

Sustainable Agro- Entrepreneurship as a Strategy for Reducing Youth Unemployment in South-East Nigeria

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/ejbir.2013/vol14n74759>

Published October 18, 2026

Citation: Nwangwu J.C. and Chilokwu C.G. (2026) Sustainable Agro- Entrepreneurship as a Strategy for Reducing Youth Unemployment in South-East Nigeria, *European Journal of Business and Innovation Research*, 14(7),47-59

Abstract: *This study examined the sustainable Agro-entrepreneurship as a strategy for reducing youth unemployment in South East Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to: examine the effect of agro-entrepreneurship skill acquisition, agro-entrepreneurship loans on youth unemployment in South East, Nigeria. Survey research design was adopted in the study. Since the population is infinite, the sample size of the study was determined with the aid of Cochran's non-parametric which gives 368. Copies of questionnaires were duly completed and returned showing 90% response rate. Research hypothesis were tested using ANOVA method. Primary sources of data were adopted and structured questionnaire were used to elicit information from the respondent. The major research instrument adopted for the study is the uses of structured questionnaire to elicit responses for the sample population. The research was done at 0.05% level of significant. This study found that sustainable agro-entrepreneurship plays a significant role in addressing youth unemployment in South-East Nigeria. Agroprenurship skill acquisition has no significant effect in youth unemployment reduction in South-East, Nigeria (Coff, 10.531,p, .000). Agroprenurship loans have no significant effect on youth unemployment reduction in South-East, Nigeria (Coff, 0.621,p, .535).On the basis of the findings the study recommends that Government and relevant agencies should strengthen agro-entrepreneurship skill acquisition programmes by providing regular training, technical support, and capacity-building initiatives that equip youths with modern and sustainable agricultural practices. Financial institutions and government intervention agencies should improve the accessibility and effectiveness of agro-entrepreneurship loan schemes by simplifying loan application procedures, reducing collateral requirements, and providing adequate monitoring to ensure that funds are utilized for productive agricultural enterprises*

Keywords: agro- entrepreneurship, youth unemployment, Agroprenurship skill acquisition, Agroprenurship loan,

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural entrepreneurship is a strategic pathway to achieving economic development. Agricultural entrepreneurship involves the identification, development, and management of innovative agricultural ventures that not only enhance productivity but also create employment and income-generating opportunities (Otache, 2017). Agricultural entrepreneurship therefore offers an opportunity to transform the sector from subsistence farming into a market-oriented, high-value enterprise that can drive sustainable development and economic growth (Eneji et al., 2019). Thus innovative agro-entrepreneurship helps to diversify the economy and reduce dependence on oil and extractive industries. Within Nigeria, agriculture remains the backbone of rural livelihoods, contributing about 23% to the GDP and employing nearly 70% of the labor force (NBS, 2022). Agriculture has historically been one of the most important sectors of the Nigerian economy and remains a major source of livelihood for a large percentage of the population. The sector contributes significantly to employment generation and rural development, particularly in agrarian communities. However, traditional farming practices have often been characterized by low productivity, limited technological adoption, and poor value-chain development. These challenges have discouraged many youths from participating actively in agriculture, thereby contributing to rising unemployment levels (Adeyanju, Mburu, & Mignouna, 2020).

In recent years, the concept of sustainable agro-entrepreneurship has emerged as a strategic approach to revitalizing agriculture and addressing youth unemployment. Sustainable agro-entrepreneurship involves the application of innovative, environmentally friendly, and economically viable business practices in agriculture to create value, generate income, and promote long-term agricultural development (Ouko, Ogola, Ng'on'ga, & Wairimu, 2022). It integrates agricultural production with entrepreneurship by encouraging individuals to view farming and agribusiness as profitable ventures rather than mere subsistence activities.

