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Gendered aspiration among rural youths in agriculture: Implications for food security in Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research investigates gendered aspirations among rural youths in agriculture and examines their implications for food security in Delta State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted to compose a sample focusing on understanding the distinct aspirations of male and female youths in the agricultural sector. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 200 respondents and interview conducted for this study. Data generated from the study were processed and analyzed with percentages of their educational qualifications and age groups, and the hypothesis was tested with t-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance. The research reveals nuanced differences in the aspirations of male and female rural youths, shedding light on factors influencing their aspirations in agriculture, such as educational level, age group, access to resources, and societal expectations. Findings indicate that 61.50% majority were female while 38.50% were male. At the same time, both gender express a keen interest in contributing to the agricultural sector. There are significant differences between young men and women as young women expressed more aspirations in agriculture than young men, directly impacting food security as inequality of young men and women's participation and involvement will affect availability and access to food. Based on these findings, it was recommended that Delta State government should promote the active involvement of young men and women in leadership roles within agricultural organizations and decision-making processes; this can contribute to more inclusive policies and strategies that address the gendered aspects of agricultural aspirations.

Keywords: Gendered Aspiration; Rural; Youth; Agriculture; Delta State.

1. Introduction

Rural youth engagement in agriculture is pivotal for sustainable development, particularly in ensuring global food security. Any nation's youth are its greatest asset. They are the most valuable resources available to any country. They possess attractive traits supporting crop, animal, and fish production (Umaru, 1992; Owigho et al., 2023). However, gendered aspirations within this demographic can significantly influence participation and success in the agricultural sector (Peter, 2019). Gendered aspiration in agriculture refers to the differentiated goals, expectations, and opportunities individuals in rural settings hold based on gender. This phenomenon is deeply ingrained in societal norms, often influencing young women's career choices and trajectories in the agricultural sector. Gendered aspirations are molded by societal expectations and traditional roles assigned to men and women in rural communities (Smith, 2020). In many cultures, agriculture is historically seen as a girl-dominated profession, shaping aspirations from a

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young age. However, young women may encounter barriers due to entrenched gender norms, limiting their perceived roles in farming. Young women tend to engage in agriculture than young men and take careers in farming, especially in rural communities (Smith, 2020). Access to education plays a pivotal role in shaping aspirations.

Research shows that limited educational opportunities for young girls in rural areas contribute to lower aspirations and hinder their ability to engage in agriculture-related careers. Unequal access to education perpetuates gendered disparities in skills and knowledge necessary for agricultural pursuits. This knowledge and skill can be imparted through seminars, workshops, and conferences that can improve their aspiration toward agriculture (Jones, 2018). Disparities also influence gendered aspirations in access to resources. Young men may face challenges such as limited land availability, while young women often struggle to secure access to credit and inputs (World Bank (2023)). Unequal access to these resources can hinder the realization of aspirations and impede overall agricultural productivity. It is pertinent for states and nations to recognize and appreciate the potential of young men and women in their contribution to agricultural development.

In Delta State, Nigeria, youth engagement in agriculture has emerged as a critical component in pursuing sustainable agricultural development. Various factors, including economic opportunities, government interventions, and the evolving perceptions of agriculture among the youth, shape this engagement.

The Delta State government has implemented several initiatives to encourage youth involvement in agriculture. According to Eromedoghene, et al (2023), the Youth Agricultural Entrepreneurs Programme (YAEP), launched in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, offers training, financial support, and mentorship to young individuals seeking to establish agribusiness ventures. This programme has played a pivotal role in fostering a positive outlook on agriculture as a viable and lucrative career option for the youth, which will set the pace for career actualization in the agricultural development of communities in Delta State (Huttunen, 2019). Moreover, the economic potential of agriculture has become increasingly evident, influencing the attitudes of Delta State's youth. The agribusiness sector offers diverse opportunities, from crop cultivation to livestock farming, presenting a spectrum of career choices for young individuals (Delta State Ministry of Agriculture. (2020)). The era has come for young people to show more concern and engage in agricultural practices that will yield more food for society. The impact of young men and women in farming can be seen in their aspiration and determination to support the adult individuals who are reducing their farming strength (Flanigan et al. 2015).

Despite these positive developments, challenges persist. Access to capital and resources remains a significant barrier for many youth ventures. The need for more inclusive financial mechanisms and targeted support programmes is underscored by studies such as (Qing, 2020), which highlighted the importance of addressing financial constraints to ensure sustained youth engagement in agriculture. Based on these facts, the study's specific objectives were to:

- Determine the difference between male and female based on their aspirations in agriculture.
- Examine factors that influence gendered aspirations in agriculture.

