



Leveraging on Youth Sensitive Policies for Enhancing Youth Inclination Towards Agriculture in the Era of Economic Uncertainties

Dumbiri, David Nwanna^{1*} & Ewobor, Esther Oghenerurie¹

¹Department of Agricultural Education, University of Benin, Benin City, NIGERIA

*Corresponding author email: david.dumbiri@uniben.edu

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Abstract: This research work aims to investigate how agricultural youth sensitive policies can be leveraged to enhance youth's inclination towards agriculture in the era of economic uncertainties. Three research questions were raised to guild the study. The population of study comprised of 113 students from 100 levels to 400 level studying Agriculture Education in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin city, Edo State. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The entire population of 113 students was used because of the few students enrolled to study agriculture education in the Department. Questionnaire was administered to them, which was collected immediately after filling. Validated of instrument was by 3 experts from the Department of Vocational and Technical Education Faculty of Education. The data collected was analyzed using frequency count, mean and standard deviation. The findings of this study reveal that the current state of youth participation in Agriculture is low. It also examines the barriers and challenges facing youth's participation and implementation of youth sensitive policy in Agriculture. The study also revealed the existing agricultural youth sensitive policies and the roles of policymakers in implementing Agricultural youth sensitive policies. It was recommended that government should; develop adaptive and flexible policy frameworks; Modernize Agricultural curricula to include practical skills, entrepreneurship, and digital technology training.; establish innovative financing and resource access mechanisms; and ensure active youth participation in policy formulation and implementation.

Keywords: Youth Sensitive, inclination, economic uncertainties

1. Introduction

As the world grapples with economic volatility and unpredictability, there is an urgent need to engage people and retain them in agriculture to ensure food security, sustainable development, and rural economic growth. Agriculture has long been the backbone of many economies, particularly in developing countries. However, the agricultural sector faces a significant challenge in attracting and retaining young talent. The aging farmer population, coupled with the migration of youth to urban areas in search of perceived better opportunities, threatens the long-term sustainability of the agricultural sector. This demographic shift poses risks to food production, rural development, and the preservation of traditional agricultural knowledge (White, 2020). The era of economic uncertainties, characterized by market instabilities, inflation, and employment challenges, further complicates the landscape for youth engagement in agriculture. Young people often perceive agriculture as an unattractive, low-income profession with limited prospects for growth and innovation. These perceptions, combined with the allure of urban lifestyles and non-agricultural careers, contribute to the declining youth participation in the sector (Leavy & Hossain, 2014).

However, agriculture holds immense potential for innovation, entrepreneurship, and sustainable livelihoods. With the integration of modern technologies, sustainable practices, and value-added approaches, the sector can offer diverse and rewarding career paths for young people. Recognizing this potential, there is a growing emphasis on developing and implementing youth-sensitive policies in agriculture. Youth-sensitive policies are strategies and initiatives specifically designed to address the unique needs, challenges and aspirations faced by young people in the agricultural sector. These policies aim to create enabling environment that encourages youth participation by addressing barriers such as limited access to land, credit, markets, and technology. They also focus on providing tailored education, training, and mentorship opportunities that align with the interests and skills of young people (Bennell, 2017).

*Corresponding author: david.dumbiri@uniben.edu

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One notable example is the African Union's policy named Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), which includes a specific focus on empowering and engaging youth in agriculture. Under the CAADP framework, member states are encouraged to develop and implement national strategies that promote youth employment and entrepreneurship opportunities available in the agricultural value chain. Some of the economic uncertainties prevalent in Nigeria include, insecurity and instability, climate change, high cost and food insecurity, inflation, limited access to modern technologies among others.

Another prominent initiative is the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Regional Initiative on Empowering Small holders and Family Farms for Improved Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction, which prioritizes the engagement of youth and women in agriculture (FAO, 2017). This initiative supports the development of tailored policies, programs, and capacity-building efforts aim at addressing the specific needs and aspirations of young people in rural areas. In addition, Youth Employment in Agriculture Programme (YEAP) was launched by the Nigerian government in 2014, which provides training, support services and access to finance to young agripreneurs (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Nigeria, 2014).

