



Assessment of rural children involvement in farming activities in Odeda local government area of Ogun state, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the involvement of rural children in farming activities in Odeda local government area of Ogun state. Interview schedules were used to obtain information from 80 children from the study area. The study revealed that the mean age of the respondents is 14 years with more than half (55%) between 13 and 15 years. Majority (92.5%) of the children are schooling. Also, about three out of every four children (76.25%) are involved in about 13 farming activities. Boys are more involved at a higher level in farming activities than girls. Chi-square analyses revealed that there is significant difference at $p < 0.05$ in male/female involvement in land clearing ($\chi^2 = 13.265$), ridging ($\chi^2 = 19.163$), planting ($\chi^2 = 23.474$), fertilizer application ($\chi^2 = 9.172$), staking ($\chi^2 = 10.889$), harvesting ($\chi^2 = 26.000$), transporting ($\chi^2 = 11.607$) and marketing ($\chi^2 = 9.053$). It can further be deduced from the study that farming in the study area by the children cannot be regarded as child labour as most of their involvement is done on weekends. The study concluded that children should be involved in farming at a low to medium level depending on age as this serves as means through which a child can acquire basic survival skills that will be needed for the child's personal development and, in the long run, resulting in sustainable national development.

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Introduction

Agriculture is a very important sector that immensely contributes to national development. According to Ogen (2003), the Nigerian economy could be described as an agricultural economy during the first decade after independence because agriculture served as the engine of growth of the overall economy. By this time, agriculture contributes over 60 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (Ogen, 2007). As also submitted by Ogen (2007), Nigerian farmers produced 70 percent of Nigeria's exports and 95 percent of its food needs, despite their reliance on traditional tools and indigenous farming methods.

The colonial administration focused attention and directed Nigerian farmers' effort towards the production of export crops like cotton, rubber, cocoa, oil palm, and etc. and neglected food crop production. This is mainly due to the fact that export (commodity) crops served as raw materials to the colonising countries. According to Nwachukwu (2006), concentration of attention on commodity exports, and the belief that food production activities could take care of themselves without any governmental intervention, also became the official farm policy of the post-1960. This led to the incapacity of food production to meet the needs of the rising population and the inability of producers to reinvest in land.

As affirmed by Akangbe, *et.al.* (2006), the discovery of oil and its subsequent exploration and exportation brought a setback to Nigeria's agriculture because, the government shifted attention from the agricultural sector to oil industry which encouraged the drifting away of young able bodies from rural areas to the urban. This made agricultural production to be left in the hand of the aged men and women and younger children.

As reported by Olagbaju and Falola (1996) in Ogen (2007), the agricultural sector now accounts for less than 5 percent of Nigeria's GDP. Despite the neglect of the sector by the federal government, its importance cannot be overemphasised in the Nigerian economy (www.nigeriabusinessinfo.com/agric.htm, 2007).

Now that the active working force of the nation has left the agricultural sector for other sectors (like oil and banking industries) due to its neglect by the government and subsequent unattractiveness, agricultural production, including farming, now rest on the aged and children's shoulder.

Previous researches revealed that greater percentage of children are working in the agricultural sector. International Labour Organisation –ILO (2009) that 70 percent (over 132 million children aged 5-14 years old) of working children are in agriculture. ILO (2009) further submitted that the vast majority of the world's child labourers are working on farms and plantations, planting and harvesting crops, spraying pesticides, and tending livestock on rural farms and plantations.

Also, Adekunle, *et.al.* (2007) revealed that about one out of every four (23.1% of) spent at least 5 days on the farm per week; this implies that such children would have missed at least 3 days of schooling, thereby leading to high rate of failure among rural children.

Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development –SARD (2007) revealed that globally 318 million children under 18 work in some form of productive activity; 218 million (about 70%) children are in work defined as child labour; and 126 million (about 60% of) child labourers are engaged in hazardous activities. SARD (2007) also ranked agriculture as one of the three most dangerous work activities, along with mining and

construction; and that child labour in agriculture reinforces the cycle of rural poverty.

