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PERCEPTION OF JOB-SEEKING GRADUATES IN OYO STATE NIGERIA TO CASHEW PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT: *Cashew is an important and commercially grown cash crop in Oyo state and Nigeria generally for its apple and most importantly the nuts. Cashew cultivation in recent years has experienced a yield decline due to few cashew farmers involved and moribund cashew trees. This paper aims to understand the perception of job-seeking graduates in Oyo state to cashew production and proffer recommendations that will help in promoting their participation. Some selected areas were considered in Oyo state and data were collected using a questionnaire on socio-demographic characteristics of the respondent, awareness on cashew tree and its importance, opinion of respondents to cashew farming, perception of respondents to money-making opportunities in cashew production and categorization of the respondents based on their level of perception. 270 respondents were considered in the survey. Data were analyzed using the SPSS statistical package. Results showed that 45.5% of the unemployed graduates were between the ages of 30-34 years. The study also showed that 90.7% know the economic importance of cashew while 89.3% know cashew farming as profitable. Farming ventures interest 73.3% of the unemployed graduates while 66.7% would want to venture into cashew farming. 52.2% of the job-seeking graduates had a favourable level of perception about cashew production. The perception of the job-seeking graduates is satisfactory as the favourability of their level of perception to cashew production is a little above average. Feasible loans or grants should be made available and easily accessible to job-seeking graduates to promote their involvement in cashew farming.*

KEYWORDS: Cashew, Perception, Unemployed, Farming, Graduates, Production.

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INTRODUCTION

Cashew (Anacardium Occidentale L.), is a well-known species of the Anacardiaceae family (Subbarao *et al*., 2011). It originated from Brazil but the Portuguese explorers introduced it to Nigeria in the 15th and 16th centuries (Asogwa *et. al*., 2008) which was then used majorly for afforestation purposes and erosion control. The commercialization of cashew started in 1953 in Nigeria (Akinwale and Esan, 1989) and is now cultivated in about 20 states with Kogi, and Oyo state among the major cultivators. Cashew trees produce important edible nuts which are in major demand in the global market (Tola and Mazengia, 2019) with Nigeria known as one of its leading producers. The tree brings sustainable revenue to both farmers and local buyers (Elijah, 2015). It is an important dollar-earning crop (Anon, 2017). Cashew farming is mostly practiced for its wood, apple and majorly the nut (Adeigbe, *et. al*., 2015). Traits of importance in cashew are nut size, tree height, the colour of apple, disease resistance and nut yield (Aliyu *et. al*., 2008) with a mature tree producing a yield within the range of 7-11 kg per annum (Adejo *et. al*., 2011).

There is a feasible decrease in nut yield of cashew in growing parts of Nigeria such as Oyo state due to a decline in the population of cashew farmers (Hammed *et. al*., 2008) and an increase in senile or moribund cashew trees in the growing parts of the country. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2020), cashew production in Nigeria dropped from 800,000 tonnes in 2009 to 100,000 tonnes in 2019 making Nigeria currently ranked as the 14th producer of cashew from 1st as of 2009. Globally, Nigeria supplies about 2.52 percent share of the total global export of cashew nut which is very low in contrast to the output of other cashew producing countries such as Ivory Coast (20.01%), India (18.76%), Vietnam (7.15%), Tanzania (5,68%) and Benin (5.16%) (Food and Agriculture Organization Statistics {FAOSTAT}, 2019). Among Nigerian agricultural export commodities, cashew ranked 5th with 61,867 tonnes of cashew nuts exported (FAO, 2018) with cocoa beans, sesame seeds, bran wheat and palm kernel taking the first to fourth positions respectively. These low values call for concern thereby creating a need to increase cashew production.

Despite the importance of cashew to economic growth and development, the hidden prospect of the crop in Nigeria is yet to be tapped into (Asiru *et. al*., 2005). Currently, cashew tree products are not being fully taken advantage of for income making. Investment return in cashew farming ranges between 30 to 40 percent in 3-5 years after cultivation (Ingredient Sourcing Solution {ISS}, 2015); this implies that cashew cultivation is a money-making business. Some of the challenges currently facing cashew production in Nigeria include moribund trees, farmers with small farm holdings and deforestation (Aliyu *et. al*., 2008). The value chain of cashew has not been effectively tapped, despite its money-making prospects. (Adesanya *et. al*., 2021).