Furthermore, international development organizations and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also developed initiatives to support youth in agriculture. For example, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has a dedicated Rural Youth Action Plan that aims to increase economic opportunities and employment for young dwelling people in rural areas through various interventions, including skills development, access to finance, and support for youth-led enterprises (IFAD, 2019). Other youth sensitive agricultural policies in Nigeria include: Young Farmers Network (YFN), Youth Agripreneurship Development Program (YADP) and Agricultural Youth Empowerment Scheme (AGRIC-YES), Youth Farm Lab (YFL).

However, as noted by Yeboah et al. (2019), the effectiveness of these policies in attracting and retaining young people in agriculture remains limited, especially during economic downturns. These policies aim to tackle obstacles such as limited access to land, markets and capital, but their implementation often falls short due to various factors, including budgetary constraints and shifting priorities during economic crises.

Economic uncertainties play a significant role in shaping youth attitudes towards agriculture. This perception is further reinforced by the volatile nature of agricultural markets and the sector's vulnerability to external shocks, as emphasized by Anyidoho et al. (2021) in their study on youth aspirations in rural Africa. Recent research by Mabiso and Benfica (2019) suggests that well-designed and properly implemented youth-sensitive policies can indeed enhance youth inclination towards agriculture, even in uncertain economic times. They emphasize the importance of policies that not only address immediate challenges but also align with the aspirations of young people and the changing nature of agriculture in the digital age. This aligns with findings from Ripoll et al. (2017), who argue that policies focusing on modernizing agriculture through technology and innovation can significantly increase its appeal to youth.

The role of education and skills development in enhancing youth participation in agriculture cannot be overstated. Mukembo and Edwards (2015) found that integrating agricultural education in school curricula and providing vocational training can positively influence youth perceptions of agriculture as a lucrative career path. This educational approach, coupled with youth-sensitive policies, could potentially create a more resilient agricultural workforce capable of weathering economic uncertainties.

Furthermore, the emergence of agribusiness and value chain opportunities presents new avenues for youth engagement in agriculture. Maiga et al. (2020) highlight that policies supporting youth entrepreneurship in agribusiness can create attractive entry points for young people, even during economic downturns. These opportunities, when backed by supportive policies, can transform the perception of agriculture from a traditional, labor-intensive occupation to a modern, technology-driven, and profitable venture.

While the current state of youth participation in agriculture remains low, there is significant potential for improvement through targeted, youth-sensitive policies. The challenge lies in effectively implementing these policies and ensuring their resilience in the face of economic uncertainties. There is still limited engagement of youth in agriculture, despite efforts made to encourage them, this is the gap this study tends to fill. As Sumberg et al. (2021) suggest, a holistic approach that combines policy interventions with educational initiatives, technological integration, and support for youth entrepreneurship in agriculture could be key to reversing the trend of declining youth participation in this sector.

1.1 Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the existing agricultural youth sensitive policies?
2. What are the key barriers to implementing effective youth-sensitive agricultural policies?
3. How can policymakers ensure the long-term sustainability and relevance of youth-sensitive agricultural policies in a rapidly changing economy?

2. Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study; the design is less invasive and more focused on understanding behavior as it captures existing condition within the population without variable manipulation. The population of the study comprised of 113 students. It consists of all the students enrolled into Agricultural Education in the Department of Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), Faculty of Education, University of Benin. The entire population of 113 students were used, since it was manageable, hence census. A structured questionnaire titled Enhancing Youth Inclination towards Agriculture using Agricultural Youth Sensitive Policies (EYIAAYS) was the instrument for data collection which was designed based on the research questions raised. A questionnaire consisting of 31 items was used, the validation of the instrument was by 3 experts in the field of agriculture, while the reliability was 0.85 using Cronbach's alpha. The instrument for the data collection was personally administered by the researcher. All the administered questionnaires were collected on the spot which were used for data analysis. Data collected was analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions. A mean of 2.50 and above being the criterion level/benchmark was interpreted as agree while mean score below 2.50 were interpreted as disagree.

3. Results

3.1 Research Question 1: What is the existing agricultural youth sensitive policies?

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation showing responses on the existing agricultural youth sensitive policies.

