

Evaluation of Rural Youth Participation in Cashew Farming in Sierra Léon

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Abstract: The general purpose of the research study is to evaluate the involvement of youth in cashew processing with specific reference to the cashew production district in the north Western region of the country. Specifically the survey will focus on the following: Identify and evaluate the proportion of youths involved in cashew production and processing Methods of processing cashew adopted by youths in Sierra Leone. Identify the marketing channels adopted by youths in the sale of processed cashew as potential NTE products for export competitiveness. Simple random sampling techniques were used to select respondents. Twenty respondents were sampled randomly from Loko, Kambia, Bombali Western zones of Zeraleon giving a total sample size of eight respondents in the study areas. Questionnaire was the principal instrument of data collection. A total of seventy two copies of a questionnaire were returned and found useful. Descriptive statistics were applied to data collected. Youth participated in different ways in cashew farming. The youth participated in the following functions: processing, transportation, handling, sales, labour and fruit utilization. The outcome indicated that some youths earned their living by receiving daily or monthly income accounting for 33.33% while some earn their income by selling varying quantities and receiving a certain percentage as their remuneration. About 72% were cashew farmers while 20% were engaged as traders. The majority of the youth who participated in processing were involved in manual processing while a negligible few of about 11 % participated in mechanical processing. The youth were involved in transportation of bags into the store, warehouse and from farm to the neighboring villages processing centers. On the side of transportation, the findings shows that 42% used jute bags, 30% use basket and 28% use plastic sacks to transport the raw nut from the warehouse to the processing centers. It is established in this study that serealone youth in Loko, Kimbali, Kambia and south western aeas participated in eight specific functions such as marketing, processing, transportation, sales, provision of labour, supply of input and handling of harvested cashew nuts but cashew farming also provide avenue for child labour by engaging youths below the age of eighteen as hire labour in cashew farming .

Key words: Cashew • Farming • Youth • Participation

INTRODUCTION

Cashew production has gain prominence in sub-Saharan African countries with Ivory Coast currently leading the global cashew production followed with India, Brazil, Columbia and Vietnam. Cashew botanically known as *Anacardium occidentale* is a perennial crop that grows in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The lifecycle of the tree crop varies between 25 -30 years and it is grown as a tree crop that produces cashew nut and apples. New cashew varieties are being introduced with maturity period ranging between 3-5 years after planting.

Cashew production started in the late 1980 is in Sierra Leone and grows well in most ecological zones found in the North-western region of the country. There are two varieties of cashew produced in Sierra Leone namely: senegalensis and Kumba Gaye. Matured cashew fruit has two different colour – bright red and bright yellow, with the yellow colour is believed to be tastier. Both varieties produce good nuts with three flowering cycles per year. Seed harvesting commence from December and runs up to June.

The leading producer of cashew is MAGBEMA Cashew Farmers association with approximately over 1, 500 Ha under cultivation, all of which is based in Kambia

district. DFID provided both technical and financial support for the establishment of the farm while the Commonwealth Secretariat provided financial support to build a mini processing factory equipped with old technology machines from India.

Youth represent about 60% of all full employment (FAO, 2012) and Africa has the youngest population in the world and each year 10-12 million of its young people seek to enter the continent's workforce, too many without success (Nteranya Ken and Daniya, 2015). A total of 14, 500 farmers are currently engaged in cashew production with total estimated production recorded as 4, 300 Mt. (MAF Baseline survey, 2017). Total estimated is recorded at 15Kg/Ha. The country offers extensive arable land, the greater proportion of which is either underutilized or not utilized at all. Given this facts the Government of Sierra Leone through the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry recognized cashew as an alternative tree crop to the traditional cocoa and coffee predominantly grown in the south/eastern regions of the country. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry have prepared a draft cashew policy that is yet to be enacted by parliament before implementation. The formal sectors of employment where most graduates seek employment cannot absorb the large number of graduates, estimated to be between 10 to 12 million young persons per year (AGRA 2015; AEO, 2012). A large number of educated yet unemployed youth, whose efforts are otherwise key to achieving rural transformation can be employed in cashew farming.

Are youth really in cashew farming or they are not interested? The study will provide answers to the following questions;

- What is the level of youth involvement in cashew farming?
- Which aspect is youth mostly involved?
- What is the source of finance for youth farmers?

Purpose of the Survey: The general purpose of the research study is to evaluate the involvement of youth in cashew processing with specific reference to the cashew production district in the north Western region of the country. Specifically the survey will focus on the following:

- Identify and evaluate youths involvement in cashew production and processing.
- Assess the methods of processing cashew adopted by youths in Sierra Leone.

- Identify source of finance by the youth and determine price variation across time among youth marketers.