Rural children, in particular girls, tend to begin work young, as early as 5 years of age. In some countries, children under 10 are estimated to contribute 20 percent of child labour in rural areas (ILO, 2009). ILO concluded that the work that children perform is often invisible and unacknowledged because they assist their parents or relatives on the family farms or they work under quota system on larger farms or plantations. Hence, children are an important source of cheap labour. SARD (2007) also reported that child labour is increasing in post-harvest processing, transport, marketing and a range of agro industries.

National AG Safety Database- NASD (2002) classified tasks that are appropriate to children depending on their age groups as:

Preschool: household clean up, watering plants, feeding small animals

Age 6-11: hand tools (not powered tools), feeding animals (under supervision), weeding, watering and picking, land mowing with a push mower on a flat surface, hand raking and digging

Age 12-14: limited power tools under supervision

Age 15-18: can start to do adult jobs under supervision.

SARD (2007) and ILO (2009) also submitted that not all forms of farm work can be regarded as child labour. SARD (2007) posited that "participating in household farm and non-farm activities especially in subsistence farming gives children an opportunity to develop skills they will need to succeed as farmers. It also gives a sense of belonging to the community that leads to feelings of self esteem and social security. This participation becomes an issue when farming activities interfere with schooling, when family farm work is hazardous or when children must take paying jobs to support the family and are given dangerous tasks they are not stronger enough to handle." In line with this position, ILO (2009) submitted that many types of work experience for children can be positive, providing them with practical and social skills for work as adults. ILO added that improved self confidence, self esteem and work skills are attributes often detected in young people engaged in some aspects of farm work.

Agbonlahor, *et. al.* (2007) established that child farm labour is prevalent in the rural farm sector of Ogun state. From this background, the involvement of children in farming activities that harm, abuse and exploit a child or interfere with their schooling, dangerous to their physical, mental and psychological development is regarded as child labour in this study. Child labour will only allow rural families to wallow in poverty as it prevents them from acquiring the needed basic survival skills as an adult.

Okpukpara and Odurukwe (2003) opined that a child who is compelled by the nation's socioeconomic condition to work will grow up to become a burden to him/her and the nation because the child will lack basic survival skills and knowledge that will benefit the child and the nation, in the long run. In support of this opinion, Owolabi (2012) posited that sustainable development depends not only in investing in the present needs of the working children, but also eradicating all forms of child labour that will compromise the future development of these children and the nation, at large.

The study seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

i. What are the personal and family characteristics of the respondents?

ii. What farming activities are respondents involved in?

iii. Is there any disparity between the male/female levels of involvement in farming?

iv. How do children view farming?

In the light of this, the study was designed to specifically:

i. describe the personal and family characteristics of children in the study area;

ii. identify the farming activities involved in by children;

iii. ascertain the level of involvement of male/female children in farming activities; and

iv. establish the opinion of children on agriculture.

The study was based on the assumption that there is no significant difference in male-female children's involvement in farming activities.

Methodology

Odeda local government area of Ogun state was purposively chosen for this study because of prior observation about the use of children in farming activities by parents and relatives on family farms. Odeda local government area which has a landmass of 1,263.45 sq. Km with a population of 217,000 persons (according to 2006 census) is geographically encompassed within 7°8' and 7°30' north of the equator and longitudes 3°18' and 3°37' east of the Greenwich meridian. The local government shares boundaries with Ibarapa and Iddo local government areas of Oyo state and Abeokuta south and Obafemi/Owode local government areas of Ogun state in the north, east, south and west respectively. The inhabitants of this area are mainly agrarian, with few who are involved in quarry business and vocational jobs.

Information was obtained from 40 male and 40 female children randomly selected from five villages within the study area through the aid of well structured interview guide. Obtained information was presented using tables, means, frequency and percentages. The study hypothesis was analysed using the Chi-square analytical technique.

Results and Discussion

Personal and family characteristics of respondents

Table 1 presents the personal and family characteristics of the respondents. Result from the table revealed that greater proportion (55%) of the respondents is between the ages of 13 and 15 years with a mean age of 14 years. About 27.5% of the children are within 10-12 years of age while 17.5% fall between 16 and 18 years. This indicates that involvement of children in farming increases with age until up to 16 years when their involvement decline. The result is in line with the finding of Agbonlahor, *et.al.* (2007) that found a mean age of 12.8 years for children in farm work. This is because at ages of 16 and above, the children possess a higher level of freedom to go into other economic activities.

