



## Labour Migration and Rural Agricultural Production in Southwestern Nigeria

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### Abstract

**Keywords:**

Agricultural Productivity, Rural-Urban Migration, Rural-Rural Migration, Rural Infrastructure

In recent years, Nigeria witnessed significant labour migration coupled with reduction in rural agricultural productivity. Youths abandoned farms for ventures with high returns and less drudgery in cities thus labour availability in peak agricultural seasons became scarce. The declining farm population constituting mostly women and old men are not capable of producing sufficient food for the non-farm population. Hence, this study examined labour migration and rural agricultural production in southwestern Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select 454 respondents for the study. Data were collected and analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings showed that farmers often used combination of local land less residents, contract labour and seasonal labour. Majority (90.4%) of the food crop and most (82.2%) of the tree crop farmers affirmed the existence of migration in their locality. They also indicated that both rural-urban and rural-rural streams of migration existed. Mann-Whitney U test also showed significant difference in labour availability for food ( $z=-4.38$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ) and tree crops ( $z=-4.75$ ,  $P \leq 0.05$ ). Tackling rural-urban migration problems remain a panacea for increasing food production. Hence, policies that will focus on rural and agricultural development must be enacted.

### 1. Introduction

Rural-urban migration was gradual between 1960 and 1970 but rose from 14 percent in 1960 to 37 percent in 1992 (Shaib Aliyu and Bakshi, 1997). Fashina (2005) reported a rise in rural-urban migration between 1999 and 2003 with a mean of 46 percent per annum in Ondo state. Dipeolu (2000); Ogundele (2005); Abass (2012); Ajaero and Onokola, (2013) discovered large scale rural-urban migration. Also, Kayode (2002) identified low labour productivity as one of the constraints to be removed in order to adequately harvest Nigeria's vast potential.

The traditional agricultural labour force, usually provided by a farmer, his wife or wives, children and dependants are no more readily available. Adult male and female migrate to obtain paid employment to augment household resources. They seek off farm employment due to push factors (Bagamba *et al.*, 2007). Aside this, farmers send their

children to cities and towns in order to obtain an education. They are often lost to urban employment thereafter, and are not inclined to return to the village. Besides, youth and children migrate to escape social and cultural imprisonment in rural areas. And heavy dependence on manual labour made farming unattractive to youths who constitute the majority of the migrant.

Despite the introduction of mechanized farming in Nigeria, human labour remains dominant in all agricultural activities. Labour requirement for successful farm operation in non-mechanized agriculture is high for land preparation, planting, fertilizer application, weeding and harvesting (Babalola, 2002). Farm labour supply, especially for planting, weeding and harvesting still constitutes a serious bottleneck. Due to the labour intensive nature of agriculture, ageing farmers cannot cultivate more land, but need to hire labour to substitute lost family

labour. It is against this background that this study will attempt to consider the following objectives.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Developmental changes in labour use

Nigeria's economy which was traditionally based on agriculture and trade, changed drastically under colonial rule, beginning in the late 19th century. The petroleum industry development in 1960s and 1970s prompted great massive investment in industry, infrastructure and social services. Urban centers grow rapidly due to economic development and monetization. This growth encouraged the flow of people in the service sector of the economy. The outcome of transformation into modern society shows in the changing composition of the labour force.

Agriculture belongs to primary industry in the production activity group. From 1980 to 1986, it contributed 34 percent of the total gross domestic product (GDP) and employed 80 percent of the labour force in Nigeria (Makdawire, 1987). In 2002, labour force totaled 52.9 million, up from 30 million in 1980. Women made up 37 percent and men, 63 percent of the labour force. According to Encarta (2005), only 43 percent of all workers were in agriculture, down from 54 percent in 1980, 50 percent were in the service sector and 7 percent were in industry, including mining, manufacturing and construction.

The service sector absorbs graduates from tertiary institutions while the industrial and manufacturing sector absorbs semi-skilled, skilled and at times unskilled labor, leaving most unskilled labour for agriculture. At that time, distribution of labour depended on technological changes and political design in the economy. As development proceeds, expanding industrial and manufacturing sector use up initially present unlimited agricultural labour. The proportion of the labor force in agriculture decreases with technological and industrial expansion in cities, whereas the proportion of labour in the manufacturing sector increases.

However, the marginal productivity of unskilled labour in urban areas is less than in rural areas. Wages paid to those who are fortunate to get employment are probably on the average, well below those earnable in rural areas. Yet, unskilled labour is scarce in the agricultural sector. Spore (2000) had remarked that it is as if agriculture is slipping away from its dictionary definition as science, art and business of cultivating soil, producing crops and raising livestock. It seems to be slipping towards seeing itself and being seen as rustic water far away from any motor of progress.