Youth unemployment has become one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges confronting Nigeria. Despite the country's abundant human and natural resources, many young people remain unemployed or underemployed due to limited job opportunities, rapid population growth, and insufficient industrial development (Nwangwu, Arinze, & Nwangwu, 2025). In many states, including south-east, the inability of the formal sector to absorb the growing labour force has resulted in increased poverty, crime, and social instability among youths (Adeyanju et al., 2020).

Despite these efforts, youth participation in sustainable agribusiness in Anambra State remains relatively low due to factors such as limited access to finance, inadequate agricultural infrastructure, lack of modern farming knowledge, and negative perceptions of agriculture among young people. Consequently, many youths continue to migrate to urban areas in search of white-collar jobs that are often scarce. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the effect of sustainable agro-entrepreneurship on youth unemployment in South East States. The study aims to determine whether promoting sustainable agricultural enterprises can provide viable employment opportunities for youths and contribute to economic development in the state.

However, despite various government and private sector initiatives aimed at promoting youth participation in agriculture, youth involvement in sustainable agro-entrepreneurial activities in Anambra State remains relatively low. Several challenges appear to hinder the effectiveness of sustainable agro-entrepreneurship in reducing youth unemployment. These include limited access to finance, inadequate training and technical knowledge, poor access to modern agricultural technologies, lack of supportive infrastructure, and negative perceptions of agriculture among youths who often view it as an unattractive and labor-intensive occupation. As a result, many young people continue to search for white-collar jobs that are scarce, thereby increasing the unemployment rate in the state.

Although previous studies have examined youth unemployment and agricultural development in Nigeria, there is still insufficient empirical evidence on how sustainable agro-entrepreneurship specifically influences youth employment generation in Anambra State. This gap in knowledge creates uncertainty for policymakers, development agencies, and other stakeholders seeking effective strategies to address youth unemployment through agriculture. Therefore, the problem of this study is to examine the extent to which sustainable agro-entrepreneurship can contribute to reducing youth unemployment in Anambra State, and to identify the factors that influence youths' participation in sustainable agricultural entrepreneurial activities.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the sustainable Agro-entrepreneurship as a strategy for reducing youth unemployment in South East Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to,

- i. To assess the impact of agro-entrepreneurship skill acquisition on youth unemployment in South East, Nigeria.
- ii. To examine the role of agro-entrepreneurship loans on youth unemployment in South East, Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

Agro-Entrepreneurship

Agro-entrepreneurship comprises the application of science and technology in agriculture and, all business and management activities conducted by firms such as the provision of farm inputs, production process, marketing and transportation of produce (Ng'atigwa, Hepelwa, Yami & Manyong, 2020). Agro-entrepreneurship or agribusiness is more than just the sale of farm produce, but instead involves all the economic activities related to agriculture, including chemicals, farm machinery, breeding, crop production/farming, distribution, marketing and sales. Agro-entrepreneurship is the combination of entrepreneurship and agriculture with the intent of profiting from a business enterprise. Ezen and Chinedu-Eze (2016). Jena et al. (2018) define agribusiness as agriculture-related business. Agro-entrepreneurship has been conceptualized as the application of the principles of entrepreneurship to agriculture or agricultural related businesses (Uche & Familusi, 2018). Agro-entrepreneurship is synonymous with agricultural entrepreneurship (Bairwa et al., 2014). Agro-entrepreneurship is the

application of entrepreneurial concepts and methods to the agricultural industry. An agro-entrepreneurship is described as "a business owner who is self-employed and seeks to create wealth within the agricultural industry," according to (Eneji, Mai-Lafia, & Weiping, 2019).. An agribusiness entrepreneur is a person who finds profitable business opportunities in agriculture, acquires resources, starts the firm, and oversees it (Carr, 2016). In brief, an agribusiness owner is a person who operates an agricultural business.

