



## Key Determinants of Youth Engagement in Agribusiness: Implications for Food and Nutrition Security in South East Nigeria

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### Abstract

*This study examines the key determinants influencing youth participation in agribusiness and their implications for food and nutrition security. This study was carried out in Abia and Ebonyi states. A mixed-method approach was adopted, incorporating surveys and in-depth interviews conducted in Abia and Ebonyi states. A total of 150 youths engaged in agribusiness activities were randomly selected across three agricultural zones in each state. Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, including logit regression analysis. Findings indicate that productive assets, education level, age, participation in agricultural programs, marital status, and access to credit, location, and training opportunities significantly influence youth engagement in agribusiness. In contrast, gender and attitude did not show significant effects. Notably, youth engagement in agribusiness was largely on a part-time basis, with a preference for off-farm activities due to resource constraints. The study highlights the need for policies that enhance access to capital, provide technical training, and improve youth perceptions of agribusiness. Increased youth engagement can enhance agricultural productivity, food availability, and economic stability, ultimately contributing to food and nutrition security. Addressing these barriers through targeted interventions can unlock the potential of youth in agribusiness and promote sustainable rural development.*

**Keywords:** Youth engagement, Agribusiness, Food security, Nutrition security.

### Introduction

Young people play a crucial role in the economic, social, and political advancement of both developed and developing nations, provided that effective and adaptive policies are implemented in line with population growth (Afoloabi, Danladi, & Ilugbusi, 2022). According to Adesina and Eforuoku (2018), a country's economic success is closely tied to the energy, capacity, and aspirations of its youth. In this study, *youth* refers to the transitional phase between childhood and adulthood. The United Nations (2015) and the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) define youth as individuals aged 15 to 24 years, although this group encompasses a wide range of educational backgrounds, social affiliations, ethnicities, and personal attributes. In Nigeria, the National Population Commission (NPC) estimates that nearly half of the population falls within the 15–34 age range (Akinwekomi, Obayelu, & Afolabi, 2017). However, Africa continues to face the highest global rates of total and youth unemployment, recorded at 20.8% and 10.6% respectively. Reflecting this trend, Nigeria's youth unemployment rate surged from 40.84% in Q2 to 53.4% in Q4, as reported by the National Bureau of Statistics (2020).

The agricultural sector in Africa continues to present significant employment opportunities for the growing youth population (Yami, Feleke, Abdoulaye, Alene, Bamba, & Manyong, 2019). In particular, agribusiness offers substantial potential, as it links agricultural production with related industries and services along the value chain. Previous studies (Roepstorff, Wiggins, & Hawkins, 2011; ILO, 2022; Mukembo *et al.*, 2015; Mwaura, 2017) emphasize the potential of this interconnected system to drive economic growth and create employment at multiple stages—ranging from production and processing to wholesale and retail.



Nigeria's youth are strategically positioned to play a transformative role in the revitalization and development of the agricultural sector. As Mwaura (2017) notes, involvement in agri-food-related activities spans a broad spectrum, including entrepreneurship, value chain engagement, policy formulation, and advocacy. Similarly, studies by Olokundun, Falola, Ibidunmi (2014); Mastewal *et al.* (2019); Adeyanju, Mburu, and Mignouna (2020); and Bello *et al.* (2021) affirm that the agricultural sector holds immense potential for creating jobs capable of improving living standards.

However, if youth are not fully integrated into the agricultural economy, the prospects for future economic growth and development may be significantly hindered (Adigun, Bamiro, & Oyetoki, 2017). The active participation of young people is essential for the social, political, and economic advancement of any nation, especially when supported by responsive and forward-looking policies that align with demographic trends (Adesina & Eforuoku, 2018).

Globally, scholars have studied factors affecting youth involvement in agriculture (see Anna, 2016; Eric, 2017; Akinwekomi, Obayelu, & Afolabi, 2017; Adeyanju and Mburu and Mignouna, 2020). However, few actual and effective approaches, institutions, and procedures exist. Youth involvement in agriculture is crucial, but experts may not regard it as a serious threat to long-term agricultural practices. With so few research on young people in agriculture, it's tough to figure out what works.

