

Land access, tenure security and the fate of rural youth in Africa: the case of Ondo state - Nigeria

Creating productive employment opportunities for youths is the major concern for most developing countries in the world. The need for jobs is especially critical where the largest segment of the population is young and increasing number of this group seek for employment. Having a large and growing population of young people with little job creation in the formal sector, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) largely fits to this reality (Brooks et al. 2013) and Nigeria can be taken as a show case of the situation.

The majority of youths in Nigeria live in rural areas where farming has been traditionally the main livelihood of the people. However, Nigeria currently faces severe land scarcity in some parts of the country where population densities have become very high and farm sizes have become very small. In a country where there are no well-functioning land market and where the credit market is very thin and where there are no many large farms that can provide enough farm wage employment, access to farmland is the most important factor that determines whether a rural youth can depend on agricultural livelihood as well as whether a rural youth would migrate or stay at home.

Some argue that though the Nigerian rural youths have still the opportunity and the desirable qualities to work in agriculture, most of them have strong apathy toward agriculture (Aphunu and Atoma 2010); and this has resulted in mass unemployment and lack of sustainable livelihood activities among the rural youths. However, most of these studies reached at this conclusion simply by observing what is happening externally and without indicating the major underlying factors behind the observed phenomenon. Moreover, most of the youth migration studies on Nigeria reached at conclusion simply by asking the opinion of the migrants toward agriculture and without controlling for important factors that affect such opinion. Of course, there are few other studies that have tried to identify the determinants of migration and agricultural labor participation among the Nigerian youths. However, these are not also without serious methodological limitations to reach at a conclusion of greater policy relevance.

Many studies indicate that issues like access to and equitable distribution of land, land transfer rights, land disputes and other tenure security issues have long been problems and points of serious controversy surrounding the Nigerian land tenure system since the 1978 Land Use Act (LUA) of the country. In response to these issues and other hindrances to efficient land administration, the Nigerian Federal Government established a Presidential Technical Committee for Land Reform (PTCLR) on April 2, 2009, mainly to undertake systematic land registration nationally; and making recommendations that will ensure effective, simplified, sustainable and successful land administration in Nigeria. The titling program is expected to revitalize the land market in Nigeria, increase investment opportunities, encourage mortgage lending, assure security of livelihoods and property, and reduce transaction costs for property right transfer.

This paper hypothesizes that in the absence of vibrant labor intensive non agriculture sector, access to land is an important push-factor that drives youths in the rural agrarian society to look for non-agricultural livelihood options. In today's Nigerian context, it is highly plausible to argue that population growth puts pressure on land; and the rural youth don't have easy access to land and are hampered by ambiguities in transferability of land through purchase, sale, leasing, inheritance, assignment under

traditional rules, and mortgage. And these render the rural youth to be underemployed and to look for non-agricultural livelihood strategies- which are also scarce in the Nigerian context.

As indicated above, although there are some studies that try to identify the underlying causes of rural-urban migration in Nigeria, to the best of our knowledge, none of them attempt to examine the impact of access to land on youths' decision regarding livelihood strategy. In this study, controlling for other socioeconomic factors that pertain to rural-urban migration, we test the hypothesis that access to land is an important push-factor that drives youths in the rural Nigeria to migrate and look for non-agricultural livelihood options. Specifically, we test whether youths' actual and potential access to land have an impact on youths' decision on migration and occupational mobility in Ondo State of Nigeria.

For this purpose, sample size of approximately 3800 households were selected from two LGAs (Akure North and Akure South) in Ondo state in Nigea. These households were selected along the boundaries of the treatment wards in Akure South (urban LGA) and Akure North (rural LGA). For comparability reasons, blocks of clusters were selected on both sides of the boundaries of the treatment wards on the basis of: Continuity of settlement on both sides of the boundaries, and comparability of subjects in terms of access to public services, infrastructural development, economic activities. Data consists both principal male, principal female and female spouses from 1962 urban and 1840 rural households.

Our dataset is unique and rich in three important dimensions: first, it is gender-disaggregated in order to capture the existing important intra-household variation in terms of key perception variables; second, it captures information about three generations (i.e., information about heads/spouses of households and their siblings, information about children in the households, and information about parents of heads/spouses of households); and third, the dataset is consisted of information that are collected at the household, household member level, and plot level. In addition, this study uses a follow-up survey data that include the important information about 7485 youth members of the household who are 15-30 years of age.

The unique and rich nature of our dataset not only allow us to have information about the usual potential determinants of rural youth migration but it has information about youths' potential and actual access to land. And, such information are collected in such a way that it is possible to capture the existing important intra-household variation in terms of key perception variables.