Youth Commercial Agricultural Development Programme and Unemployment Reduction in Ekiti State (2017-2021)

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Abstract

The research focused on unemployment and how the Ekiti State Youth Commercial Agricultural Development (YCAD) program has helped in curbing it. The work aimed at determining the effect of YCAD empowerment programme on unemployment reduction in the state and ascertaining the effect of agricultural incentives on unemployment reduction in Ekiti State. The Systems theory propounded by David Easton was used as the theoretical framework. Questionnaire was used as the primary method for data collection while the Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) on SmartPLS3 software was used to run a number of statistical tests on the acquired data and results showed that agricultural incentives have a positive and significant impact on unemployment in Ekiti State. In light of this, the study suggested that more agricultural incentives be made available to everyone, not only the privileged few.

Keywords: Youth Commercial Agricultural Development, Agricultural businesses, System theory, Unemployment reduction, Incentives.

Introduction

The agriculture industry is one of the main forces behind economic growth and development in emerging countries. The potential for the agriculture sector to dramatically increase employment, both in terms of quantity and quality, is very high. An agricultural that is expanding responsibly can provide a decisive boost and significant assistance in the fight against poverty (Fechter, 2012). To achieve this, employment opportunities directly tied to agriculture is crucial. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and African Development Bank (AfDB) affirmed that agriculture is one of the most promising potential fields of employment for young people. Also, the World Bank predicts that by 2030, the agriculture and agribusiness sector in Africa would be worth $1 trillion USD, and that by 2040, the continent's food markets alone will have grown from $313 billion in 2010 (Okwi, 2017).

Nigeria is tragically entangled in the web of the unemployment despite having outstanding potentials in both human and material resources. The fact that Nigeria, with a population of over 200 million and an area of 923,768 square kilometres, of which 82 million hectares are arable lands, had 140,431,790 people as of the 2006 census but still considered internationally as the poverty capital of the world should be worrisome. Nigeria faces a serious problem with its youth unemployment rate, which was

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34.9% as of 2021 (NBS, 2021). Poverty, violence, and social unrest are only a few of the social and economic problems brought on by the high percentage of youth unemployment.

The impact of the high unemployment rate resonates across all the states in Nigeria. For example, the Ekiti State ADP overview from 2013, stated that over 52% of youth in the state were unemployed. As of December 2020, the unemployment rate in Ekiti State stood at 32.21% (NBS 2021). To tackle this menace of unemployment, Ekiti state government established a three-arm agricultural development framework in 2011 to effectively combat the unemployment in the state. A program called "Youth Commercial Agricultural Development" (YCAD) was started. The three-pronged strategy comprised public-private partnerships on agriculture, the provision of agricultural subsidies, and youth commercial agricultural development programs. These initiatives have been effectively implemented since 2011 and are still in place today (Ekiti State ADP overview, 2013).

Ajayi (2017) stated that, the Youth Commercial Agricultural Development (YCAD) program has worked to empower the youth in Ekiti State by providing land and agricultural equipment, milk collection, seed multiplication/capacity building, diary development, cocoa development, agricultural equipment financing, and partnerships with public and private organizations like BORBDA, Friesland Campina, IITA, BOA, Agbekoya Farmers Association, and Afe Babalola University. In spite of these initiatives, the agriculture industry in Ekiti State has not grown sufficiently to offer the youth meaningful employment prospects which is evident in the persistent high unemployment rate of the state. Thus, this study seeks to determine the effect of YCAD empowerment programme on unemployment reduction in Ekiti State and to ascertain the effect of agricultural incentives on unemployment reduction in Ekiti State.

Hypotheses of the Study

H0₁: The YCAD empowerment programme has not significantly affected unemployment in Ekiti State

H0₂: The agricultural incentives have not significantly affected unemployment in Ekiti State.

Literature Review

Agricultural Incentives

According to Cooke et al. (2011), agricultural incentives are devices or methods that are employed to persuade individuals to alter their behaviour in a particular way. According to this concept, agricultural incentives can be provided before the desired behaviour takes place in order to induce that behaviour. These incentives may be monetary or take on other forms. This definition, however, is lacking because

it does not detail the nature of the desired behaviour. According to Thaler and Sunstein (2008), incentives are referred to as "nudges" in the policy community and are any feature of the decision architecture that does not exclude any positive options but instead directs people toward a desired behaviour. They go on to say that the choice architecture is made up of a variety of non-fiscal and non-regulatory weapons that can be employed to influence people's behaviour. Approaches based on incentives or nudges assume that pro-agricultural behaviour can be promoted if the incentive mechanism is in line with people's interests and incorporated into the policy framework for improving and managing the agricultural sector (Cooke et al., 2011; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

