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SMALL-SCALE FOOD CROPS PRODUCTION AS A VERITABLE TOOLS FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN SOUTH-SOUTH RURAL HOUSEHOLDS, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The main objective of the study was to analyze the mean percentage contributions of food crops farmers' sources of annual incomes. 384 respondents were obtained using multi-stage sampling procedures and data were collected with the aid of structured questionnaires. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study area was dominated by male gender households head having family size of 11 persons. Most respondents were well experienced in farming with secondary educational level and with aged farmers. The mean annual incomes of ₦39,066.67 ($102.48) revealed that respondents were poor. Food crops production contributed 31.0% income to the total annual incomes which was quite substantial. Most food crops grown were cassava, maize and yam. Major constraints of respondents were lack of money and flooding. The study recommends that greater focus should be given to food crops production as it can be used as veritable tools for poverty alleviation.

KEY WORDS
Alleviation, crops, small-scale, tools, poverty, rural households.

Poverty was defined by Aderonmu (2010) as the deficient of command over necessary consumption needs. Agwu and Kadiri (2014) defined "poverty as a state when the resources of families or individual persons are not sufficient to give an acceptable social standard of living". Uma and Eboh (2013) asserted that poverty in developing countries such as Africa countries is chronic, massive and pervasive, affecting greater portions of the African societies.

Awotide et al, (2015) reported that most farmers cultivated food crops such as maize, cowpea, cassava and yam in Nigeria. Emaziye (2020) stated that cassava, yam and maize were the most common food crops grown in Delta State, Nigeria. Onyenwoke and Simonyan (2014) stated that one of the important food crop grown in Nigeria and globally is cassava. Also Ferraro et al., (2015) reported that Yam (*Dioscorea spp.*) and Cassava (*Manihot esculenta*) were tropical crops consumed by about two billion people which represent main source of carbohydrate and energy for about 700 million persons in the sub-tropical regions. Surajo et al., (2018) reported that the serious phenomenon in Nigeria is poverty that affects Nigerian population leaving the country as one of the poorest country globally.

World Bank (2015) stated that poverty status is measured using economic dimension based on consumption and income. Yalogama and Chilesha (2016) stated that "Poverty reduction programmes globally were aimed at alleviating poverty of the vulnerable communities and the poor through community-demand-driven and participatory strategies. Singh and Chudasama (2020 reported that poverty reduction strategies need to be adopted simultaneously for a comprehensive poverty reduction driven.

Hussaini (2014) reported that "since Nigeria Independence the struggle against poverty has been a central focus of development planning but development programmes aim to reduce poverty were either abandoned or neglected completely by successive government in Nigeria". Nkwede (2014) stated that "issues of poverty have been a lot of concern to both private individuals and successive administrations in Nigeria but various efforts to reduce poverty has not yielded the required results".

Taiwo and Agwu (2016) stated that poverty reduction programmes by NGOs and government were not successful in addressing poverty reduction but rather a means of looting the public coffers. Singh and Chudasama (2020) stated that some degrees of strategies were needed to compliment the series of approaches to poverty reduction that needs urgent implementations. United Nations Development Programme (2014) affirmed that capabilities' approach is needed for measurement of poverty.

Food crops production would bridge the gap between poverty and rural households in South-South, Nigeria.

Objectives of the study:

- Examine the socio-economic characteristics of food crops farmers;
- Examine the food crops farmers annual income;
- Evaluate food crops farmers sources of income;
- Determine food crops farmers enterprises;
- Analyze mean percentage contribution of sources of annual incomes;
- Examine the constraints of food crops farmers.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

The South-south geopolitical zones of the country Nigeria is made up of Six states namely rivers, Edo, Delta, Cross River, Bayelsa and Akwa-Ibom. The zone has a diverse ethnic nationalities and hub of Nigerian economy with the presence of crude oil in the area. The South-South, Nigeria has about 85,303km^2 land mass and a population of about 21,014,655persons (NPC, 2006). The occupation of the zone is agriculture.

Multi-stage sampling technique was used in random adoption of 384 food crops farmers. Firstly, were the random selections of three states from the six states that make up the South-south of Nigeria. Secondly was the random adoption of four Local Government Areas giving a total of 12 local Government areas. Thirdly were the random adoption of four rural farming communities each giving a total of 48 rural farming communities and lastly were the random selection of eight food crops farmers giving a total of 384 food crops farmers utilized for the research study.

Data for the study were obtained with the aid of well-structured questionnaires administered to respondents. The data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequencies, mean and mode.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The socio-economic characteristics of food crops farmers. The study revealed that male gender household head with a mean age of 49 years dominated the area. Most respondents were married with large family size of 11 persons that mostly have secondary school educational level. Most respondents were well experienced in crop production with a mean farming experience of 20 years as shown in Table 1. These research findings agreed with Emaziye (2020) who stated that most crop farmers were married, aged and with low level of education in Niger Delta Region, Nigeria.

Table 1 – The socio-economic characteristics of food crops farmers

	Frequency (n=384)	Percentage (%)	Mode/Mean
Age (years)			
27 – 38	41	10.7	
39 – 50	169	44.0	49 years
51 – 62	147	38.3	
63 – 74	27	7.0	
Gender (Household heads)			
Female	161	41.9	
Male	223	58.1	Male
Family Size (persons)			

Table 1 Continue

4 – 7	42	10.9	
8 – 11	149	38.8	11 persons
12 – 15	162	42.2	
16 – 19	31	8.1	
Marital Status			
Married	206	53.6	Married
Widow	104	27.1	
Single	30	7.8	
Divorced	44	11.5	
Education Status			
No formal education	87	22.7	
Primary school	128	33.3	
Secondary school	143	37.2	Secondary
Tertiary school	26	6.8	
Farming Experience (years)			
1 – 12	95	24.7	
13 – 24	137	35.7	20 years
25 – 36	152	39.6	

Source: Field data.