Unemployment most especially among the graduate youth is a critical problem in Nigeria today which is one of the factors responsible for social vice activities such as armed robbery, internet fraud, kidnapping and banditry. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020), the rate of unemployment in Nigeria increased from 23.4% in 2019 to 27.1% in 2020 and the rate of unemployment among the youth increased from 29.7% in 2018 to 34.9% in 2020. This implies that 21.7 million Nigerians are unemployed of which 7.6 million are youth within the ages of 15 to 34 years. In the absence of white-collar jobs for the graduate youths, agricultural ventures such as cashew production or engaging in one or more of its value chains can help reduce unemployment in the society creating good income for the youth and also contributing

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directly to an increase in the production of cashew and its products. Oyo state is a major cashew-producing state in Nigeria with an unemployment rate of 17.99% – 19.64% (Statista, 2020) with a high rate of unemployment among its graduate youth.

Some of the opportunities involved in cashew production include cultivation for the apple, nuts, or both for local consumption or export, cashew seedling production, processing, marketing and export which can help address the problem of unemployment among Nigerian youth and thereby contributing to the increase in production of cashew. The various stages of the cashew value chain can be grouped into input supply, farm production, post-harvest handling e.g drying, marketing and transportation, processing, export and consumption. The identified stages of cashew production and processing serve as a source of revenue for farmers (Adeigbe, *et. al*., 2015). The investors in the cashew nut value chain are expected to provide job opportunities for the overcrowded Nigerian youths (Adesanya *et. al*., 2021) which indirectly contributes to the national revenue and gross domestic product of the country.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to:

1. Understand the perception of job-seeking graduates in Oyo state to cashew production.
2. Identify ways of increasing the production of cashew among job-seeking graduates in Oyo state.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The study was conducted in Oyo State with the coordinate 8.1574° N, 3.6147° E located in the South Western area of Nigeria. It is ranked 5th as the most populated state in Nigeria. The ecological form of Oyo State is that of guinea savannah in the north and rain forest in the south.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used in selecting areas considered which were Ibadan, Oyo and Ogbomoso. High population, high numbers of graduates and involvement in cashew production and its value chain were of paramount importance in the selection of the surveyed areas. Purposive sampling was also used in selecting 270 respondents, 90 each from the 3 areas as the respondents were either job-seeking graduate youths or unemployed but running a not too sustainable business before participating in the survey.

Data Collection

A physical approach was used at each of the selected areas as data were collected using questionnaires. The data collected were socio-demographic characteristics of the respondent (sex, age, marital status, area of residence, academic qualification, course of study and number of years after graduation), awareness on cashew tree and its importance, opinion of respondents to cashew farming, perception of respondents to money-making opportunities in cashew production and categorization of the respondents based on their level of perception.

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Data Analysis

Data obtained were analyzed using SPSS statistical package (version 22). Descriptive statistics such as frequency table, percentage were used and relationships were tested using chi-square.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 on socio-economic characteristics of the job-seeking youths showed that 61.1% are male while 38.9% are female. The majority (45.5%) are within the age range of 30 – 34 years while 35.6% are within the age range of 25 – 29 years which indicate that a larger population of the job-seeking youths are still in their productive youthful period which gives them an edge for a favorable result if involved in cashew production. 55.6% and 37.7% had B.Sc. and post-graduate. qualifications respectively which show that they are well learned in their various professional fields. A very sizable amount of the youths studied Agricultural science-related courses (37.8%) followed by Engineering related courses (15.6%). 52.2% had graduated 1-5 years, 40% had graduated between 6-10 years while 3.3% had graduated over 10 years which indicates that graduate youths have not been getting white-collar jobs immediately after graduation.