Despite the agricultural potential of South East Nigeria, there is a notable underrepresentation of youth engagement in agribusiness activities. This phenomenon is indicative of broader challenges surrounding youth engagement in the agricultural sector, which is compounded by factors such as limited access to land, finance, technical knowledge, and market opportunities. The lack of youth involvement not only hampers the region's agricultural productivity and economic growth but also poses significant implications for food and nutrition security. Understanding the key determinants influencing youth engagement in agribusiness is crucial for addressing these challenges and fostering sustainable development in the region. This study therefore aims to explore the various factors that drive the involvement of young individuals in agribusiness ventures, with a specific focus on the implications of these determinants to food and nutrition security in the South East region of Nigeria. By identifying barriers and enablers to youth involvement in agribusiness, this research can inform targeted interventions and policies aimed at unlocking the untapped potential of young people in the agribusiness sector.

### **Objectives:**

- i. Investigate the Nature and Extent of Youth engagement in Agribusiness Activities
- ii. Investigating key determinants of youth engagement in agribusiness ventures
- iii. Identifying Barriers and Facilitators of Youth Engagement in Agribusiness

### **Research Methods**

This study was carried out in Abia and Ebonyi States in Southeastern Nigeria. These states were purposively selected due to their predominantly agrarian economies and significant youth population engaged in agricultural activities. A multistage sampling technique was adopted. First, three agricultural zones were randomly selected from each of the two states. Within each zone, simple random sampling was used to select 75 youth respondents, resulting in a total sample size of 150 youths. This sampling strategy ensured that a diverse and representative subset of the youth involved in agribusiness across different zones of the study area was included.

The study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches: Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires designed to elicit information on the determinants, types, challenges, and implications of youth engagement in agribusiness. Qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews with key informants to gain a

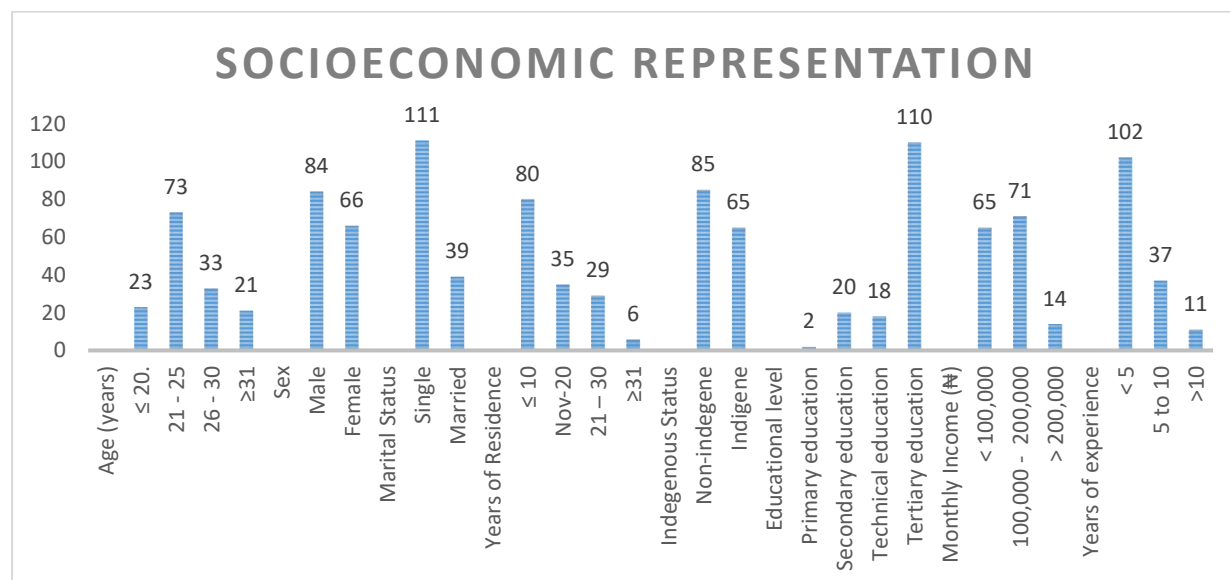
deeper understanding of youths' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward agribusiness and its implications for food and nutrition security. Closed-ended questionnaire measuring socioeconomic characteristics, level of participation in agribusiness, perceived benefits, challenges, and determinants of involvement and semi-structured interviews that focused on nuanced perspectives about agribusiness engagement and the broader implications for food and nutrition security was used