Youth Empowerment Programme

Programs that involve young people in decision-making processes related to program design, planning, and execution are known as youth empowerment interventions, according to Morton and Montgomery's (2011) definition. They also stressed the value of encouraging adults with knowledge in specific fields who give young people leadership opportunities in well-organized activities. This definition, which is the main emphasis of this study, did not, however, adequately capture the economic empowerment part of employment. Youth empowerment entails a collaborative, democratic, and prosocial process of involvement, according to Morton and Montgomery (2011), which implies group interaction. Youth empowerment programs, on the other hand, are well-planned and structured courses of action intended to improve young people's long-term employment prospects by giving them basic skills, work readiness skills, occupational training, and citizenship skills, according to the Human Resource Development Centre (2016). This definition of youth empowerment is thorough and includes both the social and economic facets of it. The definition by its content shows that youth empowerment in all its gamut is geared towards skill acquisition for the youths with an ultimate goal of making them productive and fit for any specialization and professionalism in any chosen field or sector of the economy. The conception or definition as interpreted is apt, embracing and in tandem with the philosophy that underpinned this study.

Review of empirical findings

Ajayi (2013) examined the impact of agriculture from 2007 to 2012 on employment, concentrating on the Birnin Gwari Local Government Area. The study's goals were to assess how employment creation in Birnin gwari Local Government has been impacted by the relative neglect of agricultural development and how much agricultural development may support job creation. The study collected its data by giving (400) questionnaires to the respondents who were randomly selected. The data presented and analyzed revealed that the area's agricultural capacity had declined over time due to extensive

neglect, which had a significant impact on employment prospects and led to agricultural businesses being given a demeaning status appropriate only for the elderly, which is why young people were moving from the countryside to the cities. Additionally, it was discovered that if the government implements pro-agricultural policies in the region, full employment can be attained. However, the study did not highlight and assess agricultural development strategies in the local government area, nor did it assess how any such strategies would have affected the number of jobs available in the region's agricultural industry.

In a research by Tochukwu (2012), employment was a key factor in assessing the effects of agricultural development on Nigeria's economic growth from 1980 to 2010. In order to understand how Nigeria's agriculture industry affects job generation and economic growth, a study was conducted. The research design relied heavily on documentary analysis and used secondary data mostly from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) statistical bulletins. According to the study, which used the Ordinary Least Square (OLS) estimate technique, Nigeria's agricultural development positively affects economic growth, including job creation. The study's recommendations, such as the necessity for the government to implement updated agricultural policies and facilities, were, however, viewed as unclear and unworkable because they were made from a very distant, retroactive perspective (Tochukwu, 2012). Furthermore, the study failed to give a thorough examination of the influence of agricultural development on employment in Nigeria and only briefly touched on employment within a macro analysis.

A study on the effects of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) on reducing poverty among farmers in Abia State, Nigeria, was done in 2007 by Obike, Ukoha, and Nwajiuba. Data collection for the study included surveys and questionnaires. The study's conclusions demonstrated that beneficiaries of the agricultural program had improved seedlings per hectare with an average value higher than non-beneficiaries (N6,733.3 vs. N4,250). Additionally, compared to non-beneficiaries (N2,550), beneficiaries received more credit ($7,516 per farmer). Additionally, on average, beneficiaries used more pesticides per acre (N13,000) than non-beneficiaries (N7,250). The report suggested that regulations be put in place to boost income and encourage farmers to make decisions that would enhance their standard of living. The study did not, however, take into account the element of poverty brought on by unemployment, which affects both people with low income and the unemployed.

In order to evaluate the effects of the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) on rural residents in Nigeria, specifically in Isan-Ekiti, Oye Local Government Area of Ekiti State, Omonijo and Toluwase (2014) performed a survey. To assess the study hypotheses, they used multiple linear regression

