
LABOUR SCARCITY AND ITS EFFECTS ON RICE PRODUCTION AND YIELDS IN UKOUGH COMMUNITY GBOKO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE STATE NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

This study centred on the growing scarcity of human labour and how rice production has been affected by the trend in the study area. The objectives pursued among other things includes: To examine the nature of labour required for rice productivity in the study area, to assess the nature of labour scarcity in the area of study, to evaluate the quantity of rice produced in the study area, to examine the impact of labour scarcity on rice production in the study area. The Marxist theory of labour was used as a basis for analysis and explanations in these research, while survey methodology was employed. The study was located at Ukough community in Gboko Local Government Area while, the population of the study was all rice farmers in Ukough Community from where a sample of 120 farmers, was purposely drawn. Data were collected using Structured and key informant interview, the analysis of the data was carried out qualitatively and quantitatively using percentages and descriptive interpretive analysis and percentages. Findings revealed that weeding, ploughing, Spraying and land clearing, weeding and harvesting were the major activities in rice cultivation, these lack workers making it difficult for rice farmers to produce the desired quantity of rice per year. It was recommended among other things that, Rice production be mechanised and agriculture be made more attractive to the youths through provision of social amenities, by government intervention. Rural areas should also be made conducive to attract residence and hence labour and appreciable wages be paid to attract labour on farm.

Keywords: *Labour scarcity, Rice production, yield*

INTRODUCTION

Labour is very imperative in carrying out any productive activity, human labour determines the quality and quantity of production carried out in any given organisation or venture, it is the cardinal point upon which all other inputs like capital, land and equipment revolve, since these are organised and utilised through human labour to ensure output. Labour is one of the most principal components in an agricultural system. Pinga et-al (2022) observed that, human labour is about the main source of labour available to smallholder farmers in Nigeria as it accounts for domestic food supply in the nation. She views agricultural labour force as being segmented with many categories including family, owner-operators, farm managers, hired labour, and seasonal labour. The agricultural labour force is characterised by lower formal education and training.

In recent days, the agricultural sector seems to be facing a huge problem of labour scarcity which affects the farmers and agricultural scientists to meet out the food security problem facing the world at present. Prabakara et-al (2011) considered some of the reasons for this situation to include, higher earnings realised by workers in other locally accessible jobs and the seasonal nature of agricultural work which discouraged many workers leading to labour scarcity. For instance in non-agricultural jobs like electrical work, carpentry, plumbing and masonry, workers get more daily wages than agricultural labour, this attracts youths to get involved in non-agricultural jobs, running away from farming. Commenting on the effects of this situation on agricultural production Amarender et-al (2014) and Devi (2012) were of the view that, due to the inadequacy of labour, many agricultural activities necessary for rice cultivation are delayed not keeping to the desired seasons which makes it difficult to meet out the potential productivity. Madu & Aniobi. (2018) discovered that in recent days, some of the small farmers get away from the agricultural sector because of the scarcity of labour, as they lease their land to medium and big time farmers who can afford large machineries to meet out the labour demand and the daily wages required.

Tasker (2018) and Nmadu et-al (2015) noticed that, while there are significant data gaps on the composition of labour and skills in the agricultural sector, there is growing evidence of a large mismatch between the needs of the sector and the supply of labour and skills, in the face of technological change. In the present economy, labour and skills shortages

are being experienced in many economic sectors across countries. Osugiri, et-al (2012) explain this to have resulted into increased competition, especially for semi-skilled and skilled labour in the agro-food sector. Entry barriers to the sector are a concern and include high start-up costs, geographical isolation, fragmented rural infrastructure, relatively low remuneration, poor working conditions, and the negative perception of farming as a professional career by youths. Rice production requires clearing of the land, ploughing the soil, and planting, weeding, application of needed agro-chemicals, harvesting and processing. All these processes requires much labour for efficient productivity and better yield. The short of labour has been found to have an impact on planting, precision, better weed control, timely harvesting and crop processing. This, therefore, shows that non-availability of labour is one of the major constraints in peasant production, especially during planting, weeding and harvesting.