Frequencies and percentages were used to describe demographic characteristics such as age, education, income level, and nature of agribusiness activities. Mean scores were used especially in evaluating the attitudes of youths toward agribusiness using Likert-scale responses. Attitudinal statements were ranked using mean values derived from a 5-point Likert scale. Statements with higher mean scores indicated stronger agreement or positive attitudes towards agribusiness. This analysis helped determine the general disposition of youths toward agribusiness and identified areas for potential policy intervention. A logit regression model was employed to identify the determinants of youth participation in agribusiness. This model was chosen due to the binary nature of the dependent variable (participation or non-participation) which were specified as follows:

Dependent variable: Youth participation in agribusiness (1 = participant, 0 = non-Independent variables: Gender, age, marital status, education, access to productive assets, access to credit, agricultural program participation, attitude, training and development, location, and perceived costs/benefits. The regression model was tested for goodness-of-fit and overall significance to ensure validity. Although specific metrics such as pseudo- $R^2$  or likelihood ratio tests were not explicitly stated, the interpretation indicated that the model provided a statistically acceptable fit.

## Results and Discussion

**Fig.1: Socioeconomic Characteristics of Youth in Agribusiness**

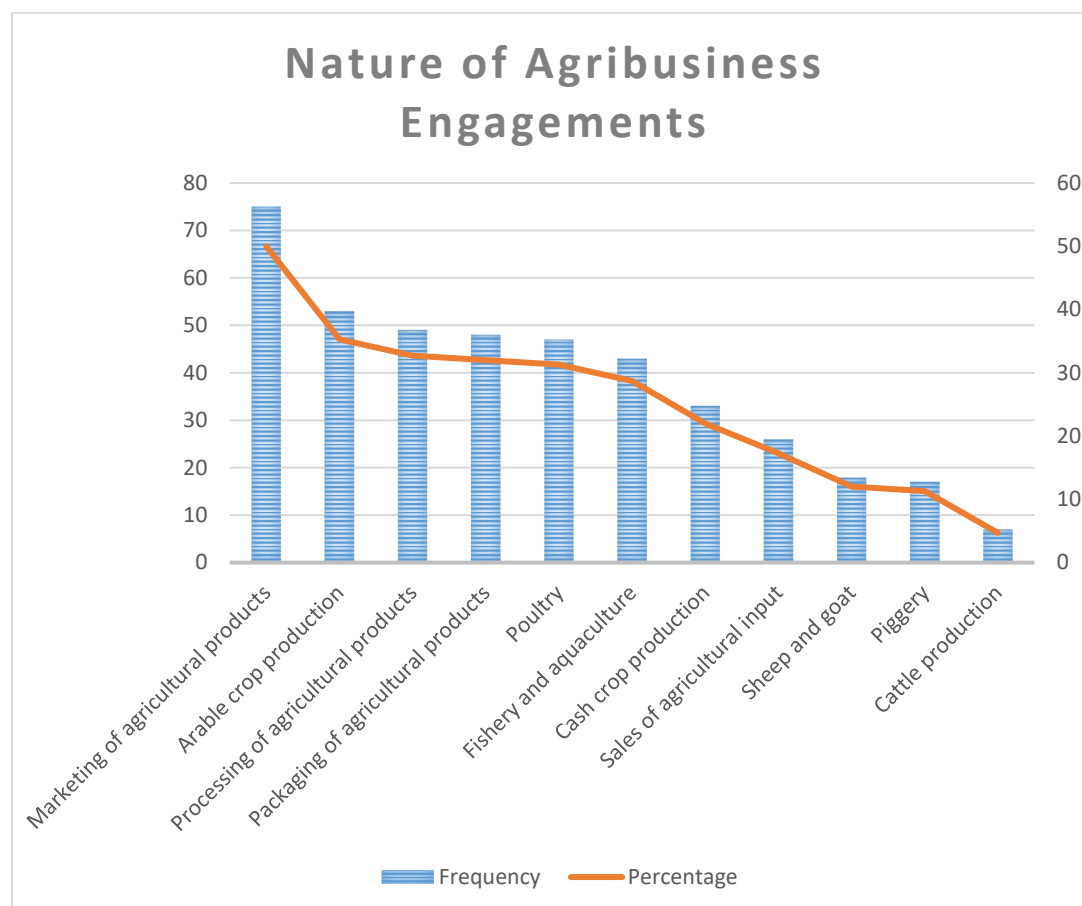


These results suggest a young, transient, and relatively educated population with limited work experience and low income. The implications highlight potential challenges in economic stability and job security, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to enhance employment opportunities, skill development, and income-generating activities for young individuals in the region.