analysis and questionnaires as their research instrument. The findings demonstrated that by supplying pesticides, better seeds, new infrastructure, and fertilizers, agricultural development programs greatly enhanced food output in the region. The study discovered that improved agricultural output was not significantly impacted by farmers' access to financing. The authors suggested that the government step up efforts to finance agricultural production. However, the study did not examine how the agricultural program's ripple impacts on previously unemployed people's employment.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this work, the System Theory propounded by David Easton in 1965 was adopted. Easton (1965) proposed that a political system could be seen as a delimited (i.e. all political systems have precise boundaries) and fluid (changing) system of steps in decision making. To him a system is made up of elements or subsystem which are interdependent and must function effectively to make the system sustainable. Redundancy in any of the subsystems impinges on the ability of the whole (system) to operate effectively and efficiently. That is, the input into a system in conjunction with the environment determines the output. In simple terms, steps and polices which are interdependent need to be put in place are needed for a system to be efficient and effective. For this study, the Ekiti State government established the 'Youth Commercial Agricultural Development Programme' which is the 'political system or the conversion process', while the unemployed youth form the "Input", and ultimately employment creation and self-empowerment serves as the "output". Government policies and business environment serve as the environments that influence the system while studies like this are the feedback to access the impact of the scheme.

Methodology

The study used a survey research design, with questionnaires serving as the primary instrument for gathering data. This strategy was adopted to allow for the gathering of multiple viewpoints and assessments from different groups, including program participants, non-participants, and representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and the agriculture departments in specified local government regions.

Population and Sample Size of the Study

Given the total number of direct beneficiaries of the state youth commercial agricultural development program, the study's sample size was calculated using the Yamane's formula. The overall number of direct beneficiaries, as reported by the Ekiti Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (EMANR, 2014), was 1,161, with the local government areas of Emure, Efon, and Ido-osi each reporting 589, 296

and 276 beneficiaries, respectively. These numbers were also confirmed by consulting the local governments' record books from 2017 to 2022 (Ido-osi local government record book; Emure local government record book; Efon local government record book). Applying Yamane's formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

whereby n= sample, N=population, and e=alpha or level of significance. With 0.05 alpha (level of significance).

$$n = \frac{1161}{1+1161\,(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1161}{3.9025}$$

n = 297.5

n = 298

The sample size for the study is 298, as determined by the Yamane's formula calculation. Based on Israel's (2013) advice, a 10% adjustment was applied to account for anticipated non-response and partial responses. This results in the calculated sample size of 298 being increased by 30 respondents, making the new sample size 328.

Table 1: Showing the population and sample size of the study

S/N	Target (Study area)	Population	Sample size
1.	Emure Local government	589	$\frac{589}{1161}$x328 = 166
2	Efon Local government	296	$\frac{296}{1161}$x328 = 84
3	Ido-osi Local government	276	$\frac{589}{1161}$x328 = 78
	Total	**1161**	**328**

Source: Field survey, 2023

Sampling Technique

Probability sampling techniques was employed in this study. The questionnaire respondents were selected from among the beneficiaries through the use of simple random sampling which are probability sampling technique. This was done to ensure fair representation of the target groups. Questionnaire was administered to 166, 84, and 78 randomly selected beneficiaries of the agricultural development programme in Emure, Efon and Ido-osi Local Government Areas respectively.

Sources of Data Collection

Primary sources

The only main sources are questionnaires. Because of its dependability, practicality, and grounding in anonymity, the employment of questionnaires in this context is both required and practical. The closed-ended format of the questionnaires made it simple to tabulate, code, and analyze the data. The study's questionnaire was divided into four sections, A, B, C, and D, which stood for the three research hypotheses. The survey was composed of closed-ended questions with response options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, developed using the Likert 5-point scale approach. Participants in the study were given 328 questionnaires total, including questions taken from earlier research. The survey included several parts of closed-ended questions that were scored on a Likert scale with values ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Reliability of Research Instruments

The ability of a research tool to consistently and steadily produce accurate data is known as reliability. Utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), the reliability analysis of the questionnaire will be carried out in this study. According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), a Cronbach's alpha value between 0.7 and 0.9 is desirable, between 0.6 and 0.7 is acceptable, and a coefficient of 0.9 or higher indicates outstanding reliability. A pilot research with 30 respondents was undertaken to test the questionnaire's reliability, and the results were then put through a Cronbach's alpha test with a 70% cutoff. The output in Table 2 is greater than 70%, demonstrating the internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire for use in the study.

Table 2	Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha		N of Items
.870		16

Source: SPSS version 25 output

Method of Data Presentation and Analysis

Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) on SmartPLS3 software was used to run a number of statistical tests on the acquired data. The tests included screening for outliers and determining whether there were any missing values, which were filled in using the mean substitution method. Additionally, the data were examined for multicollinearity and normalcy using the VIF, skewness, and kurtosis statistics. The measurement model and structural model, respectively, are the two models that make up the SmartPLS3 software. Path coefficients, path loadings, and total and

indirect effect coefficients were studied using the outer model, and these variables were studied using the inner model (Garson, 2016).