Prabakara et-al (2011) writing about their findings on the implications of labour scarcity on rice yield revealed that in India, there is a prevalence of acute labour scarcity in the district of Tamil Nadu and it has affected the productivity levels of almost all crops and is even leading towards the permanent changes in the cropping pattern. More recently Lawal(2018) reported a major challenge in rice transplanting that happens across over 30 million hectares at the beginning of the monsoon rainfall season. More than 95% of the rice area in India is dependent on manual labour for crop establishment and as the labourers migrate from the north-western states of Haryana and Punjab, to their home states with little prospect of returning in the near future, labour scarcity becomes a challenge.

According to Oluyole (2013) the farming communities of South Africa now have smaller portions of farmland as well as a preference for other rural jobs which have contributed in keeping the young people away from the farm. His findings revealed that young people preferred to work as mason, rural electricians, loading and offloading rather than agriculture which has adversely affected farm labour supply. Rice is a very essential crop among the Nigerian families widely consumed by a lot of people, Nigerian society consume rice more than it produces no wonder efforts to smuggle rice are always made at several quarters any time there is a ban its importation. Imolehin and Wada in Pinga et-al (2022) discovered that, rice is consumed by over 4.8 billion people in 176 countries and is the most important food crop for over 2.89 billion people in Asia, over 40

million people in Africa as well as over 150.3 million people in America. Nigeria was almost 99 percent self-sufficient in the rice production consumed by its citizens for over two decades (1970s and 1980s) self-sufficiency declined to 38 percent, resulting in the importation of rice from other countries such as Thailand, Bangkok, and China to compliment the indigenous rice. This falling yield of rice led to supply deficit situation in the country and in response to the situation, successive Nigerian governments have intervened in the rice sub-sector by increasing tariff on rice importation so that local production could be encouraged.

In Nigeria small scale farmers are the key players in rice production. This is because in Nigeria agriculture has always been dominated by peasant farmers with less farm inputs and capital to invest in agriculture, this group of farmers cultivate less than 3 hectares but represent a substantial proportion of the total population and produce about 90-95% of the total agricultural output in the country (Oyeyinka & Bolarinwa; Yuguda; Babafada; in Madu & Aniobi, 2018). Human labour is about the main source of labour available to smallholder farmers in Nigeria as it accounts for domestic food supply in the nation; hence the need to continue supplying food to the ever-growing population anchors on human labour productivity.

The Nigerian Government has invested huge amount of money towards the improvement of rice varieties over the years. These initiatives have led to the development of several varieties of rice, such as: Faro 54, 57, 52 and CP however Shabu et-al (2011) laments that the investment by Government in developing the cultivation of rice in Nigeria will be in vain if there is severe scarcity of labour in the rural areas. Rice production occurs in all agro-ecological zones in Nigeria with the middle belt enjoying a comparative advantage in production over the other parts of the country. In the middle belt of Nigeria, Benue state participate maximally in the production of rice been the food basket of the nation. Rice production occurs in all agro-ecological zones in Nigeria with the middle belt enjoying a comparative advantage in production over the other parts of the country. In the middle belt of Nigeria, Benue is the buckle that holds the belt. It is referred to as the food basket of the nation.

Ukough Community of Gboko Local Government Area in Benue State with a very fertile land well positioned for the production of rice enjoy a pull of rice farmers from many parts of the state who rushes there for rice production, however this fertile land has been underutilised for quite a

long time due to so many challenges including scarcity of labour. It then becomes very necessary to find out the nature of labour required for the production of rice in this community and the extent to which rice production has been affected by scarcity of labour and procedures to remedy the situation.