This result agrees with the assertions of (Adeyanju, 2019), the age of youths, and other variables such as availability to training, land, and credit have a positive substantial effect. Also, Nwafor *et al.* (2016) noted that education is an important socio-economic factor that influences farmers' decision because of

its influence on the farmer's awareness, perception, reception and the adoption of innovation that can bring about increase in production.

**Fig.3: Nature of agribusiness activities**



It is evident from this observation that off-farm agribusiness activities are more popular among the youth in the study area than on-farm activities like livestock and cash crops production, which might be due to lack of access to productive resources (land and capital) and high risk involved in primary production activities. The finding implies that the agricultural sector of the economy has a lot of agribusiness opportunities that could absorb the teeming population of unemployed youths if well-focused by the three tiers of government in Nigeria. This is similar to the submission of Nwaogwugwu and Obele (2017) and Enugwu *et al.* (2022) who reported that crop production, agricultural marketing, livestock farming and processing were the dominant agribusiness activities among youth in Nigeria.

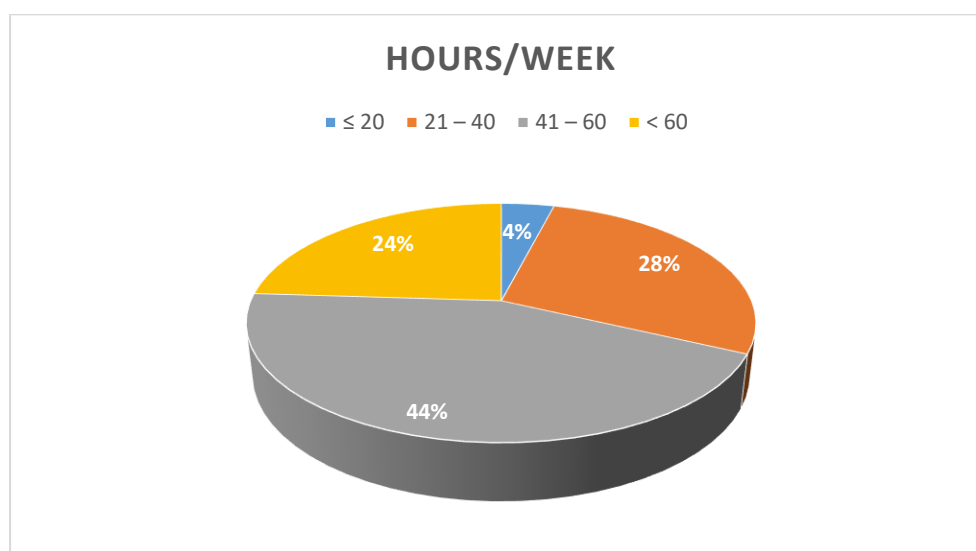
**Table 1: Attitude of Youths towards agribusiness activities**

Variables	Ranked mean
Agribusiness can help reduce the rate of unemployment	4.74
Agribusiness activities are a way to reduce poverty and hunger	4.69
Agribusiness can solve the problem of food shortage	4.57
Youth participation in agribusiness will increase agricultural productivity	4.51
Agribusiness does not benefit youths	4.44
Agribusiness is not for the youths	4.37
Agribusiness is a lucrative business	4.05
Agribusiness cannot increase the standard of living of participants	4.03
Agribusiness strengthens the link between agricultural stakeholders	3.93

There is no steady employment in agribusiness	3.77
Agribusiness is concentrated in agrarian communities	2.61
Agribusiness is capital intensive	1.74