Agro-entrepreneurship Skill acquisition

Skill acquisition as a systematic and sequential development of skills that promotes efficiency and effectiveness in the performance of a specified job (Bello,2021). Skill acquisition is the process of developing capacities through all levels of education and training, occurring in formal, non- formal, and on-the-job settings, which enable individuals in all areas of the economy to be fully and productively engaged in livelihoods and to have the capacity to adapt their skills to meet the changing demands and opportunities of the economy and labour market especially in the e-world (Quadri, Silwal, Archibong,. & Jibrilla, 2024).). Skill acquisition is the ability to be trained on a particular task or function and become expert in it. Some of the needed skills in business education for one to be self reliant include communication skills, reading skills, and manipulative skills. Skill acquisition has been describe by many as the recipe for eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by creating avenue for employment, thereby creating job opportunities and wealth creation.

Agro-entrepreneurship Loans

Credit is considered as a key to economic growth especially in developing countries as it lubricates the economy. Therefore, the role of bank credit in economic growth has been accepted by many researchers as various economic agents that are able to invest money in various investment opportunities (Ifechukwu-Jacobs, Arinze, & Nwangwu, & Atueyi, 2025). Finance has been identified as one of the major factors militating against the development of small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria. It was in recognition of this difficulty in credit availability for the purpose of investment that the Nigerian government singled out small and medium scale enterprises as key area of intervention (Nwibo, Nwibo, Okonkwo, and Utobo, 2025). This was premised on the government desire of giving support to small and medium scale enterprises in the country as a measure of meeting up with its commitment to the development plan and the indigenization policy (Ozuzu, Amadi, & Nwala, 2025). The intention was that it would be a reaction against the dominance of the economy by the international capitalist entrepreneur and also on the account that revitalizing small and medium scale enterprises would enhance the capacity of the indigenous capitalist class, as a potential player in economic growth and national development, ,while some governments had formulated policies aimed at facilitating and empowering the growth and development of the SMEs, others have focused on assisting the SMEs to grow through soft loans and other fiscal incentives (Nwangwu, Ohanyere, Nwangwu, & Atueyi, 2025).

Unemployment

Unemployment refers to as a situation where people who are willing and capable of working are unable to find suitable paid employment Ldama, (2026), It is one of the macro-economic problems which every responsible government is expected to monitor and regulate. The higher the unemployment rate in an

economy the higher the poverty level and associated welfare challenges. Fajana (2010), Alao (2015) and Wikipedia (2010) identify the following types of unemployment. Ifechukwu-Jacobs, Arinze, & Nwangwu, & Atueyi, (2025), defined unemployment as a situation where some people who fall within the ages of the working population, capable and willing to work, are unable to obtain befitting work to do. The state of being without any work yet looking for work is called unemployment. Unemployment is defined by the Bureau of Labour Statistics as people who do not have a job, have actively looked for work in the past few weeks and are currently available for work. Also people who were temporarily laid off and were waiting to be called back to that job are included in the unemployment statistics. The International Labour Organization (2018) saw unemployment as when people are without jobs and they have actively looked for work within the past four months. Unemployed individuals are unable to earn money to meet financial obligations. Unemployment is the term referring to individuals who are unemployable and seeking a job but are unable to find a job (Jacobs, Ezeokafor, & Ekwere 2021). Unemployment is a situation in which persons capable and willing to work are unable to find suitable paid employment.

Theoretical Framework

Schumpeterian Theory of Entrepreneurship by Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1934)

The Schumpeterian Theory argues that entrepreneurs are the driving force of economic development through innovation. According to Schumpeter, entrepreneurs introduce new products, production methods, markets, and organizational forms that stimulate economic growth and create employment opportunities. Sustainable agro-entrepreneurship involves adopting innovative and environmentally sustainable agricultural practices, value addition, agribusiness development, and modern farming technologies. These entrepreneurial activities generate employment, increase productivity, improve incomes, and reduce youth unemployment. The theory therefore explains how agro-entrepreneurship serves as a mechanism for job creation and economic transformation.

