

Out-migration prospects, Changing Values and Young People's Increasing Disinterestedness in Cocoa Farming in Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper engages the contradiction wherein in the face of unemployment in its several strands young people in cocoa farming communities in Southwest Nigeria exhibit strong aversion for farming activities. Anchored on Rational Choice Theory and Ethno-methodology the study adopted the qualitative data collection techniques including In-depth Interviews, Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions. Findings show that prospects for out-migration to urban centres to undertake other livelihood activities, perceived capital and labour intensity, low prestige and derogation ascribed to cocoa farming were identified as major reasons for dwindling interest of young people in cocoa farming. It is strongly recommended that government should reposition agriculture generally and cocoa farming in particular by creating a genuine enabling environment to reawaken the interest of young people to cocoa business.

Key words: Livelihood activities, Aversion for Cocoa farming, and Repositioned agriculture.

Background

Sub-Saharan Africa is notorious on many fronts. Apart from its grim demographic profile, the region accounts for the worst poverty index globally. In most of the countries, youth unemployment is not only pervasive but also a manifestation of persistent failure to address basic developmental issues by relevant authorities. Consequently, individuals devise strategies to overcome their economic powerlessness by engaging in a series of income generating activities. Cocoa farming in Southwest Nigeria, from which the country earned enormous amount of resources, was for decades embraced by the youth especially those with relatively low level of education. However, as recent studies have shown, many young people in Southwest Nigeria are increasingly exhibiting lack of interest in cocoa farming activities (Adeogun, Olawoye and Akinbile 2010; *Oboh* and Sani 2009). The high rate of attrition and the built in momentum defining youth disinterestedness in cocoa production underscores the urgency of this issue that poses a threat to continuity of cocoa farming in the region.

The implications of this lack of interest for revenue generation, succession planning and processes in the cocoa value chain and the unemployment scenario particularly in the absence of a viable alternative are unmistakable and cannot be overstated. Although cocoa is a major cash crop in Nigeria accounting for at least 34 billion Naira from export annually (Ibiremo 2011), the country's cocoa potentials are not fully harnessed mainly due to increasing shortage of manpower. Nigeria ranked fourth among cocoa producing countries in

2004 behind Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Indonesia (FAO 2004) and will likely drop if the interest of the youth, in cocoa farming, is not re-enchanted.

To be sure, the future of cocoa farming in Nigeria, just like any other profession, is largely dependent on how well youth are socialized to assume responsibility geared towards maintaining the status quo and/or improving on existing protocols. The situation is even more critical in Nigeria where the agricultural sector is characterized by an aging farming population (*Oboh et al.* 2009). The contradiction wherein even in the midst of overarching and persistent youth unemployment (National Bureau of Statistics 2010), cocoa farming is no longer considered an option in ameliorating individual and household financial difficulties by many indicates strong aversion for the profession, for which critical investigation has become particularly necessary. The objectives of this study is two-fold: (1) identify the factors influencing lack of interest among youth in cocoa farming; and (2) examine the factors that could attract youth back to cocoa farming.

A Brief Review

The factors impinging on the status of cocoa farming in Nigeria are multifaceted and largely determined by issues related to manpower needs. Lack of interest among Nigerian youth to engage in agriculture in the context of an aging farming population is an indication of poor succession framework (*Oboh et al.* 2009). As a result, the revenues accruable from the sector do not reflect the actual and potential abundance of human and material resources in Nigeria (*Oluyole et al.* 2013). Cocoa farming which was a major crop exported in the 1950s through early 70s and for which the country generated huge revenue declined substantially due to the neglect of the agricultural sector and overemphasis on oil exploration and exploitation (*Nwokocha* 2013; *Adeogun et al.*, 2010). Consequently, the revenues from cocoa became disappointingly low, explainable from the inability of the Nigerian cocoa industry to operate at optimum (*Ibiremo* 2011; *FAO* 2004).