These findings imply a need for policies that address financial barriers, change youth perceptions, and create sustainable agribusiness opportunities to harness its full potential in tackling unemployment and food security challenges. The fact that a larger proportion of the youth had a positive disposition to agribusiness activities suggests that there is high potential in agribusiness activities in providing job opportunities and stable income as well as reducing food insecurity if they can be harnessed by relevant stakeholders and government to sustain the interest of the youth through the creation of enabling environment and building their capacity building. This is similar to the findings Mulema *et al.* (2021) who submitted that the majority of youths in Zambia had a positive disposition that the agricultural sector had high potential in contributing to their livelihoods but contradict the findings of Udemezue (2019) that the majority of the youth in Africa had an indecisive attitude to agricultural sectors

**Fig.4: Youth Participation in agribusiness activities**



This implies that the majority of the respondents spent less than 8 hours in agribusiness activities per day that is, they were participating in agribusiness activities on a part time basis. It can be deduced that although many of the youths in agribusiness activities were owners of their businesses they engaged in it on a part-time basis, implying that they could be engaging in other livelihood and income generating activities. This conforms to the findings of Kising’U (2016) who reported that the majority of the respondents did not consider agricultural value chain as a full-time occupation but contradicts the findings of Mulema *et al.* (2021) who reported that the majority of the youth who engaged in agribusiness activities in Zambia and Vietnam took them as their primary occupations.

Due to the demanding and often unattractive nature of agricultural work, many young people in Nigeria are increasingly disinterested in pursuing careers in agriculture. Although they possess qualities that could significantly benefit the sector, their enthusiasm remains low. This disinterest stems largely from the perceived lack of long-term career prospects within the agricultural industry. As a result, the future of agriculture is at risk, with fewer youths choosing to engage in it. Rural areas, where agricultural opportunities are most prevalent, often fail to provide the incentives, economic prospects, and living conditions that appeal to young people. Furthermore, despite the sector’s vast potential, ineffective policies and regulatory frameworks continue to discourage youth involvement in the agricultural economy.





## Determinants of Youth participation in Agribusiness

Table 2: Logit Regression

Variables	Coefficient	Robust Std Error	P-Value	Marginal Effect
Gender	-0.017	0.026	0.507	-0.311
Productive assets	4.711	1.032	0.002	0.287
Level of formal education	0.261	0.012	0.000	0.178
Age	0.489	0.21	0.032	0.256
Agricultural program	0.254	0.111	0.012	0.222
Attitude of youth	-0.232	0.289	0.441	-0.199
Marital status	0.391	0.016	0.001	0.276
Access to credit facilities	0.621	0.289	0.004	0.512
Perceived benefits/costs	0.521	0.446	0.293	0.207
Location	0.498	0.287	0.099	0.432
Training and development	0.454	0.175	0.022	0.211

Table 2 shows the estimated determinants of youth engagement in agriculture. The model's coefficient and marginal effect estimate are used to explain why youth participate in agribusiness. However, the marginal effect explains probability model magnitude better than the coefficient. Because the marginal effect determines the direction and extent of the probable influence of young people's participation or non-participation. Thus, the marginal effect is utilized to explain the model's results. Table 3 shows that the provided model is compatible and best fit for the model utilized in the study.

The results indicate that several factors significantly influence youth engagement in agribusiness, which has direct implications for food and nutrition security. Productive assets (4.711,  $p = 0.002$ ), level of formal education (0.261,  $p = 0.000$ ), age (0.489,  $p = 0.032$ ), participation in agricultural programs (0.254,  $p = 0.012$ ), marital status (0.391,  $p = 0.001$ ), access to credit facilities (0.621,  $p = 0.004$ ), location (0.498,  $p = 0.099$ ), and training and development (0.454,  $p = 0.022$ ) all show significant positive effects on youth engagement in agribusiness. These findings suggest that increasing access to productive resources, education, financial support, and training opportunities can enhance youth involvement in agribusiness, leading to improved food production and supply. This agrees with Adigun, Bamiro and Oyetoki, (2017) who noted that if young do not fully participate in agriculture, future economic growth, development and food security would be severely hampered. They observed that unsustainable agricultural methods have led to low agricultural output in Nigeria is a major cause of food insecurity and scarcity. Adeyanju (2019) argues that the low productivity of Nigerian farmers is due to reasons such as unpredictable funding sources, lack of machinery, lack of training and development, and land scarcity.