Very low proportion (7.5%) of the respondents had no formal education. About 56.75% of the respondents are in secondary schools while about 5% are high school graduates.

The study portrays that respondents hail from a mean rural household size of 8 persons with more than half (52.5%) from a family of 6-10 persons, while, 31.25% and 16.25% of the respondents come from a family of less than 5 and greater than 10 persons respectively. This corresponds with the study of Ajani *et. al.* (2007) which presented a mean household size of 10 persons.

The table presents that majority (46.25%) practise Islam, while 43.75% and 10% of the respondents practiced Christianity and Traditional religions respectively. This confirmed the information obtained from the local government secretariat at Odeda that there is freedom of religion in the area. Though, few in proportion, rural people still worship traditional gods.

It is also revealed that higher proportion of the respondents' fathers (41.25%) are crop farmers, 17.50% are civil servants, 30% are artisans while 11.25% engage in other occupations. However, more than half (52.50%) of their mothers are traders, 17.5% are crop farmers, just 8.75% of the mothers are civil servants while the remaining 22.25% engage in other occupations. This shows that more men than women are primarily crop farmers while more women than men are primarily traders. This is because women serve as helpers to their husbands on farm and sell petty goods at the frontage of their houses and only go to the market on special market days to sell their goods and farm produce.

Table 1 also reveals that majority of rural parents (43.75% and 45% fathers and mothers respectively) had secondary education, 15% of both fathers and mothers had no formal education, 28.75% and 36.25% of fathers and mothers respectively had just primary education while 12.5% and 3.75% of fathers and mothers had up to tertiary education. This implies that male parents are more educated than female parents.

Parents' membership of organisations was also portrayed in Table 1. Table 1 further x-rays that 72.5% and 68.75% of fathers and mothers respectively are members of one organisation or the other.

Involvement of children in farming activities

Table 2 shows that at least three out of every four children (76.25%) are involved in farming activities at one time or the other. This corroborates the report from Food and Agriculture Organization-FAO's Newsroom (2006) that some 70 percent of child labour worldwide is found in agriculture, with many children engaged in forced and hazardous activities.

It was also observed from Table 2 that majority (52.46%) of children involved in agriculture are boys while the remaining (47.54%) are girls. It is then deduced that 80 percent and 72.5 percent of sampled male and female children respectively are involved in farming activities. This implies that more males than female children are involved in farming activities as also confirmed by Ajani, *et al.* in their 2007's study.

Table 2 also reveals the farming activities involved in by children. Children are involved in the following 13 activities in descending order as: weeding (96.72%), planting (93.44%), transport of goods (91.80%), harvesting (85.25%), land clearing (80.33%), ridging (70.49%), and marketing of goods (62.30%), processing (50.82%), fertilizer application (47.54%), staking (44.26%), thinning (29.51%), stumping (24.60%) and herbicide application (24.60%).

This corroborates the ILO's report of January, 2012 that child labour in farming may involve: preparation of land, transport and planting of seedlings, weeding, applying fertilizers and spraying pesticides, harvesting, and processing of collected crops. It is then inferred that children are more involved in farming activities that are simple, requires less skill and frequently practiced in rural areas. Most children are not involved in staking, thinning, stumping and herbicide application because those operations are not practiced by most rural farmers. Also, stumping is a high energy sapping farm activity.

Based on time of involvement, 59.02% of the children are involved in farming activities throughout the year while 37.70% and just 3.28% of the respondents are only involved during the rainy and dry seasons respectively. The high percentage of children's involvement in these activities throughout the year is attributed to the fact that rural farmers do plant and water vegetables during the dry season aside from their regular crops in the rainy season in order to supplement shortages usually recorded during the dry season.

The highest proportion (39.34%) of the respondents are involved in farming activities on weekends only, while about one out of every four children are involved in these activities on daily basis. This explains why more than 90 percent of the respondents are involved in educational activities despite the high proportion of children involved in farming activities.

The academic performance of the children in the study area is not dependent on their involvement in farming as the farming activities of majority of them only take place on weekends and hence, do not interfere with their educational activities.

An average of 3.6 hours is spent on the farm by children with more than half (59.02%) of them spending between 1 and 3 hours on farm.