Manpower shortages in African farms depict some level of incongruity given that the continent consists, mostly, of young people, what has been captured in the literature as 'Youth Bulge' (*Brooks and Zorya*, 2013), who are supposed to defray the human resource cost of competitive cocoa farming. Studies indicate that youth comprise about one-fifth of the total population in many countries in the developing world; approximately 65 percent of Africa's population is below age 35 (*Akinnifesi*, 2013; *Proctor and Lucchesi*, 2012). Presently, one-third of Africans which translates to 297 million people are aged 10-24 and estimated to rise to 561 million by 2050 (*Devlin*, 2011). As *Isiugo-Abanihe* (2011) observed,

the population of Nigeria is similar to what obtains on the continent wherein more than 60 percent of the people is in the age group 0-24 (see also ISERT 2014). This figure will increase substantially with the inclusion of youth at the upper age limit of 35.

Thus, well managed, Africa can harness the dividend of its youthful populations for transformative agriculture (Brooks and Zorya, 2013). However, nearly 75 million African youth are unemployed; estimates show that 24 percent youth unemployment exists in sub-Saharan Africa, where the situation is more intense (Akinnifesi, 2013; Proctor and Lucchesi, 2012). Yet, most of these youth are unwilling to engage in agriculture including cocoa farming thereby abandoning farm business to the elderly many of whom lack requisite energy and innovativeness to match the demands of contemporary agriculture (Brooks and Zorya, 2013). As Adeogun *et al.* (2010) noted, the dwindling cocoa-outputs in Southwest Nigeria a few years ago, as it were, could be explained by recourse to obsolete varieties and overaged trees, dropping from 300,000 twenty-five years ago to about 180,000 tons presently.

By leaving African farms in large numbers for cities, youth in Africa are contributing unwittingly to the food crisis confronting the continent and beyond, especially, in the face of increasing demand for food globally (FAO 2009). As has been estimated, by 2050 seven out of ten people worldwide will live in food-deficient countries (Oxfam 2011). Dealing with this impending emergency in the agricultural sector particularly cocoa farming would require active engagement of youth. However, the readiness of the sector as well as rural areas to re-attract young people is critical to the realization of this goal (Proctor and Lucchesi, 2012). It has been noted that attracting youth to agriculture and cocoa farming requires that the sector becomes more dynamic and appealing than it is presently on one hand, while young people will need to develop a positive attitude towards the sector than they do now (Institute of Development Studies 2012). In addition, adequate policy and investment intervention that focuses specifically on rural youth and on youth employment in agriculture (Proctor and Lucchesi, 2012) will be essential in attracting young people back to agriculture.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on the Rational Choice Theory (RCT) and Ethno-methodology – two sociological perspectives that emphasize the capacity of human actors to create and recreate their activities on the basis of their assessment of contexts and the likely benefits accruable from their actions. The Rational Choice Theory, for instance, credits individuals with the ability to weigh the merits and disadvantages of an intended action before taking such action which ought to derive from teleological ends or goals set by the prospective actor (Ritzer

2008; Friedman and Hechter 1988). The theory supposes that an actor who has the privilege of choice between alternative pathways to behaviour, in a given context, chooses an action considered more beneficial than the forgone activity, which is likely more costly. Indeed, the application of this perspective in everyday life makes meaning only if it is established that the actor understands fully the issues and intricacies surrounding each option.

Such awareness prepares the individual to take informed decisions that may be devoid of sentiments and biases. For instance, scholar in this tradition would be interested in ascertaining why and how the decision to abandon cocoa farming was reached by a young person who had been involved in that activity and what other options are being (or have been) considered and the likely advantage of the latter over the former on one hand. On the other, the reasons why youth who had never been involved in cocoa farming decide from the outset not to embrace that activity. If the major reasons or push factors for disinterestedness in cocoa farming are its inherent labour intensity and poor income, the perspective would assume that the perceived alternative should be less laborious and at the same time but with a higher income for the actor. Whether in reality such decisions are arrived at, in the long-run, after a careful cost-benefit analysis is outside the purview of this paper.