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Socio-economic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	165	61.1
Female	105	38.9
Age		
20 – 24	24	8.9
25 – 29	96	35.6
30 – 34	123	45.5
35 – 39	27	10
Marital Status		
Single	156	57.8
Married	114	42.2
Area of residence		
Ibadan	90	33.3
Oyo	90	33.3
Ogbomoso	90	33.3
Level of education		
Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.)	150	55.6
Post-Graduate	102	37.7
Others	18	6.7
Course of study		
Agricultural science	102	37.8
Languages	6	2.2
Basic sciences	36	13.3
Medicine	30	11.1
Earth sciences	3	1.1

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Engineering	42	15.6
Social science	21	7.8
Management sciences	6	2.2
Computer science	9	3.3
Pharmacy	6	2.2
Food science	9	3.3
Number of year(s) after graduation		
0	12	4.4
1 – 5	141	52.2
6 – 10	108	40.0
Above 10	9	3.3

Source: Field survey: 2021

The table 2 on the distribution of respondents by their awareness on cashew tree and its importance showed that 96.3% knows what a cashew tree is which signifies that cashew tree is a popular tree. 99.6% of the respondents can identify cashew nut which showed that cashew nut is a well-known nut. 83.3% know what a cashew apple is while 16.7% have no idea. 90.7% knows the economic importance of cashew tree while 87.4% knows cashew nut as a major export commodity in Nigeria which shows that the economic importance of cashew as a major export crop is widely known. 89.3% know cashew farming to be profitable.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by their awareness of Cashew tree and its importance

Awareness of Cashew tree and its importance	Yes	No
Do you know what a cashew tree looks like	260 (96.3)	10 (3.7)
Can you identify cashew nuts?	269 (99.6)	1 (0.4)
Can you identify cashew apples?	225 (83.3)	45 (16.7)
Cashew trees are of economic importance.	245 (90.7)	25 (9.3)
Cashew nut is a major export commodity in Nigeria.	236 (87.4)	34 (12.6)
Cashew farming is profitable.	241 (89.3)	29 (10.7)
Nigeria is one of the leading producers of cashew nuts.	170 (63.0)	100 (37.0)

Source: Field survey, 2021. Values in parentheses ( ) are percentages

Table 3 on the distribution of respondents according to their opinion on cashew farming showed that 73.3% had a positive opinion about their interest in farming ventures which implies the majority are interested in farming. It is easier to get land on lease for farming than from family/friends and owning one as respondents had a positive opinion of 54.4%, 46.6% and 40% respectively. 95.5% had a positive opinion on farming being profitable. The majority of the respondent had a positive opinion on the commercialization of cashew as well known (78.9%), a money-making venture (91.1%), willingness to venture into cashew farming (66.7%), cashew farming as prestigious (74.4%), awareness on available training (46.6%) and their availability for any cashew farming training (81.1%).

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Table 4 shows the perception of respondents to money-making opportunities in cashew production. 58.9% prefer cultivation for the nuts, 15.6% prefer cultivation for the apple which has the lowest response of all the money-making opportunities. This indicates that the economic importance of the cashew apple is not well-known and established among the youths. Export had the highest response of 68.9% which shows that the majority prefers exportation among the money-making opportunities considered while processing and cashew seedling production had 44.4% and 35.6% respectively.

Table 3: Distribution of the respondents according to their opinion on cashew farming

Opinion of the respondent to cashew farming	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Standard Deviation
Farming venture interests me	111 (41.1)	114 (32.2)	33 (12.2)	6 (2.2)	6 (2.2)	4.18	0.89
I can easily get land of my own for farming	48 (17.8)	30 (22.2)	66 (24.4)	66 (24.4)	30 (11.1)	3.11	1.28
I can easily get land from family and friends for farming	60 (22.2)	66 (24.4)	69 (25.6)	48 (17.8)	27 (10.0)	3.31	1.28
I can easily get land on lease for farming	33 (12.2)	114 (42.2)	63 (23.3)	42 (15.6)	18 (6.7)	3.38	1.10
Farming is a profitable venture	174 (64.4)	84 (31.1)	6 (2.2)	6 (2.2)	0 (0.0)	4.58	0.65
Commercial cultivation of cashew is well known	87 (32.2)	126 (46.7)	27 (10.0)	24 (8.9)	6 (2.2)	3.98	0.99
Cashew farming is a money-making venture	126 (46.7)	120 (44.4)	24 (8.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4.38	0.65
I will love to venture into cashew farming	105 (38.9)	75 (27.8)	81 (30.0)	3 (1.1)	6 (2.2)	4.00	0.97
Cashew farming is prestigious	90 (33.3)	111 (41.1)	60 (22.2)	3 (1.1)	6 (2.2)	4.02	0.90
There are available trainings on cashew farming	33 (12,2)	93 (34.4)	81 (30.0)	45 (16.7)	18 (6.7)	3.29	1.09
I will be available for any cashew training	114 (42.2)	105 (38.9)	26 (13.3)	12 (4.4)	3 (1.1)	4.17	0.90

Source: Field survey, 2021. Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD). Values in parentheses ( ) are percentages.