Presentation of Descriptive Results

Table 3   **Age of the respondents**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18-25years	97	31.7	31.7	31.7
26-30years	122	39.9	39.9	71.6
31-35years	87	28.4	28.4	100.0
Total	306	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey

The table 3 shows the age distribution of the respondents. 97 (31.7%) were between 18-25years, 122 (39.9%) are between 26-30years and finally and 87(28.4%) were between 31-35years. This shows that majority of the respondents are between 26-30years.

Table 4   **Educational Qualification**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
O level	155	50.7	50.7	50.7
NCE/ND	110	35.9	35.9	86.6
HND/B.Sc	28	9.2	9.2	95.8
Postgraduate	13	4.2	4.2	100.0
Total	306	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey

The table 4 shows the educational qualification of the respondents. 155 (50.7%) were secondary school certificate holders, 110 (35.9%) were diploma holders, 28 (9.2%) were HND/degree holders and 13 (4.2%) were postgraduate holders. This shows that majority of the respondents have attained O' level of education and thus can provide answers to the questionnaire

Table 5   **YCAD programmes**

ITEMS	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std.
1. YCAD programme in Ekiti state has improve the income of young farmers	306	1	5	3.68	1.294
2. The programme has provided adequate training and support to young farmers	306	1	5	3.62	1.228
3. The programme improve overall productivity of young farmers in the state	306	1	5	3.79	1.129
4. The programme provide access to financial resources to young farmers Ekiti State	306	1	5	3.80	1.278
Valid N (listwise)	306				

Source: Field survey

Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics for YCAD programme. Mean response to question 1 on YCAD programme is above average (3.50-5.00); this result indicates that YCAD programme in Ekiti state has improve the income of young farmers. The mean response to question 2 on adequacy of training is above average (3.50-5.00); this result shows that retaining the programme has provided adequate

training and support to young farmers. The mean response to question 3 on productivity of farmers is also above average (3.50-500); this result indicates that the programme improve overall productivity of young farmers in the state. The mean response to question 4 on access to finance is above average (3.50-5.00); this result indicates that, the programme provide access to financial resources to young farmers Ekiti State.

Table 6   **Agricultural Incentives**

ITEMS	N	Min	Max.	Mean	Std.
5. The provision of credit facilities galvanized interest to agricultural businesses	306	1	5	3.11	1.210
6. There is affordable machineries provided to young farmers to participate in agriculture	306	1	5	3.90	1.219
7. The grant given by the state government helped you to start up your agricultural business	306	1	5	3.55	1.120
8. New agricultural businesses are exempted from tax in the first three years of operations	306	1	5	3.52	1.084
Valid N (listwise)	306				

Source: Field survey

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics for agricultural incentives. Mean response to question 5 on provision of credit facilities is below average (1.00-3.49); this result indicates that provision of credit facilities does not galvanized interest to agricultural businesses. The mean response to question 6 on provision of machineries is above average (3.50-5.00); this result shows that there are affordable machineries provided to young farmers to participate in agriculture. The mean response to question 7 on grant is also above average (3.50-500); this result indicates that the grant given by the state government helped the participants to start up their agricultural business. The mean response to question 8 on tax exemption is above average (3.50-5.00); this result indicates that, new agricultural businesses are exempted from tax in the first three years of operations.

Table 7   **Unemployment reduction**

ITEMS	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std.
9. YCAD programme has been effective in creating employment opportunities for youth in community	306	1	5	3.62	1.128
10. YCAD programme enabled young people to become self-employed	306	1	5	3.72	1.299
11. YCAD programme has improved the standard of living of the youth in your community	306	1	5	3.67	1.201
Valid N (listwise)	306				

Source: Field survey

Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics for unemployment reduction. Mean response to question 9 on effectiveness of the programmes above average (3.50-5.00); this result indicates that YCAD programme has been effective in creating employment opportunities for youth in the community. The mean response to question 10 on self-employment is above average (3.50-5.00); this result shows that YCAD programme enabled young people to become self-employed. The mean response to question 11 on improvement of standard of living is above average (3.50-500); this result indicates that YCAD programme has improved the standard of living of the youth in your community.

Inferential Analysis and Results

The conventional bootstrap approach was used on a sample of 306 cases using 5,000 bootstrap samples to assess the theoretical linkages in the structural model, following the advice of Hair et al. (2013) and Henseler et al. (2009). This was done to evaluate the path coefficients' importance for the model's direct and indirect relationships.