Ethno-methodology which has been adopted as a complementary model for explaining youth aversion for cocoa farming and the likely attempt at engaging in other activities shares similarities with Rational Choice Theory in many respects. Interpreted as the common-sense strategy (Haralambos, Holborn and Heald 2004), it describes how individuals adjust their actions in everyday interaction to cope with and/or overcome perceived or real challenges of life. The basis of strategizing is in an actor's perception of inherent weakness related to a system or activity and the possibility of overcoming some of these threats that may act as proxies for socioeconomic powerlessness. Abandoning or not venturing into cocoa farming among youth in Southwest Nigeria signifies some level of assessment that showcase the demerits of such activity and the likelihood of securing better rewards from other economic activities. In what follows, we present a conceptual framework that synthesizes the above perspectives diagrammatically.

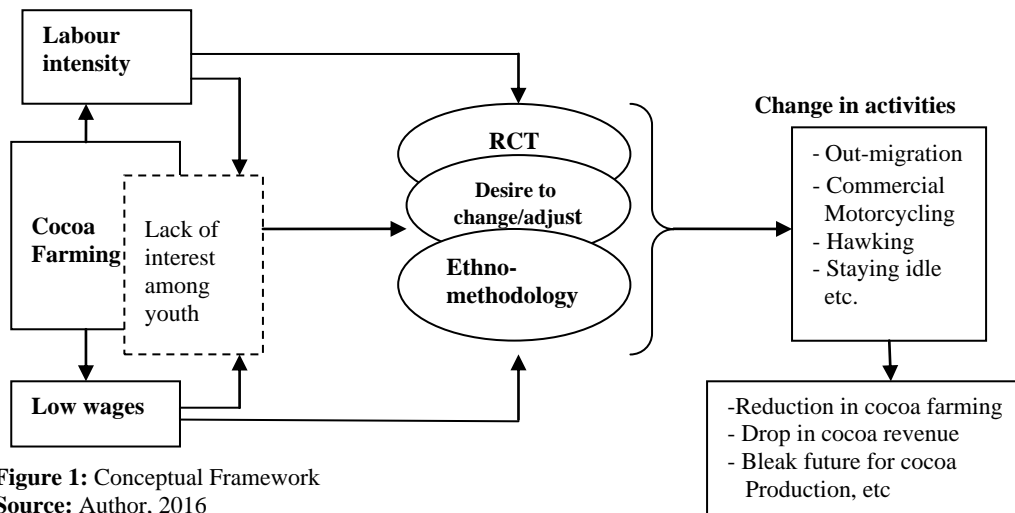


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Author, 2016

Figure 1 indicates that lack of interest in cocoa farming among young people, in the study area, may have resulted from several factors particularly its laboriousness and attendant low income that fuse tightly to discourage youth from involvement in cocoa farming. Consequently, the desire for change is considered legitimate and necessary for adequate adjustment to an increasingly competitive socioeconomic environment such as Nigeria. The framework also reveals that among the choices and common-sense strategies employed by youth are out-migration into cities for the purposes of engaging in other economic activities; involvement in commercial motor-cycling in and around rural communities despite inherent risks; hawking of wares along major highways and staying idle and without a defined means of livelihood, among others. The extent to which idleness as an option or rational choice for dealing with dissatisfaction arising from the perceived challenges of cocoa farming is debatable even though it may be an indication of a strong sense of repugnance related to cocoa production.

The effects of the above scenario on cocoa farming are clear both in the short and long runs. For the most part, apart from reduction in cocoa farming activities, in this case in Southwest Nigeria, mainly due to manpower related issues, revenues from the sector are dropping significantly. As a result, unless an intervention is introduced to stem the tide, the future of cocoa farming in Nigeria would remain bleak.

Materials and Methods

The study employed the qualitative method of data collection. A total of 32 In-depth and 14 Key Informant Interviews and 9 Focus Group Discussions were conducted among a wide range of stakeholders in cocoa producing communities of Osun and Ondo states in

Southwest Nigeria. Respondents and participants included youth, cocoa farmers, village elders and opinion leaders, members of farmers' association, staff of Non-Governmental Organizations and officials from relevant ministries. Data collection lasted for four weeks

The data were analyzed through ethnographic summaries and content analysis. The procedure began with the translation and transcription of tapes recorded during interviews and group discussions. Thereafter, the information was carefully examined, isolated by themes reflecting the specific objectives of the research and presented. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research. Respondents' consent was sought prior to their participation in the study. Their right to withdraw at any point and/or with-hold information perceived to impinge on their privacy was respected. Responses were treated with utmost confidentiality, to the extent that no aspect of information could be traced to any respondent. In addition, it was ensured that respondents did not experience any physical or psychological harm as a result of their participation in the study.