Relevance to the Study

The Schumpeterian Theory of Entrepreneurship is highly relevant to this study because it provides a theoretical basis for understanding how sustainable agro-entrepreneurship can reduce youth unemployment in Anambra State, Nigeria. The theory emphasizes that entrepreneurship, driven by innovation, is a key engine of economic development and employment creation. It posits that entrepreneurs stimulate economic growth by introducing innovative products, production techniques, markets, and organizational practices that improve productivity and generate new business opportunities.

In the context of this study, sustainable agro-entrepreneurship encourages young people to engage in modern agricultural enterprises through the adoption of innovative and environmentally sustainable farming practices, value addition, agribusiness development, and the application of improved technologies. These entrepreneurial activities create direct and indirect employment opportunities,

enhance agricultural productivity, increase income levels, and contribute to rural economic development.

Empirical Review

Ikuemonisan and Akinbola (2021) examined agri-preneurial intentions among students in the state-owned tertiary institutions in Ondo State. The study profiled students' perceptions of learning (SPOL), teachers' impact (SPOT), and mentorship and explored the effects of these on their agri-preneurial intentions. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze 120 students, who were randomly selected from the two state-owned tertiary institutions. A logistic regression analysis was performed to assess the effects of SPOL, SPOT, mentorship, as well as other socioeconomic characteristics, on students' likelihood to have agri-preneurial intentions. The study revealed that SPOL, SPOT & age significantly increased the likelihood of students having agri-preneurial intentions, while perceptions of mentorship and the number of graduates in the family decreased it. Although the SPOL and SPOT were positive and statistically significant, the weak effects of the mean scores suggest that SPOL and SPOT should be improved upon to enhance students' interest in agri-preneurship.

Okonkwo, et. al. (2023) highlighted that agri-preneurship programme is vital to develop entrepreneurs and leaders to improve agribusiness in Nigeria. This study defined the concept of agri-preneurship and its role in enhancing climate resilience in Nigeria. It recommended that climate resilience and sustainable economic growth can be achieved if we run agriculture as a business to enhance climate resilience and encourage private-sector led engagements as the main objective driver. It further enumerated the numerous benefits of agri-preneurship as it helps to build resources by wealth creation along the value chain through production, value addition, and export of processed or unprocessed goods among others. It concluded by the call for more in-depth research on agri-preneurship and its role in enhancing climate resilience in Nigeria.

Nwankwo, Chiekiezie and Offiah, (2021) interrogated the existence and contribution of agri-preneurial activities to the rural economy. The study employed multistage, purposive and random sampling techniques to generate relevant data using a structured questionnaire administered to 144 small scale farmers. The data generated were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Probit regression analysis, and factor analysis. The results revealed that majority (61.1%) of agri-preneurs were female with a mean age of 43.14 years and an average household size of 6 persons. The results from the Probit analysis showed that household size, educational level, agri-preneurship experience, level of annual income and non-farm income were statistically significant and influenced agri-preneurship development. The study further identified various factors driving agripreneurship.

Orisaremi, Ahmadu and Orisaremi, (2022) examined the influence of agricultural policy on agri-preneurship development in Nasarawa state. The study adopted survey design. The population of the study consists of 2076 agri-preneurship managers operating their businesses within Nasarawa State area. The study objectives are to ascertain how specific agricultural policies and programmes have affected food security, poverty reduction and employment generation. Taro Yamane's sampling technique was used to derived the sample size of 335. Simple linear regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses formulated for the study. The findings revealed that agricultural policy has a significant effect on

employment generation, (f- test 96.749 and p-value p of 0 .000), agricultural policy also has a significant effect on poverty alleviation (f-test 200,756 and p-value of 0.000) and moreover, agricultural policy has a significant effect on food security (f-test 86.568 and p-value of 0,000) in Nasarawa state.