S/N	Existing Youth sensitive policies	MEAN (\bar{x})	SD	REMARK
1	Youth Agricultural Development Program [YADP]	3.73	0.45	Agree
2	Food and Youth Network [FYN]	3.75	0.44	Agree
3	National Association of Farmers and Agricultural Youth Support [NAFAYES]	3.21	0.89	Agree
4	Youth Employment in Agricultural Programme [YEAP]	3.67	0.56	Agree
5	Youth Farm Lab [YFL]	3.69	0.58	Agree
6	Food and Agricultural Organization	3.88	0.33	Agree
7	Agricultural Youth Empowerment Scheme (AGRIC-YES)	3.73	0.53	Agree
8	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program	3.52	0.88	Agree
9	International Fund for Agricultural Development	3.43	1.06	Agree

The data presented in table 1 show that the mean responses ranged from 3.21 to 3.88. The mean responses for all items were above the bench mark of 2.50 which shows an agreement among the respondents indicating the presence of agricultural youth sensitive policies that has been set up to enhance the inclination of youths towards agriculture, which is also revealed with a grand mean of 3.66. The standard deviation of the items which ranges from 0.33 - 1.06 is also an indication that there is less variability in the responses of the teachers which implies that the responses were consistent and did not deviate far from one another.

3.2 Research Question 2: What are the barriers of the existing Agricultural youth sensitive policies?

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation showing responses on the barriers of the existing Agricultural youth sensitive policies.

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	SD	REMARK
1	Limited awareness and knowledge about existing agricultural youth sensitive policies hinder their effective utilization by young farmers.	3.42	0.87	Agree
2	There is a lack of youth involvement in the formulation and implementation of agricultural policies.	3.43	0.86	Agree
3	Insufficient financial support and investment hinder the effective implementation of agricultural youth sensitive policies.	3.70	0.46	Agree
4	Some agricultural youth sensitive policies do not adequately address the specific needs and aspiration of young farmers.	3.72	0.45	Agree
5	The absence of clear monitoring and evaluation mechanisms make it difficult to assess the effectiveness and impact of the agricultural youth sensitive policy.	3.78	0.46	Agree
6	The policies do not sufficiently address the need for capacity building and skills development among young farmers.	3.62	0.51	Agree

continued

7	Cultural and social perceptions of agriculture as an unattractive career option hinder policy effectiveness.	3.58	0.54	Agree
8	Existing policies do not effectively leverage technology to make agriculture more appealing to youth.	3.53	0.52	Agree
9	The policies fail to provide adequate financial incentives to attract youth to agriculture.	3.78	0.46	Agree
10	There is insufficient coordination between different government departments in implementing youth sensitive agricultural policies.	3.52	0.60	Agree

Table 2 presents the mean values of the barriers faced by the existing agricultural youth sensitive policies. Items 1 to 10 recorded mean responses from 3.42 to 3.78 which were above the bench mark of 2.50, which implies that the mean responses for all the items demonstrated an agreement by the respondents. This is revealed with a grand mean of 3.61. The standard deviation of all the items ranges from 0.45 to 0.87 showing that the respondents are close in their opinion.

3.3 Research Question 3: How can policymakers ensure the long-term sustainability and relevance of youth-sensitive agricultural policies in a rapidly changing economy?

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation showing responses on how policy makers can ensure a long- term sustainability and relevance of youth-sensitive agricultural policies in a rapidly changing economy.

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	SD	DECISION
1	Policy makers should establish mechanisms for effective and continuous feedback from young farmers to keep policies relevant.	3.40	0.61	Agree
2	Training and skill development opportunities provided by the government are not sufficient to equip youth with the necessary agricultural knowledge and expertise.	3.43	0.86	Agree
3	Government initiatives should facilitate access to land and resources for young farmers and agripreneurs.	3.25	0.78	Agree
4	Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established by the government to access the impact and outcome of agricultural youth sensitive policies.	3.45	0.88	Agree
5	Government should prioritize the inclusion of young farmers in the policy making process to ensure the effectiveness of agricultural youth sensitive policies.	3.81	0.39	Agree
6	Incorporating flexible mechanisms in policy design allows for quick adjustments to economic shifts.	3.62	0.51	Agree
7	Engaging youth in policy formulation and review processes enhances the long-term relevance of agricultural policies.	3.48	0.54	Agree
8	Implementing mentorship programs between experienced farmers and youth can contribute to the sustainability of agricultural policies.	3.52	0.60	Agree
9	Promoting agricultural education and vocational training ensures a skilled work force capable of adapting to economic changes.	3.39	0.49	Agree
10	Policies should focus on improving access to finance and credit for young farmers to enhance long-term participation in agriculture.	3.47	0.54	Agree
11	Investing in agricultural technology and innovation is crucial for maintaining policy relevance in a changing economic landscape.	3.44	0.50	Agree
12	Fostering entrepreneurship and innovation among young farmers is key to ensuring policy relevance in changing economic contexts.	3.45	0.52	Agree

The data in table 3 reveals that the mean responses ranged from 3.25 to 3.62 indicating that all the respondents agreed to the points listed above on how policymakers can ensure the long-term sustainability and relevance of youth-sensitive agricultural policies, which is revealed with a grand mean of 3.45. The standard deviation which ranges from 0.39 to 0.88 is an indication that there is less variability in the responses of the students.