It has been observed that fewer young people use improved input, forcing them to farm subsistence. Also, most youngsters do not own or control crucial assets in agricultural production, such as land. This is in line with the assertions of Adesina and Eforuoku (2018), that young farmers use inefficient agricultural inputs, resulting in low yields and a reduced inclination to participate in agribusiness also, Akinwekomi, Obayelu, and Afolabi (2017) opined that absence of agricultural programs, technology, agro-processing skills, and training and development workshops have all hindered young engagement in agribusiness. Having access to a startup fund is critical to every business endeavour, since it can determine whether or not it will succeed. Capital is required to establish any business and is vital in agriculture (Anna, 2016). The results is consistent with the findings of Njeru (2016) who found a statistically significant positive association between the selected factors: youth access to land, finances, and markets, and youth perception of agriculture. The research used regression analysis.



Conversely, gender ( $-0.017$ ,  $p = 0.507$ ), attitude of youth ( $-0.232$ ,  $p = 0.441$ ), and do not show significant effects, indicating that while social perceptions and demographics may play a role, they are not the primary drivers of agribusiness engagement. However, the negative marginal effect of youth attitudes ( $-0.199$ ) suggests that unfavorable perceptions about agribusiness could hinder participation, potentially reducing the workforce needed to enhance agricultural productivity.

In relation to food and nutrition security, these findings imply that targeted policies should focus on improving access to capital, providing technical training, and strengthening agricultural programs to encourage youth participation in food production. Enhanced engagement in agribusiness can lead to higher agricultural productivity, increased food availability, and improved income levels, ultimately reducing hunger and malnutrition. Addressing barriers such as access to credit and improving perceptions of agribusiness can further ensure a sustainable food system that supports both economic and nutritional well-being.

### Policy Implications

1. Agribusiness Has High Potential for Youth Employment and Economic Growth – The study confirms that agribusiness can significantly reduce unemployment and poverty among youth by providing sustainable livelihood opportunities.
2. Limited Access to Resources Hinders Youth Participation – Challenges such as inadequate access to land, capital, credit facilities, and productive assets prevent young people from fully engaging in agribusiness.
3. Education and Training Enhance Youth Engagement – Formal education, skill development, and participation in agricultural programs positively influence youth involvement in agribusiness, making knowledge acquisition a key driver of success.
4. Perceptions and Attitudes toward Agribusiness Influence Participation – While many youths have a favorable attitude toward agribusiness, negative perceptions and uncertainty about profitability and job stability still discourage full-time engagement.
5. Youth Prefer Off-Farm Agribusiness Activities – Due to financial and resource constraints, most youth engage in agribusiness-related activities such as processing, marketing, and value addition rather than primary production.
6. Agribusiness Plays a Crucial Role in Food and Nutrition Security – Increased youth engagement in agribusiness leads to improved agricultural productivity, better food availability, and enhanced dietary diversity, contributing to overall food security.
7. Targeted Policies and Support Systems Are Needed to Enhance Youth Participation – Governments and stakeholders must implement policies that improve access to credit, land, training, and market opportunities to ensure that agribusiness remains attractive and viable for young people.

### Conclusion

This study underscores the significant role of agribusiness in addressing unemployment, poverty, and food insecurity while highlighting the key determinants influencing youth engagement in the sector. Findings reveal that access to productive assets, education, agricultural programs, credit facilities, and training opportunities are crucial enablers of youth participation in agribusiness. However, challenges such as financial constraints, limited land access, and negative perceptions hinder full-time involvement. The predominance of part-time engagement suggests the need for targeted interventions that create an enabling environment for sustainable youth participation. By improving access to resources, strengthening agribusiness policies, and promoting skill development, youth engagement can be enhanced, leading to increased agricultural productivity, economic stability, and improved food and nutrition security. Addressing these barriers will not only empower young people but also contribute to the broader goal of a resilient and sustainable food system in Nigeria.



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