Kazungu and Neema (2023) showed the state of the art on agri-preneurship and food security in Tanzania, research themes and new developments on the two concepts, showing literature gaps and practice on the concepts, and showing how agri-preneurship is a solution to food insecurity in Tanzania. Herein, a total of 61 articles retrieved from Scopus, Google Scholar, and the Web of Science databases on the themes of agri-preneurship and food security were reviewed.

METHODOLOGY

Cross sectional Survey research design was used in carrying out the study. Ikeagwu (1997) opined that studies of this nature will be survey method to look for information on facts, attitudes, practices and opinions of the respondents. In this study, the data collection technique was based on questionnaire. The researcher developed the questionnaire that will be administered to the respondents. Since the population is infinite, the sample size of the study was determined with the aid of Cochran's non-parametric sample size determination formula. q and p values obtained from their responses were recorded as, 40 and 60 respectively and calculated on Cochran's formula for sample size determination as shown below

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

where

n = Sample size

z = The value of Z-score associated with the selected degree of confidence limit (95%) i.e. = constant = 1.96

p = probability of positive response 40/100 = 0.4

q = probability of negative response 60/100 = 0.6

e = tolerable error or error margin = 5% = 0.05

Substituting therefore,

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.4 \times 0.6}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3.8416 \times 0.4 \times 0.6}{0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{0.921984}{0.0025}$$

$$n = 368.4$$

The major research instrument adopted for the study is the uses of structured questionnaire to elicit responses for the sample population.

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Three hundred and Sixty-Eight (368) were administered among the employees of selected respondents. However, three hundred and fifty-nine (359) copies of questionnaire were retrieved. Therefore, the analysis and interpretation of data were based on the returned questionnaire.

Analysis of Regression

TABLE 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
YUEP	4.7354	.70485	359
AESQ	4.6518	.88671	359
AGEL	4.5655	1.08598	359

Source; SPSS Output 2026

The descriptive statistics show that 359 respondents participated in the study. The mean score for Youth Unemployment (YUEP) is 4.7354 (SD = 0.70485), indicating that respondents generally agreed that youth unemployment is a significant issue in south-east. Agro-entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition (AESQ) recorded a high mean of 4.6518 (SD = 0.88671), suggesting a high level of agreement that skill acquisition is important in addressing youth unemployment. Similarly, Agro-entrepreneurship Loans (AGEL) recorded a mean of 4.5655 (SD = 1.08598), indicating that respondents agreed that access to agro-entrepreneurship loans contributes to reducing youth unemployment. The relatively low standard deviation values imply that respondents' opinions were fairly consistent across all the variables.

TABLE 4.2 Correlations

		YUEP	AESQ	AGEL
Pearson Correlation	YUEP	1.000	.885	.846
	AESQ	.885	1.000	.951
	AGEL	.846	.951	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	YUEP	.	.000	.000
	AESQ	.000	.	.000
	AGEL	.000	.000	.
N	YUEP	359	359	359
	AESQ	359	359	359
	AGEL	359	359	359

Source; SPSS Output 2026

The correlation results indicate a strong positive relationship between the study variables. Agro-entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition (AESQ) has a very strong positive correlation with Youth Unemployment (YUEP) ($r = 0.885$, $p = 0.000$), while Agro-entrepreneurship Loans (AGEL) also show a strong positive correlation with Youth Unemployment (YUEP) ($r = 0.846$, $p = 0.000$). Furthermore, AESQ and AGELQ are highly positively correlated ($r = 0.951$, $p = 0.000$). Since all the p-values are less than 0.05, the relationships are statistically significant. This implies that improvements in agro-entrepreneurship skill acquisition and access to agro-entrepreneurship loans are significantly associated with changes in youth unemployment in South-East Nigeria.