1.1. Research Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between male and female aspiration in agriculture.

2. Methodology

2.1. The Study Area

The study was conducted in Isoko North, Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. Isoko North is one of the twenty-five local government areas in Delta State. The location of Isoko North LGA is 5.00°E and 6.00°E and 7.09° and 8.00°S. The estimated population is 144,155 (National Population Commission, 2022). Isoko North Local Government Area shares boundaries with to the Southwest, Isoko South Local Government Area to the South, the West Ughelli North Local Government Area, the North Ndokwa West Local Government Area, and the East Ndokwa East Local Government Area, all in Delta State. The LGA comprises 13 clans: Ozoro, Ellu, Okpe-Isoko, Iyede, Ofagbe, Aradhe, Owhelogbo, Emevor, Otorowhe, Bethel, Ovrode, Oyede and Otor-Iyede. The Area is low-lying, with no noticeable hills or mountains and fertile land suitable for agriculture. The annual rainfall is over 2000mm, and the temperature ranges between 280c and 340c. The relative humidity is very high, over 80%. There are two main seasons – the dry season (November- March) and the rainy season (April-October). Major crops grown include oil palm, cassava, rubber, pineapple, cocoyam, yam, citrus, pepper, plantain/banana, coconut, potato, groundnut and cocoa. The Area was helpful in this study because it provided the needed information.

2.2. Sampling Procedures

The study adopted a multi-stage sampling procedure. Four (4) clans were randomly selected out of 13 clans using the ballot system in the Isoko North Local Government Area. Four communities were also randomly selected from each of the four clans. In the third and final stage, 5 percent of the rural households were selected from each community. A total of 200 respondents were selected and used for the study.

2.3. Method Of Data Collection

The study used a gendered questionnaire to collect information from the respondents. It contains two parts. Part one contained information on men aspiration in agriculture. Part two elicits information on women aspiration in agriculture. The study also adopted interview methods, which enabled the researcher to have knowledge about their goals, determination, ambition, and expectations in agriculture, which can set the pace for food security. The questionnaire utilized a Likert scale with options such as SA (strongly Agree), A(Agree), D(disagree), and N(Neutral) to measure respondents' goals, desires, determination, ambition, expectations, and perceptions in agriculture. Method Of Data Analysis. The data obtained from the study were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, and mean) and *t*-test inferential statistics using SPSS version 25.0.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Age Distribution of Respondents

The result in Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of respondents across different age groups in the study. The results reveal that the mean age of the respondents was 31 years, which indicates that they are still in an active stage. The majority of the rural youth were (42.50%) in 31-36 years age group, followed by (32.50%) between 18-24 years and (25.00%) were between 22-30 years, respectively. This finding agrees with Owigho et al. (2023), who stated that the average age of organic farmers was between 25 and 32 years (43%).

Table 1 Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percent	Mean
18 - 24	65	32.50%	
25 - 30	50	25.00%	
31 - 36	85	42.50%	31 years
Total	200	100	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

3.2. Educational Qualifications

The results in Table 2 showed the respondents' education level; most young people had completed some formal schooling. Critical points of interpretation include: 41.50% of the respondents have the FSLC qualification, and 35.00% have the GCE/SSCE qualification. 21.00% possess a B.Sc/HND degree. Only 2.50% of respondents have a Master's degree. This is in contrast with the findings of Shehu, Yusuf, and Egwuma (2021) and Eromedoghene et al. (2023), who stated that most youths in rural areas were more educated.

Table 2 Frequency Distribution for Educational Qualifications

Education Qualification	Frequency	Percent
FSLC	83	41.50%
GCE/SSCE	70	35.00%
BSc/HND	42	21.00%
MASTERS	5	2.50%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

3.3. Gender

The result in Table 3 reveals the gender distribution among rural youth aspiration in agriculture. Majority, 61.50%, were female, while 38.50% were male. This indicates that the female gender had more aspiration than the male in agriculture in the study area. This is in line with the findings of Odjebor et al.,(2022) and Owigho et al. (2023) who stated that female were more involved in farming activities than male, and the higher proportion of female participation in farming showed that female gender were more aspired in agriculture than male among rural youths in the study area.

Table 3 Frequency Distribution for Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	77	38.50%
Female	123	61.50%
Total	200	100

3.4. Factors Affecting Gender Aspiration in Agriculture

The result in Table 4 shows the factors affecting gender aspiration in agriculture, which includes.