The study will provide information that can help on how to provide gainful employment for ever increasing youth in the country. It will provide information that will determine the level of interest and youth preparedness to work in agricultural sector of the economy. It will also showcase the contribution of youth to food production in an economy where youths appear to be highest food consumer. Generational gap (e.g. transfer of indigenous farming knowledge from adults to young can be resolved by involving young people in cashew farming. Cashew can provide access to productive and decent work that helps youth achieve their aspirations, improve their living conditions and actively participate in economic development efforts.

Youth involvement is key to economic growth most especially in agricultural and rural based enterprise which is generating so many research interests. Works such as Leavy and Smith (2010), Sumberg, *et al.* (2012), Woolmer (2015), Okali and Sumberg (2010) Fara, (2010) and IITA (1015) and IFAD- ILO- FAO (2010) among others showcases the relevance of youth in today's economy and beyond.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted both participatory method including focus group discussion and consultations to identify the main economic operators involved in cashew processing and marketing. Key stakeholders like the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Local and international NGO's promoting cashew production and processing, Cashew Commodity Associations in the 3 cashew producing district of Port Loko, kambia and Bombali including Kamcashew enterprise being the first ever cashew processing factory established by Magbema Cashew Farmers Association around the 80's in Kamba district were also identified and consulted. Simple random sampling techniques were used to select respondents. Twenty respondents were sampled randomly from Loko, Kambia, Bombali Western zones of Zeraleon giving a total sample size of eight respondents in the study areas. Questionnaire was the principal instrument of data collection. A total of seventy two copies of a questionnaire were returned and found useful. Descriptive statistics were applied to data collected.

A mixture of personal interviews schedule using questionnaires and personal were applied to collect data/information targeting youths involved in cashew processing and marketing. Personal interview and focused group discussion were used to obtained information from processors in the research, which brings the total number of 40 questionnaires distributed amongst processors. Two enumerators were hired for one week each covering 2 districts to administer the questionnaires amongst the processors in their work location. Total of 72 copies of a questionnaires were recovered and found useful for the study.

Overall, the researcher did supervision and coordination of the study, SLIEPA paid the enumerators fees and transport allowance to facilitate data collection. Personal interviews and inspection of processing facilities were used during data collection.

The researcher using basic computer software in the form of tables and report generated to reflect the views of target processors did preliminary compilation of findings and data analyses.

RESULTAND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents: The result indicated that male had higher representation in cashew farming accounting for more than double the number of female participants. None of the youth was a divorcee but most were responsible youth with a family of their own accounting for 72%. All the youths had formal education with a family size of not more than ten (Table 1). None of the youths was new entrant but with varying degree of experience in cashew farming. The findings shows that more female (72%) youth are engaged in cashew processing than male (28%). The marital status of the youth population in cashew processing shows that 72% are married and 28% single. Findings on education shows that 58% of the youth population had primary education, 28% had secondary education and 14% had education up to tertiary level. The largest Household size of the youth population in cashew processing falls within the range of 5 – 10 (44%), followed with 0-5 (33%) and the least above10 records (23%). The outcome indicated that cashew farming is a good opportunity for job creation giving that male and female youth participation demonstrate a good degree acceptability of cashew farming. Cashew farming can therefore provide panacea to unemployment among graduates of various institution as processors, marketers, distributors and cashew plantation establishment.

Table 1: Socio economic characteristic of respondents

| Characteristics | Frequency | Percentages |
|-------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 20 | 28. |
| Female | 52 | 72 |
| Marital Status | | |
| Married | 52 | 72 |
| Single | 26 | 33.33 |
| Divorced | 0 | 0 |
| Education Status | | |
| Primary | 42 | 58 |
| Secondary | 20 | 25 |
| Tertiary | 10 | 14 |
| Household Size | | |
| 0 - 5 | 24 | 28 |
| 5 - 10 | 32 | 44.44 |
| Above 10 | 16 | 22.22 |
| Business Age | | |
| 5 - 10 years | 38 | 52.77 |
| 10 - 15 years | 20 | 28 |
| Above 15 years | 14 | 19.44 |
| Total percentage | 72 | |