TABLE 4.3 Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.885 ^a	.783	.781	.32949	.783	641.155	2	356	.000	1.114

a. Predictors: (Constant), AGEL, AESQ

b. Dependent Variable: YUEP

The model summary indicates that Agro-entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition (AESQ) and Agro-entrepreneurship Loans (AGEL) jointly have a strong relationship with Youth Unemployment (YUEP), as shown by the correlation coefficient ($R = 0.885$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.783$) implies that 78.3% of the variation in youth unemployment is explained by agro-entrepreneurship skill acquisition and agro-entrepreneurship loans, while the remaining 21.7% is explained by other factors not included in the model. The adjusted R^2 of 0.781 confirms that the model has a strong explanatory power. The F-statistic of 641.155 ($p = 0.000$) indicates that the overall regression model is statistically significant and fits the data well. Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.114 suggests no serious problem of autocorrelation in the residuals.

TABLE 4.3 ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	139.212	2	69.606	641.155	.000 ^b
	Residual	38.649	356	.109		
	Total	177.861	358			

a. Dependent Variable: YUEP

b. Predictors: (Constant), AGEL, AESQ

The ANOVA results show that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 641.155$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). This indicates that Agro-entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition (AESQ) and Agro-entrepreneurship Loans (AGEL) jointly have a significant effect on Youth Unemployment (YUEP) in South-East Nigeria, Nigeria. Therefore, the overall regression model is a good fit for explaining variations in youth unemployment, and the null hypothesis that the independent variables have no significant effect is rejected.

TABLE 4.4 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	.492	.103		14.506	.000	1.289	1.694
	AESQ	.666	.063	.838	10.531	.000	.541	.790
	AGEL	.032	.052	.049	.621	.535	.069	.134

a. Dependent Variable: YUEP

The constant term has a coefficient of 0.492 and is statistically significant ($p = 0.000$), indicating the baseline level of youth unemployment when all the explanatory variables are held constant.

The result further reveals that Agro-entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition (AESQ) has a positive and statistically significant effect on youth unemployment ($\beta = 0.666$, $t = 10.531$, $p = 0.000$). Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that agro-entrepreneurship skill acquisition significantly influences youth employment outcomes in South-East Nigeria. Specifically, a one-unit improvement in agro-entrepreneurship skill acquisition is associated with a 0.666-unit improvement in youth employment outcomes (or reduction in youth unemployment), holding other factors constant. The high standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.838$) further indicates that skill acquisition is the most influential predictor in the model. This finding suggests that equipping youths with entrepreneurial and technical agricultural skills enhances their capacity for self-employment, promotes agribusiness development, and reduces unemployment.

In contrast, Agro-entrepreneurship Loans (AGEL) have a positive but statistically insignificant effect on youth unemployment ($\beta = 0.032$, $t = 0.621$, $p = 0.535$). Although the coefficient is positive, the p-value is greater than the 0.05 significance level, indicating that the effect is not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis for this variable cannot be rejected. This implies that access to agro-entrepreneurship loans, on its own, does not significantly influence youth unemployment in South-East Nigeria during the period of the study. The insignificant result may suggest that many youths either have limited access to agricultural loans, face difficulties in obtaining credit, or are unable to utilize available loans effectively due to stringent lending conditions, inadequate collateral, poor loan management, or insufficient entrepreneurial experience.

The regression results indicate that while both variables have positive coefficients, only agro-entrepreneurship skill acquisition has a significant effect on youth unemployment. This demonstrates that developing the entrepreneurial and technical capacities of young people is more effective in addressing youth unemployment than merely providing access to agro-entrepreneurship loans. Therefore, skill acquisition remains the most important determinant of youth employment outcomes in the study areas.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One

H_{01} : Agroprenurship skill acquisition has no significant effect in youth unemployment reduction in South-East, Nigeria.

In testing this hypothesis, the t-statistics and probability value in table 4.4 above is used. Agroprenurship skill acquisition variables have a t-statistics of 10.531 and a probability value of 0.000 which is statistically significant. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypotheses which state that Agroprenurship skill acquisition has no significant effect in youth unemployment reduction in South-East, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02} : Agroprenurship loans have no significant effect in youth unemployment reduction in South-East, Nigeria.