Results

Findings of this research are presented systematically in line with objectives of the study. To avoid unnecessary repetitions, we highlight views of respondents and participants that largely reflect the position of the majority on an issue.

Youth Disinterestedness in cocoa farming: Identified Factors

The issues identified as responsible for lack of or reduction in the interest of youth in cocoa business in Southwest Nigeria are several and linked to personal, ideational and social factors. In the views of one youth:

Most young people who grew up in cocoa farms and have known about cocoa farming are not interested in it because of the intense labour involved. It is not easy for school certificate holders or graduates to come to the farm and undertake physical labour as we do. Another problem is finance... acquiring a farmland is very expensive and not many can afford it. Substantial number of the farmers today inherited the land from their parents. In addition, a lot of money is also required to maintain the farm (*IDI/Youth/Apomu/Osun State*).

The above respondent highlighted multiple issues that may combine to engender youth disinterestedness in cocoa business. It therefore means that even without problematizing labour intensity, financial constraint and limited access to land are singly and jointly critical in defining the capacity of youth to embrace cocoa farming. As a result of these real or imagined challenges and some others, many young people are discouraged from striving to venture into cocoa business. As a youth interviewee stated:

Someone once told me that young farmers would not make any meaningful existence out of cocoa business... that the middlemen benefit extensively from the labour of young farmers most of who do not have several alternatives, (*IDI/Male Youth/Ijare/Ondo State*)).

With limited options for survival in some of these rural communities, an FGD participant stated, and in line with the views of other discussants, that:

A good number of youth want to work but no money and helper. You know before anyone can start cocoa farming, the person needs money and if he/she does not have money, it becomes extremely difficult to start off. It is frustrating when young people that decide to help farmers for some wages are owed for a long period; this does not encourage us..., (*FGD/Male Youth/Owo/Ondo State*).

Low wages received by some individuals working for cocoa farm owners may be a function of poor income accruable to farmers themselves. Consequently, beyond the fact that these wages are discouraging for young people engaged in farms in the interim, the perception that even as farm owners the financial benefits from cocoa farming will be marginal, in line with what currently exists, discourages youth from pursuing that career path. As was pointed out:

The wages farmers receive are very poor and this discourages the youth from participating in cocoa farming... the youth need money and they prefer jobs that can provide them with enough money. The youth prefer to work and live in the cities rather than in the village. This is because life in the village is boring due to the absence of social amenities. Other economic activities like trading, doing business, working in offices, among others have taken the place of youth participation in cocoa farming (*KII/Official of Ministry of Agriculture/Osogbo/Osun State*).

From the foregoing, it is easy to deduce that preference for other economic activities among youth in Southwest Nigeria is strongly related to changing values that manifest not only in increasing desire for money but also aversion for residing in rural areas, which is described as boring. Some other participants and respondents identified huge capital requirements needed to start-off cocoa farming as instructive in the apprehension expressed by young people towards cocoa business. The view was canvassed in a group discussion and as captured by one of the participants:

It takes determination to succeed in this business. Also, cocoa farming nowadays is capital intensive; how many of the youths have the capital to invest in it and wait for about three to five years before making profit. Therefore, because youths lack the necessary funding to sustain them for such a long period of time, they simply seek for any available alternative, (*FGD/Youth/Ijare/Ondo State*).

An IDI respondent corroborated the above view as well as highlighted issues related to tools and materials necessary for production and distribution of cocoa in relevant communities. He stated that:

Several people especially youth are discouraged from cocoa farming due to challenges related to farm inputs such as fertilizer, chemical and bad road connecting most cocoa

farms to bigger communities. Another thing is the level of manual labour involved... it is not easy at all, (*IDI/Youth/Apomu/Osun State*).