Level of male/female involvement in farming activities

Table 3 reveals that more boys are highly involved in land clearing, planting and weeding than girls. The likert values for both set of children also emphasise that boys' level of involvement in farming activities is higher in land clearing, ridging, planting, weeding, thinning, staking, herbicide application, and harvesting while girls' level of involvement is higher in stumping, fertilizer application, transport, processing and marketing of farm produce.

Though, the average likert values for both sets of children reflect that children are involved in farming activities on medium level, boys' level of involvement is higher than that of girls (1.83 > 1.72).

Hence, disparity exists between the boy/girl levels of involvement in farming activities. This position would have changed if domestic house chores were included in the activities considered as more girls will be highly involved in those activities. This is in consonance with SARD (2007)'s opinion that young girls often take on household responsibilities in addition to their farming tasks in order to free their mothers to take on paid employment or work on the family farm. SARD (2007) also posited that young boys often engage in heavier and more dangerous work than girls.

Opinion of children on farming

Table 4 presents the opinion that rural children have towards farming.

The Table shows that majority of the children liked farming during rainy season (76.25%), 83.75% see farming as a means of livelihood, 73.75% can combine both farming and schooling, 76.25% opined that farming helps to acquire vocational skills and 85% opined that farming is a lucrative job. Just half of the children see farming as a poor man's job. Majority of these children also has negative opinion about farming as 65% of them opined that farming is associated with a lot of hazards, 53.75% opined that farming prevents them from studying at home, 53% also see farming as negatively affecting school performance and also as a form of child labour.

This implies that children have more positive than negative attitudes to farming. This is a reason why children are highly involved in farming despite their involvement in schooling.

Table 1: distribution of respondents based on personal and family characteristics

Variables	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Age		Mean = 14 years
10-12	22	27.50
13-15	44	55.00
16-18	14	17.50
Total	80	100
Children's educational level		
No formal education	6	7.50
Primary classes	21	26.25
Primary school drop out	2	2.50
Secondary classes	47	58.75
Completed secondary education	4	5.00
Total	80	100
Household size		Mean = 8 persons
Less than 5	25	31.25
6-10	42	52.50
Above 10	13	16.25
Total	80	100
Religion		
Islam	37	46.25
Christianity	35	43.75
Traditional	8	10.00
Total	80	100
Fathers' occupation		
Crop farming	33	41.25
Civil service	14	17.50
Artisan	24	30.00
Others	9	11.25
Total	80	100
Mothers' occupation		
Crop farming	14	17.50
Civil service	7	8.75
Trading	42	52.50
Others	17	22.25
Total	80	100
Fathers' educational attainment		
No formal education	12	15.00
Primary education	23	28.75
Secondary education	35	43.75
Tertiary education	10	12.50
Total	80	100
Mothers' educational attainment		
No formal education	12	15.00
Primary education	29	36.25
Secondary education	36	45.00
Tertiary education	3	3.75
Total	80	100
Fathers' membership of organization		
Yes	58	72.50
No	22	27.50
Total	80	100
Mothers' membership of organizations		
Yes	55	68.75
No	25	31.25
Total	80	100

Table 2: distribution of children based on their involvement in farming activities

Variables	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Involvement in farming activities		
Involved	61	76.25
Not involved	19	23.75
Total	80	100
Involvement of children by gender		
Male	32	52.46
Female	29	47.54
Total	61	100
Farming activities involved in by children		
Land clearing	49	80.33
Stumping	15	24.59
Ridging	43	70.49
Planting	57	93.44
Weeding	59	96.72
Thinning	18	29.51
Staking	27	44.26
Fertilizer application	29	47.54
Herbicide application	15	24.59
Harvesting of produce	52	85.25
Transport of produce	56	91.80
Processing of harvested crops	31	50.82
Marketing	38	62.30
Time of involvement		
Rainy season only	23	37.70
Dry season only	2	3.28
Both dry and rainy seasons	36	59.02
Total	61	100
Frequency of involvement		
Everyday	16	26.23
2-3 times in week days	8	13.11
Weekends only	24	39.34
Throughout rainy season	12	19.67
Twice in a month	1	1.64
Total	61	100
Time spent on farm (hours/day)		Mean = 3.6 Hours/day
1-3	36	59.02
3.5-5.5	12	19.67
6-8	13	21.31
Total	61	100