The Concern

Rice as a crop is very central in agricultural production of Nigeria since it both serves as a staple food and a cash crop to many homes and small scale farmers. Efforts towards rice production are therefore made in several agricultural communities by rice producers in Nigeria. However, for quite some time the quantity of rice demanded by consumers in Nigeria is hardly realised giving room for importation or smuggling of rice in to the country. Some scholars explain this scenario on the bases of population increase, however one would expect that the increase in population should as well lead to increase in work force with corresponding increase in rice production. This is however not the case since there seem to be a decrease in rice supply and sustained increase in the price of rice over years. Other scholars view inadequate supply of rice as a product of decrease in productivity which seems more appealing since it appears there is a continuous decrease in the supply of rice in Nigeria. Rice production seems to be facing a lot of challenges in Nigeria including paucity of labour. This has prompted the quest for the extent to which paucity of labour in particular has affected rice productivity. The concern for this study is then centred on issues responsible for the scarcity of agricultural labour and the extent to which rice production has been affected.

Objectives

This research work was concerned with examining labour scarcity and how it limits rice production in the study area specifically therefore, the objectives include:

- i. To examine the nature of labour required for rice production in the study area.
- ii. To assess the extent of labour scarcity experienced by rice farmers in the study area.
- iii. To examine the reasons for labour scarcity in Ukough community.
- iv. To evaluate the quantity of rice produced in the study area.

- v. To examine the effects of labour scarcity on rice production and yield in the study area.

Justification of the study

This study is valuable especially in the Nigerian society where farming is yet to be mechanised, most agricultural production is carried out manually with the use of human labour indicating that, the availability of this labour and its efficiency is a direct function of the availability of agricultural products. This study is highly beneficial since it reveals one of the major challenges facing rice production in rural communities of the state which is a determinant of food supply and income. This information is important both to the government, agricultural development agencies and NGOs interested in rural and agricultural development. The work was therefore limited to the effects of labour scarcity on the production of rice. Geographically the work was carried out in Ukough Community with a large fertile land conducive for rice production and noted for high concentration of rice farmers. The time limit for the study was from 2017 to 2022 which is five years to enable a check on consistency of variables.

Theoretical framework

The basis of this research work is upon the Marxist theory of labour which serves as a foundation that guides its analysis, explanations and submissions.

Marxist Theory of Labour

The Marxist theory of labour states that the value of a commodity can be measured by the average number of labour hours required to produce that commodity. The Marxist theory of labour value thus focused on the number of hours the labour took to produce the commodity rather than any other factor. When speaking in terms of a labor theory of value, "value", without any qualifying adjective should theoretically refer to the amount of labor necessary to produce a marketable commodity, including the labor necessary to develop any real capital used in the production (Gregory 2020). To this theory, the word value has two different meanings, and sometimes expresses the utility of some particular object, and sometimes the power of purchasing other goods which the possession of that object conveys. The one may be called "value in use"; the other, "value in exchange." The things which have the greatest value in use have frequently little or no value in exchange; and, on the contrary, those which have the greatest value in exchange have frequently little or no value in use. Nothing is more useful than water: but it will purchase scarce

anything; scarce anything can be had in exchange for it. A diamond, on the contrary, has scarce any value in use; but a very great quantity of other goods may frequently be had in exchange for it. Value in exchange is the relative proportion with which this commodity exchanges for another commodity (in other words, it's in the case money. It is relative to labor as explained by Adam Smith. The value of any commodity, to the person who possesses it, and who means not to use or consume it himself, but to exchange it for other commodities, is equal to the quantity of labour which it enables him to purchase or command. labour, therefore, is the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities. The theory is therefore applicable to this study since it expresses the fact that labour is exchanged for wages while it creates commodities which it produces. In the production of rice therefore agricultural labour becomes very important such that the size of rice farms and the quantity of rice produced by rice farmers per year is purely determined by the quantity of labour available within the community. With this situation scarcity of labour is capable of affecting both the rate of its exchange and rice productivity. In this study therefore labour is not valuable in itself until when invested in the cultivation of crops to bring about output.