Table 8: Bootstrapping results of the structural model

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values	Decision
AGI ->UNR	0.312	0.314	0.049	6.409	**0.000**	**Reject H0**
YCAD ->UNR	0.428	0.426	0.050	8.611	**0.000**	**Reject H0**

Source: SMART PLS 3 Output

The results from Table 8 are shown in Figure 1: Structural model
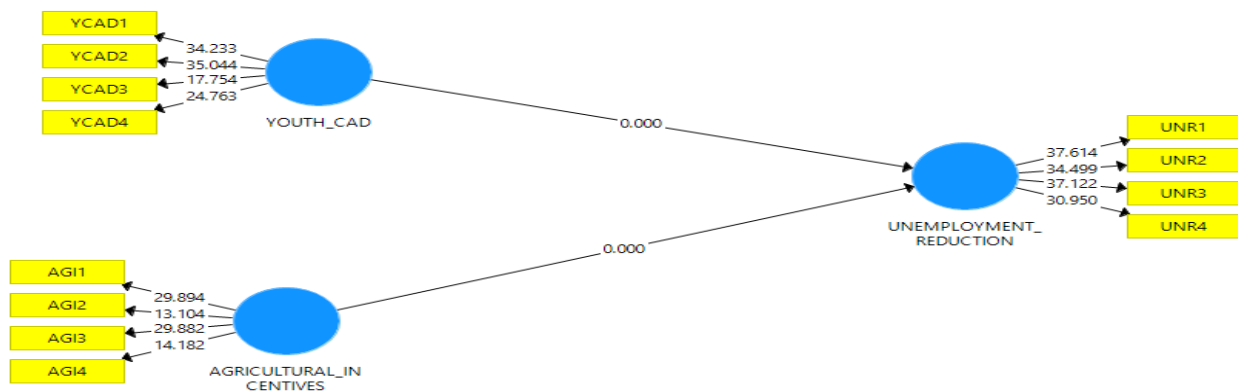
The findings in table 8 and figure 1 indicate a significant and positive association between agricultural incentives (AGI) and a decline in unemployment (UNR). With a value of 0.312 and a p-value of 0.000, the study specifically discovered that agricultural incentives had a positive and significant impact on the decrease in unemployment. At a 5% level of significance, the null hypothesis that agricultural incentives are not statistically associated to a decrease in unemployment is rejected because the p-value is less than 5%. This suggests that increasing agricultural incentives for beginning farmers will lead to a 31% rise in the reduction of unemployment in the research area. With a value of 0.428 and a p-value of 0.000, the study's findings also show that youth commercial agricultural development (YCAD) has a favorable and significant impact on the decline in unemployment. This result disproves the null hypothesis that the study area's unemployment rate is not significantly reduced by the youth agricultural

development program. This suggests that increasing the youth commercial agricultural development program by a certain amount will result in a 43% rise in the study area's unemployment reduction.

Effect size (f²) and Predictive relevance (Q²)

The f^2 statistics is used to assess the impact of an exogenous construct on the endogenous latent variable. According to Selya et al. (2012), the criteria for calculating effect sizes is based on the values 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, which are used to indicate small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively.

The R-square, also known as the coefficient of determination, is used to measure how much variance is explained by exogenous and how much by endogenous factors. According to Chin (2010), R^2 values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19, respectively, signify strong, moderate, and weak correlations. Additionally, the predictive correlation (Q^2) of external latent variables with respect to endogenous latent variables was examined using cross-validated redundancy criteria.

Table 9: R-square (R²), Effect size (f²), and Predictive relevance (Q²)

Constructs	f² Satisfaction	Effect Size	
Agricultural incentives	0.086	Small	
Youth CAD	0.163	Medium	
R-square (R²)	0.475	**Adjusted**0.473	
Predictive Relevance Indicator	**SSO**	**SSE**	**Q² (=1-SSE/SSO)**
AGRICULTURAL INCENTIVES	1,560.000	1,560.000	
UNEMPLOYMENT REDUCTION	1,560.000	1,096.453	0.297
YOUTH_CAD	1,560.000	1,560.000	