To exacerbate the worry about capital intensity, is the fact that returns on investment are not immediate but take a few years to materialize, which for a beginner, with limited resources, portends grave implications. To be sure, it is difficult to identify youth, particularly in rural communities of Nigeria known mainly for pervasive poverty that will muster enough fortitude to cope with several years of investment without income and/or profit. Coupled with the fact that the long-wait may not necessarily translate to affluence some of these youth indicate preference for other activities, as reflected in the following statement made by an interviewee:

Many young people in our community are running away from cocoa business but will prefer engaging in commercial motor cycling... some others out-migrate to urban centres at any opportunity even if it means not doing anything there... people would rather suffer the burden of unemployment in cities than return to or engage in cocoa farming (*IDI/Youth/Odigbo/Ondo State*).

The issue of occupational hazard was introduced into the discourse. An IDI respondent stated:

Cocoa farming involves a lot of risk... one may also sustain injuries in the process of weeding or applying chemicals which is quite discouraging (The respondent who is a youth and also a farmer displayed the foot injury which he sustained in his father's cocoa farm, while using cutlass), (*IDI/Youth/Ilesha/Osun State*).

Across the communities where this investigation was undertaken, the consensus was that youth are not participating in cocoa farming as much as they used to, in the past, for different personal, economic, perceptual, health and risks related reasons. To balance these responses, the views of other stakeholders on the likely reasons for the declining youth participation in agriculture, and cocoa farming in particular, are also presented. A cocoa farmer for instance argued that:

Many youth consider cocoa farm business as a dirty job. They say, how could they graduate and return to cocoa farm. But I keep telling them that cocoa may be a dirty job, but its money is not dirty... generally our youths are lazy. What they want is quick money. That is why you see most of them engaging in commercial motorcycling. They want daily money. They cannot wait for a year or six months. This is sheer madness. I think it is the height of impatience. Some will tell you 'there is nothing in cocoa, it is all suffering'. Someone said we are in the modern era and that it is slavery to be involved in extraneous labour in this generation, (*KII/Cocoa Farmers' Asso. Member/Apomu/Osun State*).

The major reason adduced by the respondent different from what youth themselves identified is laziness. To the extent that this viewpoint may be contested by many, another farmer highlighted issues related to low prices of cocoa and the attendant low motivation among

youth to partake in the business. In his words and in tandem with what a youth interviewee noted earlier, another cocoa farmer stated:

The people spoiling cocoa business are buyers that insist on paying low prices for our produce. Since we (farmers) are poor, any price the buyers want to buy we sell to them despite all our efforts all through the year. This can discourage youths from doing cocoa business. We, the elderly are doing cocoa business without visible achievements and with this, why should I expect my child to go into cocoa farming? When these young ones see how we parents are struggling with farming, they would definitely not be interested. When some of these young boys go outside the community, they see people riding big jeeps. How then do you expect them to be involved in this cocoa farming with a lot of suffering without anything to show for it? (IDI/Farmers' Association Leader/Owo/Ondo State).

To be sure, poverty among parents whether perceived or actual is a de-motivating factor in sustaining cocoa business among youth. We posit that affluence as a result of engagement in cocoa farming on the contrary would likely propel youth to take to farming irrespective of some of the reasons cited by many; a classic example of the end justifying the means or activities. The issue was further elucidated by an elder:

There are many reasons... you know nowadays majority of the youths go to school and they will tell you that they have degree and should not go into cocoa farming. For them educated people are to work in air-conditioned offices. They are so obsessed with this idea to the extent that even when they have no jobs they will prefer staying in the city to suffer. In the process some of them become frustrated and may go into crime, (IDI/Village Elder/Ijare/Ondo State).

The view on an NGO official in Owo summarizes the opinion of most respondents:

Cocoa is a cash crop which takes some years to produce and the youth of nowadays always want quick money. Second, youth believed cocoa production is tedious and if they take *Okada* (commercial motor-cycling), they can make between one and two thousand naira in few hours. Another factor is poverty. Many of the youth are from poor families. When cocoa farmers sell their produce, they don't get value for their produce. This is also why many of the youth move out of the communities to big cities like Lagos, (KII/NGO Staff/Owo/Ondo State).

Just as youth themselves observed, other stakeholders admitted that young people are either out-migrating to urban centres to undertake activities other than farm work or staying back but not involved in cocoa business as was the case.