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Table 4: Perception of respondents to money-making opportunities in cashew production

Money making opportunities in cashew production	Frequency	Percentage
Cultivation for the nuts	159	58.9
Cultivation for the apple	42	15.6
Marketing	93	34.4
Export	186	68.9
Cashew seedling production	96	35.6
Processing	120	44.4
Storage and warehousing	87	32.2
Consultancy and management services	96	35.6

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 5 shows that 52.2% of the respondents had a favorable perception of cashew production while 47.8 had an unfavourable perception of cashew production which indicates that more than half of the job-seeking graduates favours cashew production.

Table 5: Categorization of the respondents based on their level of perception

Level of Perception	Categorization	Frequency	Percentage
Favourable	≥ 3.85	141	52.2
Unfavourable	< 3.85	129	47.8

Source: Field survey, 2021 Overall mean = 3.85

Table 6 shows that gender and area of residence had a significant relationship with the level of perception of the respondent to cashew farming which indicates that gender and area of residence influenced the perception of respondents to cashew production.

Table 6: Relationship between selected socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and the level of perception of the respondent to cashew farming in the study area.

Socio-economic characteristics	Chi-square	p-value
Gender	6.242	0.012*
Marital status	0.621	0.431
Area of residence	7.036	0.030*
Academic qualification	5.801	0.122
Course of study	6,664	0.757

*** Represents significant differences.**

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Table 7 shows that availability of land to farm, little or no knowledge in cashew farming and little or no understanding of the value of crop had a significant relationship with the level of perception of the respondent to cashew farming. This indicates that availability of land to farm, little or no knowledge in cashew farming and little or no understanding of the value of crop influenced youth's perception in engaging in cashew farming.

Table 7: Relationship between the level of perception of the respondent to cashew farming and constraints militating against cashew farming in the study area

Constraints to youth participation in cashew production	Chi-square	p-value
Lack of fund	0.260	0.610
Availability of land to farm	4.613	0.032*
Little to no knowledge in cashew farming	4.609	-0.031*
Little to no understanding of the value of crop	4.446	-0.035*
The 3 to 4 years wait before fruiting	0.022	0.881
Poor knowledge of its value chain	1.309	0.253
Little or no knowledge about the marketing of cashew products	0.027	0.869
Little or no knowledge about processing, processing machines or equipment	2.618	0.106
Insecurity	0.074	0.786
Access to labour	0.239	0.625
Pilfering (theft)	1.263	0.261

*** Represents significant differences.**

CONCLUSION

A larger population of job-seeking graduates are still in their prolific youthful age, well-educated and unemployed for about an average of 4.98 years. Creating job opportunities for this population by engaging them in cashew farming or any of its value chains will help increase the decline experienced in cashew production and output thereby serving as a job opportunity and a major source of sustainable income for the job-seeking youths.

The overall perception of the job-seeking graduates is satisfactory as the favourability of their level of perception to cashew production is a little above average. Therefore to increase this, more effort must be put into awareness, training, funding and empowerment programs targeted at youths to improve the perception of youths generally to cashew production which will in the long run increase production.

Cashew tree, its fruit are well known as a profitable economic and export crop in Nigeria, however necessary training and empowerment must be adopted to help monetize this knowledge thereby increasing cashew production.

The economic importance of cashew apples is not well known therefore more awareness and training on the importance of cashew apples must be encouraged and promoted.

Farmlands should be made available via the government farm settlement system to interested cashew farmers on long term lease and training on the value of cashew, cashew production, its agronomy, value chain, security and guarding should be regularly conducted by the

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government in collaboration with Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria and other Institutes or organizations whose one of their mandate crops is cashew via mass media, social media platforms, lectures and seminars.

RECOMMENDATION

Research should be conducted in other cashew growing areas in Nigeria such as Kogi, Osun and Kwara state in order to understand the perception of job-seeking graduates to cashew production from which a national recommendation can be made to increase cashew production in Nigeria.

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