Access to education and resources are significant factors, with 35.15% and 33.17% frequencies, respectively, indicating their substantial impact on gender in agriculture, Societal norms, at 14.42%, highlight the influence of cultural expectations on career choices and Age, at 13.46%, suggests that generational differences play a modest role, but evolving perspectives across age groups contribute to gender aspirations in agriculture.

Table 4 Factors Affecting Gender Aspiration in Agriculture

Factors Affecting Gender Aspiration	Frequency	Percent
Access to Resources	69	33.17%
Access to Education	73	35.15%
Societal Norms	30	14.42%
Age	28	13.46%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

3.5. Testing Of Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between male and female aspiration in agriculture.

The test adopted a t-test with two samples of unequal variances at a 0.05 significance level.

Table 5 The test of Significant Difference between Male and Female Aspiration in Agriculture T-test for two Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

	Male	Female
Mean	2.129032258	2.97761194
Variance	0.737176097	8.217540119
Observations	62	134
Hypothesised Mean Difference	0	
Df	175	
t Stat	3.136122376	

P(T<=t.) one-tail	0.001004307	
t Critical one-tail	1.653607438	
P(T<=t.) two-tail	0.002008614	
t Critical two-tail	1.973612422	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

In Table 5, the computed t-test value (3.17) was more significant than the critical value, t-critical (1.97), with the degree of freedom of 175 at 0.05 significance level. Consequently, the hypothesis was rejected, meaning a significant difference exists between male and female agriculture aspirations. The above findings were in consonance with the assertion of Ureigho (2018); Smith (2020) and Owigho et al., (2023), who opined that young women often have a more positive perception and enthusiasm towards farming than young men. They tend to engage in agriculture than young men and take up farming careers, especially in rural communities. Young women may show more aspiration in agriculture due to evolving societal norms, increased education opportunities, and awareness campaigns promoting gender equality. As traditional gender roles shift, women are more empowered to pursue diverse career paths. Additionally, agricultural programmes highlighting the importance of women in the sector may inspire greater interest. This trend reflects a positive shift towards inclusivity and equal opportunities for women in traditionally male-dominated fields (FAO,2016).

4. Conclusion

The gendered nature of agricultural aspirations has direct implications for food security. When certain groups are excluded or face barriers to pursuing agricultural careers, the pool of talent and expertise in the sector is limited. Achieving food security requires dismantling these barriers to ensure the full participation of all individuals, regardless of gender. These gendered aspirations can have direct implications for food security. When one gender is disproportionately represented or restricted in specific roles, it limits the diversity of skills and perspectives in the agricultural sector. This, in turn, may hinder innovation and productivity. For specific instances, as shown in the study, female have expressed more aspirations in determination, desire, perception, and role. Youth engagement in agriculture in Delta State reflects a dynamic interplay of economic opportunities, governmental interventions, and changing perceptions. While initiatives like the YAEP have contributed to positive shifts, addressing challenges such as access to resources is crucial for ensuring the continued and sustainable involvement of the youth in the agricultural sector.

There is a remarkable difference in gendered aspiration in agriculture. Females expressed more aspirations than males. Female aspirations include determination, desire, ambition, and preemption. Understanding and addressing gendered aspirations among rural youth in agriculture are imperative for achieving food security. Efforts to promote equal opportunities, challenge traditional gender roles, and highlight successful initiatives can contribute to a more inclusive and productive agricultural sector. It is worth noting that gendered aspirations in agriculture are deeply rooted in societal norms, educational opportunities, access to resources, and cultural stereotypes. Addressing these factors is essential for creating an inclusive agricultural sector that harnesses young men's and women's full potential, ultimately contributing to enhanced food security.

Recommendations

Based on the study, the following recommendations were made:

The government should encourage and support initiatives that ensure equal access to agricultural education for both male and female rural youths in Delta State. This can empower them with the necessary skills and knowledge, fostering gender equality in the agricultural sector.

The youth of Delta State should advocate for and participate in developing and implementing policies that consider the specific needs and challenges faced by both genders in agriculture. This can create an environment conducive to diverse aspirations and contributions.

Delta State government should design skill development programs tailored to the specific needs and interests of both male and female youths in agriculture. This can enhance their capabilities and increase their contribution to the agricultural sector.

The Delta State government should promote the active involvement of young men and women in leadership roles within agricultural organizations and decision-making processes. This can contribute to more inclusive policies and strategies that address the gendered aspects of agricultural aspirations.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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