Source: SMART PLS output

From table 9, agricultural incentives (AGI) has small effect size on unemployment reduction in Ekiti state while youth commercial agriculture development has higher effect size on unemployment reduction. The R-Square value indicates that agricultural incentives (AGI) and youth commercial agricultural development (YCAD) have jointly explained the variation in the unemployment reduction in the selected local governments by 48%, while other factors not captured in this study accounted for the remaining 52%. Finally, the model could be said to have predictive relevance because the Q² value (0.297) is greater than zero.
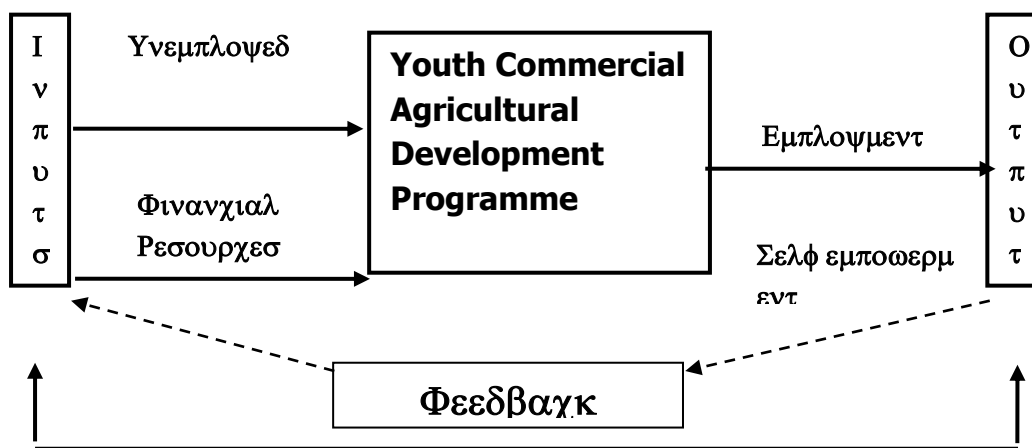
Discussion of Result

The findings show a positive and significant effect between agricultural incentives and unemployment reduction in Ekiti State. This implies that agricultural incentives have potential to stimulate unemployment youth thereby encouraging them to venture into farming which will eventually improve their standard of living, income level and ultimately contribute to reduction in unemployment in the study area. It also implies that agricultural incentives ensure the development of young farmers and boasting productive as a result of the incentives such as grants, credit facilities, tax exemptions provided by the government through the programme. The findings affirm that agricultural incentives provided by government greatly motivates young farmers which enhances productivity. This finding corroborates previous studies (Ajayi 2013; Tochukwu 2012) which opined that government intervention and incentives make the youth farmers more focused and encouraged.

Finally, the results of this study indicate a positive and significant relationship between Youth commercial agricultural development and unemployment reduction. This means that the establishment of the programme has led to a reduction in the rate of unemployment in the study domain. That is, a programme of this nature has higher performance level in terms of reducing unemployment rate. Thus, the findings imply that if the *Youth Commercial Agricultural Development (YCAD) program* can be sustained for a very long period of time, the level of unemployment in the study area will significantly reduce. Also, the findings conform to the result from the qualitative data where the respondents acknowledge that the incentives provided have helped them not only to be self-employed but they have also become employers of labour.

System's Theory as Applied to the Study

Σοχιο □ Εχονομιχ φαχτορ

	Υνεμπλοψεδ	**Youth Commercial Agricultural Development Programme**	Εμπλοψμεντ	
Ινπυτσ	Φινανχιαλ Ρεσουρχεσ		Σελφ εμποωερμεντ	Ουτπυτ

Φεεδβαχκ

Γοϖερνμεντ Πολιχιεσ   Ινχεντιϖεσ

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Youth Commercial Agricultural Development Program in Ekiti State, demonstrates a substantial effort to increase the employment potential of agriculture. Although, the program had varying effects on lowering unemployment, the effects were positive nonetheless. Thus, it may be said that the agricultural development program was effective based on the encouraging outcomes gained from all of its sections. The study made the following recommendations in light of its findings:

i.   The program can have a greater impact on lowering unemployment and enhancing the livelihoods of people working in the agricultural sector if agricultural incentives are made open and available to everyone. As the study showed that increasing the availability of agricultural incentives will encourage more individuals to engage in agricultural pursuits, thereby boosting agricultural production and promoting regional food security.

ii.   Specific agricultural value chains with the ability to offer job opportunities for young people should be the program's main focus. In order to do this, it may be necessary to identify the most important value chains, create maps of those networks, and put interventions in place so as to improve the connections between value chain actors. This will enable young people working in the agricultural sector to have easier access to credit. Also, Government should consider offering soft loans and grants, make it easier for people to connect with financial institutions and create cutting-edge financial products that are specifically suited to the requirements of youth-led agricultural enterprises.

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