Mean Annual incomes of food crops farmers. The mean annual incomes from crop production was ₦12,100, small-scale livestock production was ₦10,067, fisheries production was ₦7,333 and petty trading was ₦9,567. The mean annual income of food crops farmers was ₦39,066.67 ($102.48) which resulted to ₦107.03 ($0.28) per day as shown in Table 2. These incomes revealed that South-South rural crop farmers were poor with low income per capita. This work is in line with the findings of Olawepo (2010) that majority of rural farmers were poor with low annual incomes in Nigeria.

Table 2 – Mean Annual incomes of food crops farmers

Income	Delta (₦)	Edo (₦)	Rivers (₦)	Entire Area (₦)	Mean (₦)
Crops	12,000	12,500	11,800	36,300	12,100
Small-scale livestock	11,200	10,000	9,000	30,200	10,067
Fisheries	6,500	4,900	10,600	22,000	7,333
Petty trading	8,600	10,100	10,000	28,700	9,567
Total (₦)	38,300	37,500	41,400	117,200	39,066.67

Source: Field data.

Mean percentage contributions to sources of incomes. The parameters in Table 3 clearly shows the various percentage contributions to sources of annual incomes. Crop production contributed 31.0%, small-scale livestock production contributed 25.8%, fisheries production contributed 18.8% and petty trading contributed 24.4%. From the contribution of incomes to annual income, crop production contributed most (31.0%) which was quite substantial. Crop production could be used for poverty reduction if more attention is given to its production the south-south rural households. These collaborated with the study of Berresaw *et al.,* (2011) that crops plays a pivoted role out of poverty in Uganda. Also this findings agreed with the findings of John and Dankawu (2014) that agricultural production could be used in reduction of poverty in Nigeria.

Table 3 – Mean percentage contributions to sources of incomes

Sources of Income	Entire Area (₦)	Percentage (%)
Crops	12,100	31.0
Small-scale livestock	10,067	25.8
Fisheries	7,300	18.8
Petty trading	9,567	24.4
Total (₦)	39,066.67	

Source: Field data computation.

Food crops farmers' enterprises. The most crops cultivated in the south-south, Nigeria were cassava, yam and maize. But cassava production (40.0%) dominated the study area followed by maize production (33.0%) while yam farming (27.0%) was the least been cultivated in the area as shown in Table 5. This is similar to the findings of Emaziye (2020) that rural farming cooperator and non-cooperators mostly cultivated maize, yam and cassava in Delta State, Nigeria.

Table 4 – Food crops farmers' enterprises

Enterprises	Delta (n=128)	Edo (n=128)	Rivers (n=128)	Entire Area (n=384)
Cassava	124 (40.5%)	127 (39.8%)	110 (39.6%)	361 (40.0%)
Yam	82 (26.8%)	89 (27.9%)	73 (26.3%)	244 (27.0%)
Maize	100 (32.7%)	103 (32.3%)	95 (34.1%)	298 (33.0%)

Source: Field data. Multiple responses observed.

Constraints of food crops farmers. The major constraints experienced by food crops farmers as shown in Table 5 were flooding (23.0%), lack of money (23.5%), excessive heat (20.2%), irregular rainfall pattern (21.3%) and sickness (12.0%). The most constraints faced by food crops farmers were lack of money and flooding. In the absence of fund as a result of flooding that destroyed their farm investments, the rural food crops farmers would be faced with poverty and hunger. This study is in agreement with Olaolu and Akinnagbe (2014) that lack of credits facilities and poverty level of farmers among others were the major constraints facing agricultural production in Nigeria.

Table 5 – Constraints of food crops farmers

Constraints	Delta (n=128)	Edo (n=128)	Rivers (n=128)	Entire Area (n=384)
Flooding	120 (22.3%)	103 (19.7%)	126 (25.6%)	358 (23.0%)
Lack of money	123 (22.9%)	124 (23.7%)	120 (24.4%)	367 (23.5%)
Excessive heat	120 (22.4%)	123 (23.6%)	72 (14.7%)	315 (20.2%)
Irregular rainfall pattern	110 (20.5%)	121 (23.2%)	101 (20.5%)	332 (21.3%)
Sickness	64 (11.9%)	51 (9.8%)	73 (14.8%)	188 (12.0%)

Source: Field data. Multiple responses observed.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study showed that the area is dominated by male gender households head having family size of 11 persons. Most respondents were well experienced in farming with secondary education level and with aged farmers. The mean annual income of ₦39,066.67 ($102.48) revealing farmers poverty level. The percentage contribution of incomes of respondents was substantial indicating that food crops production could be used as a tool for poverty reduction if more attention is given to its production. Most food crops grown in the area were cassava, maize and yam and the respondents experienced major constraints in the area of lack of funds and flooding that destroyed their farm investments thereby resulted to poverty of food crops farmers. The study recommends that greater attention should be given to food crops farming as it can act as a veritable tools for poverty alleviation.

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