Youth Participation in Cashew Farming: Youth participated in different ways in cashew farming. The youth participated in the following functions: processing, transportation, handling, sales, labour and fruit utilization. The outcome indicated that some youths earned their living by receiving daily or monthly income\`accounting for 33.33% while some earn their income by selling varying quantities and receiving a certain percentage as their remuneration. About 72% were cashew farmers while 20% were engaged as traders. The majority of the youth who participated in processing were involved in manual processing while a negligible few of about 11 % participated in mechanical processing. The youth were involved in transportation of bags into the store, warehouse and from farm to the neighboring villages processing centers. On the side of transportation, the findings shows that 42% used jute bags, 30% use basket and 28% use plastic sacks to transport the raw nut from the warehouse to the processing centers. The source of nuts for processing are mainly from owned farm and accounts for 72% while those source from traders accounts for 18%. Findings on fruit utilization shows that 84% of the fruits are eaten, while 3 % are being processed into wine and the rest 2% are thrown away. Nut handling during processing, the findings shows that 53% throw the nuts into the buckets and 42% place gently into the bucket. The youth provided both hire and family labour for cashew farming representing 36.11% and 63.88% respectively. However cashew business had a negative

Table 3: Youth Participation in Cashew Farming

| Details | Frequency | Percentages |
|-------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Fruits and Nut | | |
| Fruits | 2 | 2.7 |
| RCN | 70 | 96.3 |
| Cashew business | | |
| Direct farm | 52 | 72 |
| Traders | 20 | 28 |
| Processing | | |
| Manual | 64 | 88.88 |
| Local machines | 8 | 11.22 |
| Labour | | |
| Family | 26 | 36.11 |
| Hired | 46 | 63.88 |
| Child Labour+ | | |
| Below 18 yrs. | 8 | 16.66 |
| Above 18 yrs. | 38 | 83.33 |
| Sales | | |
| Quantity | 47 | 66.66 |
| Daily | 6 | 8.33 |
| Monthly | 18 | 25 |
| Fruit Utilization | | |
| Eat | 52 | 72 |
| Wine processing | 8 | 11.11 |
| Throw away | 12 | 16.66 |
| Transportation | | |
| Basket | 22 | 30.55 |
| Placket sacks | 20 | 28 |
| Jute bags | 30 | 41.66 |
| Handling | | |
| Throw into bucket | 20 | 28 |
| Place gently | 52 | 72 |
| Total Percentage | 72.00 | 100.0 |

influence of providing avenue for child labour in the study area. About 16% of the 63.88% of the youth who provided hire labour as services rendered in cashew farming were children below the age of eighteen.

Cashew and Price Variation: It was observed that majority representing 50% agreed that price was low in the month of March and highest price by majority accounting for 52% of respondents was in the month of November. About 66.66% were members of cashew farmers association while a proportion less than 40% did not join any association because it was a voluntary association. The Youth derived their source of finance from banks, cooperatives and self-saving. The youth believed that the profit from cashew farming could be none moderate or high at different times and situations in the market (Table 4).

Table 4: Youth Involvement in Cashew Marketing and price variation

| Details | Frequency | Percentages |
|---------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Low Price | | |
| March | 36 | 50 |
| April | 28 | 38.88 |
| May | 6 | 11.12 |
| High Price | | |
| Nov | 52 | 72.22 |
| Dec | 20 | 27.67 |
| January | 0 | 0 |
| Profit/Margin | | |
| High | 0 | 0 |
| Moderate | 26 | 33.33 |
| Low | 10 | 14 |
| Membership of Association | | |
| Yes | 24 | 33.33 |
| No | 48 | 66.66 |
| Source of Finance* | | |
| Association | 4 | 5.4 |
| Self | 32 | 44.44 |
| Own | 8 | 11.11 |
| Hired | 28 | 38.88 |
| Savings | 24 | 28 |
| Bank loan | 4 | 6.11 |
| Cooperative | 8 | 33.33 |
| Total | 72 | 100 |

CONCLUSION

It is established in this study that Sierra lone youth in Loko, Kimbali, Kambia and south western areas participated in eight specific functions such as marketing, processing, transportation, sales, provision of labour, supply of input and handling of harvested cashew nuts but cashew farming also provide avenue for child labour by engaging youths below the age of eighteen as hire labour for cashew business. More female youth are engaged in cashew processing than their male counterpart. Large scale commercial processing of cashew is lacking in the country. Most of the processors used manual processing with inferior local equipment. Majority of cashew processors don't belong to any product association that would help mobilize players and other actors to serve as the mouthpiece for the product association. Cashew processors lack access to financial support from established institutions within government and the private sector. Most of the cashew processors lack basic training in modern processing techniques

Recommendations:

- Government through the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry should popularize cashew production

nationwide as an emerging new sector with great potential of job creation for the youth population for livelihood security.

- Government through SLIEPA, to promote private sector investment for commercial production of cashew to increase production volumes in the country
 - Government through SLIEPA, to support the private sector to promote value addition initiative that will cater for the needs of both small scale and large scale processors
 - Government through MAF, to support the effort of development partners to provide support to local processors in the form of training and capacity building
 - Government through SLIEPA, to facilitate private sector investment to promote packaging facilities that will meet the needs of small-scale processors
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