Re-attracting youth back to the farms

A number of suggestions were proffered by different stakeholders, ranging from monetary to non-financial support. Some respondents expressed strong opinion about the important role that the provision of funds and other relief materials will play in encouraging youth to participate in cocoa farming and agriculture generally. As one respondent remarked:

Without money no endeavour in life is worth it. Give the youths money and they will return to the farm. In addition, I think government should provide them farmlands,

chemicals, and tractors among others; make life easy and comfortable for them. Nobody is a donkey, many countries have gone beyond manual labour but are now practicing mechanized agriculture. We are still struggling with cutlasses and hoes. We are not getting anywhere if we continue like this. Already we are being left behind in all manners of endeavours. Let our government wake up... *(IDI/Community Leader/Odigbo/Ondo State)*.

The import of the above statement is that given the right motivation in form of land, capital and machinery, young people in Southwest Nigeria would likely re-embrace cocoa farming.

Because the business is capital intensive, the government should assist by making soft loans available to youth who want to go into cocoa business. In addition to funds, it is recommended that government can even acquire large parcel of land, develop it and bring in youths to work on it and after several years ownership could be transferred to such youth. If this is done, our story will change for good, *(IDI/Youth/Ilesha/Osun State)*.

The preceding statement gives further insight into specific approaches that could be adopted in pulling youth towards cocoa farming. Others issues identified as expressed by respondents and participants in various locations are also presented. The views of group discussants which is largely captured by one of the participants is that:

Government should identify willing youths, give them special training to equip them before they come into the practical farming. But that is not enough; these set of youths should be provided with takeoff grants which they should be made to pay back after about five or six years, *(FGD/Community Leader/Modakeke/Osun State)*.

While it is accepted here that training and takeoff grants are important factors for perceptual and attitudinal change in favour of cocoa production particularly among the youth, the willingness of the latter to embrace the thematic agricultural activity defines the efficacy of other factors. Furthermore, another respondent reiterated the extent that creating an enabling environment could catalyze paradigm shift that will find expression not only in encouraging rural youth but also account for return-migration. He noted:

Since the government has farm settlements here and there that are not in good shape but look more like labour camp instead, it should provide all that would be required to make life meaningful there. The physical beauty of farm settlements and facilities therein should attract people outside to strive at becoming farmers, *(IDI/Man/Odigbo/Ondo State)*.

In addition, it was argued that:

Provision of fertilizers and chemicals for new entrants for about five years and improved seedlings free of charge, then people will know that government is serious. But when you ask them to return to farms and they meet the same conditions that had driven them away, definitely the call will fall on deaf ears, *(IDI/Elder/Apomu/Osun State)*.

Generally speaking, individuals in cocoa producing communities, irrespective of age groupings, agreed that unless there is marked change in young people's attitude towards

farming, the future of the profession, that once made Southwest Nigeria famous globally, is bleak and at best uncertain. In what follows, we discuss the issues as the basis for suggesting appropriate context-specific remedies.

Discussion and Recommendations

Findings of this study indicate that lack of interest to engage in cocoa farming is the main reason for dwindling youth involvement in the profession. Although very essential in bolstering attitude and behaviour, without creating or recreating facilitating environmental conditions to re-ignite the interest of youth, willingness will not translate to action. Therefore, sensitization campaigns towards perceptual change should be matched with attractive incentives. This will go a long way to ameliorating the effects of capital requirements and labour intensity that were identified by all categories of respondents and participants in the study locations. Granted that times are changing, Nigerians are known for hard work and industry and young people are expected to reproduce this level of diligence instead of proffering excuses that find expression in indolence. We recommend that advocacy messages for attitudinal reorientation should be designed carefully to chronicle in detail the failure of some youth in urban areas and the cases of their rural-based counterparts who had succeeded even in these remote areas.