Agroprenurship loans has a t-statistics of 0.621 and a probability value of 0.535 which is statistically significant. Therefore, we reject the null hypotheses and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that Agroprenurship loans have no significant effect in youth unemployment reduction in South-East, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Agro-entrepreneurship Skill Acquisition and Youth Unemployment

The findings of the study revealed that agro-entrepreneurship skill acquisition has a positive and statistically significant effect on youth unemployment in South-East, Nigeria ($\beta = 0.666$, $t = 10.531$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that improving youths' entrepreneurial and technical skills in sustainable agriculture enhances their ability to establish and manage agribusiness enterprises, thereby increasing employment opportunities and reducing youth unemployment. The result suggests that when young people acquire practical skills in modern farming techniques, agribusiness management, value addition, and sustainable agricultural practices, they become more capable of creating self-employment and generating income rather than relying solely on paid employment. The finding agrees with the studies of FAO (2014), which reported that youth participation in agriculture can significantly improve employment outcomes when supported with appropriate entrepreneurial skills and training. Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) emphasized that entrepreneurship training and capacity building remain effective strategies for addressing youth unemployment in developing countries. Therefore, strengthening agro-entrepreneurship skill acquisition programmes would enhance youth participation in agriculture and contribute to sustainable employment generation in South-East, Nigeria.

Agro-entrepreneurship Loans and Youth Unemployment

The study further found that agro-entrepreneurship loans have a positive but statistically insignificant effect on youth unemployment in South-East ($\beta = 0.032$, $t = 0.621$, $p > 0.05$). Although the positive coefficient indicates that access to agricultural finance may improve youth employment, the insignificant result suggests that agro-entrepreneurship loans alone are insufficient to significantly reduce youth unemployment. This may be attributed to limited access to credit, stringent lending conditions, high interest rates, inadequate collateral requirements, poor loan management, or the inability of beneficiaries to effectively utilize the borrowed funds for productive agricultural ventures.

This finding partially aligns with the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which emphasizes that financial resources produce better employment outcomes when complemented with adequate knowledge and entrepreneurial skills. It also supports the assertion of the World Bank (2019) that access to finance alone cannot guarantee employment creation unless accompanied by business development services, entrepreneurship education, and institutional support. Likewise, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, 2021) noted that sustainable youth employment in agriculture depends not only on financial inclusion but also on technical assistance, market access, mentorship, and supportive government policies. The finding therefore implies that policymakers should complement agricultural loan schemes with capacity-building programmes, extension services, and effective monitoring to maximize their impact on youth employment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

This study concludes that sustainable agro-entrepreneurship plays a significant role in addressing youth unemployment in South-East Nigeria. The findings revealed that agro-entrepreneurship skill acquisition has a positive and significant effect on youth unemployment, indicating that equipping youths with relevant agricultural and entrepreneurial skills enhances their employment opportunities. However, agro-entrepreneurship loans were found to have a positive but insignificant effect on youth unemployment. Therefore, the study concludes that promoting skill acquisition in sustainable agro-entrepreneurship is more effective in reducing youth unemployment than access to loans alone.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government and relevant agencies should strengthen agro-entrepreneurship skill acquisition programmes by providing regular training, technical support, and capacity-building initiatives that equip youths with modern and sustainable agricultural practices.
2. Financial institutions and government intervention agencies should improve the accessibility and effectiveness of agro-entrepreneurship loan schemes by simplifying loan application procedures, reducing collateral requirements, and providing adequate monitoring to ensure that funds are utilized for productive agricultural enterprises.
3. The South-East Government should create an enabling environment for agro-entrepreneurship through improved rural infrastructure, access to markets, extension services, and the adoption of modern agricultural technologies to enhance the sustainability and profitability of youth-owned agribusinesses.

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