### 2.2 Labour migration

The dominant pattern observed in internal migration is from rural to urban areas. Locher (2000) opined that rural migration expresses a clear type of temporary migration in countries that are experiencing rapid urbanization and increase in manufacturing. There are two major reasons for migration. These are environmentally induced and economic migration. According to Okoko (2000), environmentally induced migration occurs when migrants need to migrate to other areas in order to escape environmental problems. This they do temporarily or permanently because of marked environmental disruption (natural and or triggered by people) that jeopardized their existence. It can be because of adverse physical conditions in the environment such as drought, landslide, earthquake, flood or erosion, menace of wild beasts or insects, pests and infertility of the soil. All these make people move to a less perilous location.

On the other hand, economic migration is a voluntary movement from one traditional habitat or a place of permanent abode into another area that has a higher economic prospect. It is a reflection of imbalances in the opportunities that exist in places. There is a greater difference in the economic opportunities of most urban and rural regions, thus there is a greater flow of migrants from rural to urban areas (Okoko, 2000). Rural people viewed migration as both cause and effect of poverty. Therefore, migration is the result of interplay between rural-urban wage differentials and urban unemployment.

### 2.3 Gender issues in labour migration

Gender involves roles, behaviour, attitudes and labour decisions of both genders. According to Sender and Smith (1990) gender play a central role in the process of formation of labour supply. Adegeye and Dittoh (1985); Fajana (2000) agreed that the supply of labour is determined by specialization, age group and gender. Generally, across the country, migration varies. More males migrate than female and in cities jobs are available for men more than for women.

Migration of youths and young adults affects labour availability and use for rural agricultural production. It leads to reduction in the amount and variety of food produced because old farmers cannot expand their scope of production. Hence, there is rise in female agricultural labour supply driven by the need to generate income for basic household needs. According to IFPRI (2012), women constitute 43 percent of the agricultural labour force. Yet, these women apart from the fact that they engage in multiple overlapping roles, their effort in agricultural activities cannot bring about expected output needed.

In addition, research studies have shown that female farmers in Nigeria are associated with traditional subsistence and low yield of food crops. Most of the female headed household always have problem of getting adequate manual labour because they have less resources for hiring labour. Hence, they are mostly small scale farmers who cannot cultivate large farmland due to constraints such as lack of access to labour and other inputs.

#### **2.4 Agricultural labour policies for increased rural production**

By definition, rural development means changes in social and economic structures, institutions, relationships and processes of the rural areas. It is also known as progress in small-scale farming, provision of physical and social infrastructure, development of rural non-farm industries and the capacity of the rural sector to sustain and accelerate the pace of development over time.

Dealing with the problem of rural development is pertinent for any meaningful agricultural development. Ekong (2003) had suggested that the spread of needed infrastructure and introduction of appropriate technology in rural areas would markedly improve rural agriculture and reduce widening rural-urban income gap. Okoko (2000) and Babalola (2002) believed that investing in rural areas will slow down migration to cities in a remarkable way. Thus, improving quality of life in villages in terms of provision of rural amenities such as supply of electricity, potable water, roads, and rural institution including adult literacy program is bound to reverse the trend of rural-urban migration. IITA (2004) also noted that making investment locally from income generated in rural areas will release direct benefit for both rural sector and the country as a whole from rural economic activities.

##### **Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives were:

- i) identify the socioeconomic characteristics of farmers.
- ii) assess labour use of farmers.
- iii) investigate labour migration and the streams of migration.

#### **2. Materials and methods**

The study was conducted in southwestern states of Nigeria which lies between latitude 5°N and 9°N and longitude 20°E. It has a land area of about 114,271km<sup>2</sup>, representing 12 percent of the country's total land area. The zone has a population of 29.9 million and a population density of 195 persons/km (NPC, 2003). Multi-stage sampling procedure was

used to select respondents for the study. Oyo and Ondo states were selected from the six states in southwestern Nigeria through simple random sampling technique. Also, random sampling technique was used to select 50% of the zones, 10% of the blocks, 25% of the cells and 10% of duly registered Food Crop Farmers (FCF) and Tree Crop Farmers (TCF) from Oyo and Ondo states constituting 454 farmers. Data on socioeconomic characteristics, categories of people hired and frequency of use and migration collected through a structured questionnaire and were analyzed with descriptive and inferential statistics.

#### **3. Results and discussion**

Based on the results in table 1, most of the respondents were within the age range of 40-60 years and above and their mean age was  $51.2 \pm 13.1$ . Majority (88.8%) of the farmers were married. The modal household size was three to five persons constituting 56.7 percent of the food crop farmers and 59.9 percent of the tree crop farmers. Agriculture was their major occupation though many still engaged in other income generating activities. Most of them belonged to one farmers' association or the other. Generally, they were small and medium scale producers cultivate wide range of crops mostly in mixture. Frequency of use of children showed importance of children in caring out agricultural tasks. Smallholder farmers often use children to substitute adult labour in order to keep up farm business. Use of contract labour was also evident in Ondo state for both food and tree crop production (Table 2).

