	186	186	
>33	21	21	
Sex			
Male	96	35.4	
Female	174	64.6	
Marital Status			
Single	197	73.1	
Married	55	20.3	
Separated	18	6.6	
Education			
Non- Formal	15	5.5	
Primary	39	14.4	
Secondary	150	55.7	
Tertiary	66	24.4	
Mode of land			
Acquisition			
Inheritance	96	35.8	
Gift	20	7.38	
Purchase	27	9.96	
Owned	52	19.2	
Rent	75	27.7	
Farm Size (Hectares)			
1-3	79	29.2	
4-6	161	59.8	
>7	30	11.1	
Farming Activities			
Crop Farming	89	32.8	
Livestock Farming	45	16.6	
Fish Farming	23	8.49	
Mixed Farming	77	28.8	
Others	36	13.3	

Source: Field survey, 2023

Determinants of Factors Responsible for Migration of Youth in the Study Area

Results of the probit regression analysis showing factors responsible for l migration of youth in the study area are presented on Table 2. The result indicated that lack of access to modern farming equipment and technology (= 0.028); Limited economic opportunities in the agricultural sector(

P= 0.000); Insufficient government support for young farmers (P= 0.026); Low income and financial insecurity in agriculture(P= 0.019); Unfavorable working conditions in farming(P= 0.000); Inadequate access to land for farming purposes(P= 0.000); Desire for better education and career prospects(P=0.037); Lack of access to markets or buyers for agricultural produce(P0.019); Climate change-related challenges affecting agriculture(P= 0.018); Perception of agriculture as unprofitable or not prestigious(P = 0.024) all had positive significant influence on migration of youth in the study area at 1% and 5% level of significance and Log-likelihood = 42.527 this implies that the model is a good fit to the data. The findings of this study conform to that of Gupta and Prajapati (1998) who found that Lack of access to modern farming equipment and technology are responsible for youth migration from farming activities. Young people usually move out of the rural areas towards the urban areas looking for employment in sectors other than agriculture (Ginsburg *et al*; 2014, Awumbila *et al* 2015).

Table 2: Probit Model Analysis of Factors Responsible for Migration of Youth in the Study Area

Items	Marginal Effect	Standard Error	P-value
Lack of access to modern farming equipment and technology.	0.053**	0.035	0.028
Limited economic opportunities in the agricultural sector.	0.185*	0.035	0.000
Insufficient government support for young farmers.	0.028**	0.036	0.025
Low income	0.037*	0.390	0.019
Unfavorable working conditions in farming.	0.363*	0.036	0.000
Inadequate access to land for farming purposes.	0.738*	0.362	0.000
Desire for better education and career prospects.	0.116**	0.039	0.037
Lack of access to markets or buyers of agricultural produce.	0.342*	0.366	0.019
Climate change-related challenges affecting agriculture.	0.562*	0.263	0.018
Perception of agriculture as unprofitable or not prestigious.	0.352**	0.273	0.024
Constant	**0.378**	**0.283**	**0.037**

Log-likelihood = 42.527,,**, indicate coefficient significant at 1% and 5% respectively*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Agricultural activities in Benue State are affected by youth migration because of the seasonality of the enterprise. There are plethora of factors responsible for seasonal migration of youth in the study area and these includes; lack of access to modern farming equipment and technology; limited economic opportunities in the agricultural sector among others. The study recommends: Promotion of agricultural mechanization, as access to mechanization tools can help retain youth in rural areas and improve productivity. Boosting of economic opportunities in agriculture as this will create value chains for agricultural produce which will improve the economic viability of farming for youths. Development of infrastructure and social amenities, investing in rural roads, schools, healthcare, and water facilities will improve the quality of life and reduce migration.

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