4. Discussion of Findings

The result in research question 1 revealed nine existing agricultural youth sensitive policies which include Youth Agricultural Development Program (YADP), Food and Youth Network (FYN) , National Association of Farmers and Agricultural Youth Empowerment Support (NAFAYES), Youth Farm Lab(YFL), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), Agricultural Youth Empowerment Scheme (AGRIC-YES), Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development

Program (CAADP), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFUND) . The identified policies are in agreement with FAO's work which is primarily embodied in its Regional Initiative on Empowering Smallholders and Family Farms for Improved Rural Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction, launched in 2017. This initiative places a strong emphasis on engaging youth and women in agriculture, recognizing their crucial role in rural development and agricultural sustainability. FAO's approach is comprehensive, aiming to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young people in the agricultural sector. The organization supports the development of tailored policies and programs specifically designed to meet the unique needs and aspirations of rural youth. These efforts extend beyond policy formulation to practical implementation through various capacity-building initiatives. The research is also in line with IFAD which developed a dedicated Rural Youth Action Plan, launched in 2019. This plan aims to increase economic opportunities and employment for young people in rural areas through various interventions. IFAD's approach focuses on three key areas: skills development, access to finance, and support for youth-led enterprises. By targeting these specific aspects, IFAD seeks to create a more enabling environment for youth participation in agriculture and rural development.

The findings of the study in research question 2 on the barriers to implementing effective youth-sensitive agricultural policies are as follows; Limited awareness and knowledge about existing agricultural youth sensitive policies; lack of youth involvement in the formulation and implementation of agricultural policies; insufficient financial support and investment; some agricultural youth sensitive policies do not adequately address the specific needs and aspiration of young farmers; absence of clear monitoring and evaluation mechanisms make it difficult to assess the effectiveness and impact of the agricultural youth sensitive policy; the policies do not sufficiently address the need for capacity building and skills development among young farmers, cultural and social perceptions of agriculture as an unattractive career option hinder policy effectiveness; existing policies do not effectively leverage technology to make agriculture more appealing to youth; the policies fail to provide adequate financial incentives to attract youth to agriculture; there is insufficient coordination between different government departments in implementing youth sensitive agricultural policies. The findings are in line with Susilowati ((2014 who made a study titled "Attracting the Young Generation to Engage in Agriculture," which investigates the declining youth participation in Indonesia's agricultural sector. Through literature review and field observations, the research identifies key barriers including negative perceptions of farming as a low-income, labor-intensive career with low social status, limited access to land and capital, and outdated agricultural education curricula. The study emphasizes the urgent need for multifaceted policy interventions to make agriculture more appealing and accessible to youth, such as improving resource access, modernizing agricultural education, and changing societal perceptions. Susilowati argues that addressing these challenges is crucial not only for the sustainability of agriculture but also for broader goals of food security, rural development, and economic growth. While focused on Indonesia, the study's findings have wider implications for countries facing similar agricultural sector challenges, contributing valuable insights to the global discourse on youth engagement in agriculture. The findings are also in agreement with Kinyua and Muriithi (2019) who explored the barriers faced by young farmers in accessing and taking advantage of agricultural youth sensitive policies. Despite the implementation of various initiatives and programs aimed at supporting youth engagement in agriculture, the research indicates that many young individuals remain unaware or lack comprehensive understanding of these policies and their potential benefits. As a result, many young farmers and aspiring agricultural entrepreneurs miss out on valuable opportunities and resources that could facilitate their entry and success in the agricultural sector.