Result of Mann-Whitney U test in Table 3 showed significant difference in labour availability of food crop farmers ( $z=-4.38$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ). Similarly, the result also shows significant difference in labour availability of tree crop farmers ( $z=-4.75$ ,  $P \leq 0.05$ ). But there was no significant difference in labour availability of pooled food and tree crop farmers ( $z=-1.79$ ,  $p \geq 0.05$ ) (Table 3).

Table 1. Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Food crop farmers		Tree crop farmers		Total Freq	%
	Freq	%	Freq	%		
Gender						
Male	154	64.2	115	53.7	269	59.3
Female	86	35.8	99	46.3	185	40.7
Number of dependants						
1-5	178	74.2	175	81.8	353	77.8
6-10	12	5.0	4	2.8	16	3.5
>10	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of farmlands						
1	139	57.9	126	58.8	265	58.4
2	67	27.9	64	29.9	131	28.9
3	34	14.2	24	11.2	68	32.8
Years of experience						
<10 years	9	3.8	29	13.6	38	8.4
11-20 years	21	8.8	23	10.7	44	9.7
21-30 years	116	48.3	103	48.1	219	48.2
31-40 years	94	39.2	43	20.1	137	30.2
41-50 years	-	-	10	4.7	10	2.2
>50 years	-	-	6	2.8	6	1.3
Absentee farmer	24	10.0	23	10.7	47	10.4
Migrant farmer	13	5.4	19	8.9	32	7.0
Resident farmer	144	83.2	172	80.4	316	69.6

Table 2. Distribution of farmers by categories of people hired and frequency of use

Categories	Food Regularly	Occasionally	Never	Tree Regularly	Occasionally	Never
	Freq (%)	Freq (%)	Freq (%)	Freq (%)	Freq (%)	Freq (%)
Local land less residents	146 (60.8)	54 (22.5)	40 (16.7)	141 (65.9)	39 (18.2)	34 (15.9)
Migrant/seasonal labourer	154 (64.2)	52 (21.7)	34 (14.1)	122 (57.0)	57 (26.6)	35 (16.4)
Contract labourer	72 (30.0)	43 (17.9)	125 (52.1)	124 (57.9)	54 (25.2)	36 (16.8)
Youth and children	45 (18.7)	123 (51.3)	72 (30.3)	38 (17.8)	127(59.3)	49 (22.9)

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U Test of Labour Availability for Food and Tree Crop Production

States		N	Mean Rank	Sum of ranks	MWu	W	Z	P	Decision
Food Crops	Oyo	173	111.79	19339.00	4288.00	19339.00	-4.38	0.00	Sig.
	Ondo	67	143.00	9581.00					
	Total	240							
Tree Crops	Oyo	121	93.90	11362.50	3981.50	11362.50	-4.75	0.00	Sig.
	Ondo	93	125.19	11642.50					
	Total	214							
	Pooled								
	Food crop	240	235.25	56461.00	23819.0	468.24	-1.79	0.07	Not sig.
	Tree crops	214	218.80	468.24					

There is low productivity per man hour of labour due to migration. The situation grew worse with similar cropping patterns of farmers that increased demand for labour during peak production period. The seasonal bottleneck of labour availability due to large-scale rural-urban migration has become a major constraint to agricultural production. Corroborating this finding, Osugiri et al., (2012) found that youths have drifted from involvement in agriculture in southeast Nigeria. Fashina (2005) had remarked that emigrants were mainly males and children of household heads between ages of 16 and 30 years. Migrants do not typically represent a random sample of the overall population, rather they are disproportionately young, better educated, and less risk-averse and more achievement oriented (Ekong, 2003). However, Arokoyo and Auta (1992) had advocated that only the participation of energetic, creative, innovative, productive and committed people can bring expected development in agriculture.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The cardinal aim of rural development is to encourage rural dwellers to produce surplus food over above their own need. In order to achieve this, there is need to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas in terms of distribution of social amenities. This is important because labour availability is intricately linked with nexus involving wage rate as well as availability of social infrastructure. Adequate provision of infrastructure will increase labour availability for rural agricultural production and reduce labour migration.

Hence, Government should formulate operationally relevant national policy quickly to meet rural needs. This is necessary as there are yet many untapped potentials in rain fed agriculture prevalent in rural areas of Nigeria where bulk of human and natural resources are located. Besides, it is a known fact that food security and agricultural development are interrelated and depends critically on improving rural productivity.

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