Table 3: boys/girls level of involvement in farming activities

Farming activities	Level of involvement							
	Male				Female			
	Low (1)	Medium (2)	High (3)	Likert value	Low (1)	Medium (2)	High (3)	Likert value
Land clearing	4	17	9	2.17	4	11	4	2.00
Stumping	5	4	0	1.44	2	4	0	1.67
Ridging	11	13	0	1.54	12	6	1	1.42
Planting	3	21	8	2.16	5	15	5	2.00
Weeding	5	12	15	2.31	6	12	9	2.11
Thinning	6	4	2	1.67	3	3	0	1.50
Staking	5	8	0	1.77	7	6	1	1.56
Fertilizer application	6	7	0	1.54	7	7	2	1.69
Herbicide application	0	4	1	2.20	7	3	0	1.30
Harvesting	8	20	1	1.76	10	12	1	1.61
Transporting	12	13	4	1.72	10	14	3	1.74
Processing	5	7	3	1.87	4	8	4	2.00
Marketing	9	8	2	1.63	7	10	2	1.74
Average likert value				1.83				1.72

Table 4: distribution of children on their opinion on farming

Opinions on farming	Response			
	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I like farming during rainy season	61	76.25	19	23.75
Farming is a poor man's job	40	50.00	40	50.00
Farming negatively affects school performance	42	52.50	38	47.50
I prefer farming than schooling	8	10.00	72	90.00
Farming is a means of livelihood	67	83.75	13	16.25
I can combine both farming and schooling	59	73.75	21	26.25
Farming is associated with a lot of hazards	52	65.00	28	35.00
Farming helps to acquire vocational skills	61	76.25	19	23.75
Farming prevents studying at home	43	53.75	37	46.25
Farming should be practiced by old people	30	37.50	50	62.50
Farming should be practiced by youths	70	87.50	10	12.50
Farming should be practiced by children	35	43.75	45	56.25
Farming is a lucrative job	68	85.00	12	15.00
Farming is a form of child labour	42	52.50	38	47.50

Table 5: relationship between male and female children's involvement in farming activities

Farming activities	χ^2 value	Degree of freedom	decision
Land clearing	13.265	2	Significant
Stumping	1.067	1	Not significant
Ridging	19.163	2	Significant
Planting	23.474	2	Significant
Weeding	5.729	2	Not significant
Thinning	4.333	2	Not significant
Staking	10.889	2	Significant
Fertilizer application	9.172	2	Significant
Herbicide application	3.125	2	Not significant
Harvesting	26.000	2	Significant
Transporting	11.607	2	Significant
Processing	3.355	2	Not significant
Marketing	9.053	2	Significant

Hypothesis testing

H_0 : relationship between male and female children's involvement in farming activities

Table 5 presents the chi-square analysis that shows a significant difference in male/female involvement in eight farming activities: land clearing ($\chi^2 = 13.265$), ridging ($\chi^2 = 19.163$), planting ($\chi^2 = 23.474$), staking ($\chi^2 = 10.889$), fertilizer application ($\chi^2 = 9.172$), harvesting ($\chi^2 = 26.000$), transport of produce ($\chi^2 = 11.607$) and marketing ($\chi^2 = 9.053$) at 0.05 level of significance.

This means that involvement in these activities will be higher with boys than with girls.

The result also indicated that there is no significant difference in male/female involvement in stumping, thinning, staking, herbicide application and processing. This implies that either male or female children are involved in these activities at the same rate or level.

Conclusion

The study revealed that majority of rural children combines both schooling and farming. It further revealed that rural parents in the study area not illiterates as majority of them completed secondary education. Despite the involvement of most of the rural children in farming, their level of involvement will not harm them, since it does not interfere with the schooling of most of the children. Most of them also spend less than 3 hours though; the average hour spent on farm is 3.6 hours. The study revealed that more males than females are involved in farming activities. The level of involvement of boys is also higher than that of girls, though, both boys and girls are involved in farming

activities at a medium level. Hence, this kind of involvement at low to medium level is encouraged depending on child's age as this will serve as means of acquiring basic survival skills that will prepare him for the future. However, no work should prevent the child from schooling.

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