Land is one resource that is in limited supply and therefore a major issue in analysing the factors underlying disinterestedness in agriculture not only among youth but also other categories of people. In the absence of land, a prospective cocoa farmer would hardly kick start farming activities. Unlike what obtained in the time past when land for agriculture was mainly inherited, increasing population of Nigerian families is now undermining the feasibility of exhibiting that aspect of intergenerational gesture which engendered continuity of agriculture as a profession. Thus, even when land is apportioned for inheritance, the large number of persons in households undermines the quantity of land that beneficiaries have access to. Hence, it is imperative for the government to make available to young people who show genuine interest in engaging in farming. This strategy will not only ensure that youth are self-employed but will also enable them engage other as employees since it is clear that government has not been able to employ every young Nigerian – a situation that has been compounded by the large number of this segment of the population in Nigeria (ISERT 2014; Akinnifesi 2013; Isiugo-Abanihe 2011)

In addition, considering that poverty is pervasive in most rural communities of Nigeria making soft loans, payable after 7 years, and take off grants, available to willing

youth will go a long way to defraying the cost of farming and sundry activities. This gesture will blend well with provision of improved seedlings, fertilizers and other inputs by relevant governments and agencies. This attractive package will largely guarantee that cocoa farmers have returns on investment within the shortest possible time. This twin advantage relates to bumper harvest and quick returns. Indeed, with these incentives in place, several young people will likely have a rethink. Starting on a strong footing and maintaining reasonable degree of focus will facilitate mechanization and less emphasis on intensive labour.

Changing values that manifests clearly in the quick-money syndrome which is driving so many youth away from agriculture is part of the youth-culture pervading Nigerian communities (Nwokocha 2012). This new reawakening that is mainly expressed in value reorientation towards challenging existing norms and values has led to involvement in activities that were hitherto outside the purview of everyday life in Nigerian communities. For instance, partaking in commercial motor-cycling is linked with enormous health and physical risks. Yet, just to be called an urban resident, some individuals are ready to be involved in it. Adjusting to urban life make take a long time or even not achieved. Nwokocha (2009) had described the consequences of unplanned rural to urban migration in an unregulated system such as Nigeria to include pressure on receiving families, increase in human and vehicular congestion among others.

In the days of cocoa boom in Southwest Nigeria, farm settlements were built to accommodate farm staff. Several decades after, the imperatives of building befitting farm settlements or revamping existing ones are still evident and will go a long way to encouraging youth to participate in cocoa farming. The main advantage of farm settlements is that occupants would not be distracted unnecessarily by events in conventional community; needless to say it engenders focus among farmers.

The activities of middle wo/men in the cocoa value chain have been linked to low prices of the crop. In an unregulated cocoa market such as Nigeria, buyers usually capitalize on the vulnerability of farmers to dictate the prices of the product, which are not determined by market forces. It is therefore imperative to reintroduce the Cocoa Board to once again guide the activities of stakeholders in cocoa business. Regulating the prices of cocoa, for instance, will ensure that farmers make profits that are commensurate with their efforts. That way, poverty among these farmers which is a major push factor for disinterestedness would largely be eliminated. When the farming environment is strengthened with facilities that protect the physical, social and psychological wellbeing of cocoa farmers, young people particularly unemployed youth will be attracted to farming.

Conclusion

Findings of this study have shown that young people in Southwest Nigeria over time lost interest in cocoa farming and agriculture generally due to perceived and actual consequences related to capital and labour intensity, long-waiting time between commencement of farming activities and returns on investment, ready alternative in form of out-migration, commercial motorcycling among others. With the dissolution of cocoa boards and the evolution of non-regulatory pricing regime, buyers dictated the prices of cocoa given the powerlessness that occasioned individualized pricing of the produce. In such circumstance, the prices of cocoa dropped in line with the aspirations of the middle men and women. Consequently, cocoa farming became synonymous with poverty and its concomitant effects.

This turn of events is tantamount to inability of these farmers to either maintain their farms or expand the area of coverage or establish new ones in the face of increasing family and household responsibility. The situation is worsened by the attitude of young people that denigrate the profession thereby limiting the manpower needs of the sector. Yet, young and energetic people are needed to undertake the demanding cocoa farming activities all season long. The long term effect of youth disinterestedness is in the fact that the future of cocoa business, which was once the mainstay of the South-western economy, is not only unpredictable but also bleak. Hence, deserved attention to this sector by relevant stakeholders has become increasingly necessary in order to resituate cocoa farming in the region.

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