The findings of the study in research question 3 on how policy makers can ensure the long-term sustainability and relevance of youth - sensitive agricultural policies in a rapidly changing economy include; policy makers should establish mechanisms for continuous feedback from young farmers to keep policies relevant; Training and skill development opportunities provided by the government are not sufficient to equip youth with the necessary agricultural knowledge and expertise; Facilitating access to land and resources for young farmers and agripreneurs; Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established by the government to access the impact and outcome of agricultural youth sensitive policies; Prioritizing the inclusion of young farmers in the policy making process to ensure the effectiveness of agricultural youth sensitive policies; Incorporating flexible mechanisms in policy design allows for quick adjustments to economic shifts; Engaging youth in policy formulation and review processes enhances the long - term relevance of agricultural policies; implementing mentorship programs between experienced farmers and youth can contribute to the sustainability of agricultural policies; Promoting agricultural education and vocational training ensures a skilled work force capable of adapting to economic changes.; Policies should focus on improving access to finance and credit for young farmers to enhance long – term participation in agriculture; Investing in agricultural technology and innovation is crucial for maintaining policy relevance in a changing economic landscape; Fostering entrepreneurship and innovation among young farmers is key to ensuring policy relevance in changing economic contexts. These findings are in alignment with the study conducted by Aryeetey and Kyei (2020) where they opined that monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential for identifying strengths, weaknesses, and areas of improvement within existing agricultural youth sensitive policies. Thus, providing valuable insights into the accessibility, uptake, and tangible outcomes of these initiatives, enabling evidence-based decision making and policy refinement to better address the unique needs and challenges faced by young farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs. These findings are also in line with the study made by Yami et al (2019) who provided crucial insights for policymakers seeking to maintain relevant and sustainable youth-focused agricultural policies in dynamic economies. The study emphasizes the importance of adaptive policy frameworks that can evolve

with economic shifts and youth needs, while addressing multiple barriers simultaneously. It highlights the value of incorporating youth perspectives in policy design, leveraging digital technologies, and creating supportive ecosystems that connect education to employment opportunities. Yami and colleagues argue that effective policies must be flexible, comprehensive, and regularly updated based on youth feedback and market conditions. Their research underscores the critical role of cross-sectoral collaboration in policy implementation, offering valuable guidance for creating lasting agricultural initiatives that resonate with youth in rapidly changing economic environments.

5. Conclusion

As global economies experience volatility, the agricultural sector struggles to attract young talent. Studies highlight the multifaceted nature of this issue, emphasizing the need for youth sensitive policies that address interconnected factors such as negative perceptions of farming, resource limitations, outdated curricula, and technological integration. Key findings stress the importance of adaptable and responsive policy frameworks that can evolve with changing economic conditions and youth aspirations. The research underscores the critical role of youth participation in policy formulation and implementation, ensuring relevance and effectiveness. It also emphasizes agriculture's potential to address broader societal challenges like unemployment and rural development. By creating flexible policies, addressing multiple barriers, and involving youth as active stakeholders, nations can build a more resilient and attractive agricultural sector. This approach not only secures future food production but also contributes to economic stability, rural development, and youth empowerment in uncertain times. The integration of youth in agricultural value chain further strengthens food security resilience, particularly critical during global economic fluctuations, while simultaneously reducing poverty through inclusive growth that narrows rural-urban inequality gaps.

6. Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are therefore made: Policymakers should;

- 6.1 Develop adaptive and flexible policy framework that can quickly respond to changing economic conditions and youth needs. These frameworks should be regularly reviewed and updated to remain relevant in the face of economic uncertainties. This adaptability ensures that agricultural policies remain effective and appealing to youth even as market dynamics and technological landscapes evolve.
- 6.2 Integrate comprehensive agricultural education and skills development and modernize agricultural curricula to include practical skills, entrepreneurship, and digital technology training. This should involve partnerships between educational institutions, agricultural businesses, and technology companies to provide youth with the diverse skill set needed for modern agriculture. This approach bridges the gap between traditional farming knowledge and the demands of contemporary agribusiness.
- 6.3 Establish innovative financing and resource access mechanisms by creating tailored financial products and services for young farmers, such as low-interest loans, risk-sharing arrangements, or targeted grants. Additionally, implement programs to facilitate land access through methods like land banks or lease-to-own schemes. These measures address two of the most significant barriers to youth participation in agriculture: limited access to capital and land.
- 6.4 Ensure active youth participation in policy formulation and implementation: Involve young people not just as beneficiaries but as key stakeholders in the agricultural policy process. This could include establishing youth advisory boards, conducting regular consultations with young farmers, and creating platforms for youth to share their experiences and ideas. This participatory approach ensures that policies are truly youth-sensitive and address the real needs and aspirations of young people in agriculture.

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