METHODOLOGY

The research adopted the survey design in carrying out its investigations to allow for representative study and analysis. Ukough community is located in Mbativ district of Gboko Local Government Benue State Nigeria. It is a rural agricultural community with very fertile vast land good for cultivation of crops, people of this community generate greater part of their income from agriculture. Ukough community is an interior village, a pure Tiv settlement without a combination of any other ethnic group. The community is purely agrarian in nature and it majorly produce crops like yams, cassava, soybeans, millet, sorghum, groundnuts, maize and rice. Vegetables are also cultivated such as, okra, garden eggs, spinach, tomatoes and pepper. Some of the farmers combine crop production with little poultry and animal rearing. Small scale farming is practiced in this community almost exclusively with the use of human labour with little mechanised system when tractors are accessed. A part from farm work there are other economic activities like carpentry, building, bricks laying, repair of cell phones and trading in village periodic markets carried out on a small scale. These activities are carried out in combination with farming, however rice production is the major economic venture carried out in this community, involving farmers from

other villages and towns who come to hire land for cultivation of rice in Ukough community.

Population of study

The population of this research was the entire rice farmers in Ukough community, however the exact number of farmers was not ascertained since some of them were discovered come from other places to farm rice in the community. A sample of 120 rice farmers was selected from the undefined population using stratified random sampling. There were basically two Categories of rice farmers in the study area, the indigenous farmers who were land owners and those who only leased land in the community for rice production. Conscious efforts were made to study both categories in order to have balanced information. This group served as the two stratum from which respondents were purposively selected. Purposive sample technique was used to ensure that only real rice farmers who have been in to the practice for at least three years were selected for study. The sample was studied and the result generalised for the entire population. Structured interview and key-informant interview were used in collecting data which were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively using tables, percentages and descriptive interpretive analysis.

Demographic Data of the respondents

Information was collected with respect to the nature of the respondents interviewed in this work with regards to their age, sex, duration of involvement into rice farming and residential identity as presented on table 1 below.

Table 1 The Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

| | Respondents | Frequency | Percentages |
|----------------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| Age | 18-30 | 15 | 13 |
| | 31- 43 | 33 | 28 |
| | 44-56 | 67 | 55 |
| | 57 above | 5 | 4 |
| Total | | 120 | 100 |
| Sex | Male | 109 | 91 |
| | Female | 11 | 9 |
| Total | | 120 | 100 |
| Duration of farming | 3-10 | 41 | 34 |
| | 11-18 | 50 | 42 |
| | 19-above | 29 | 24 |
| Total | | 120 | 100 |

Field study 2023

The demographic data of the respondents indicates that, majority of the respondents (55%) were between the ages of 44 to 56, few (4%) were from 57years and above, others (28%) were between 31 to 43 years, while 15 (13%) were between 18 to 30years of age. It was discovered that, adults form the greater part of the respondents in this study, since attention was given to farmers with their personal rice farms not just youths helping on the farm as members of the family. In the same way it was discovered that only few elderly people were among the respondents because most of the elderly people hired out their land for lack of strength to cultivate others talked of handling it over to their children. The information then shows that rice production in the study area was carried out mostly by full adults. It then suggests that, data was collected from credible respondents with the desired information.

Nature of labour required for rice production in the study area

Data was collected and analysed with regards to the nature of labour required for rice production, it was discovered that some specific types of work activities were necessary for rice production including the clearing of land for cultivation, ploughing, planting, spraying, weeding, harvesting and threshing and. For the production of rice to be completed, labour has to be made available for all these work activities. The information is presented on table 2 following. Beating

Table 2 Nature of labour Required for Rice production in the Study Area

| Nature labour | Frequency |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Land clearing | 100 |
| Ploughing | 110 |
| Planting/Broadcasting of the seeds | 30 |
| Spraying | 98 |
| Weeding | 105 |
| Harvesting | 102 |
| Threshing | 105 |

Field Study 2023

Data represented on the table above revealed the nature of activities involved in rice cultivation, the information overlaps since many of the farmers mentioned almost the same activities. It was observed however that, many respondents did not mention broadcasting of rice as one of the activities involved in rice production perhaps they under rated this aspect since it is usually carried out by farm owners themselves. All these activities were said to be very important in rice production and when not performed affects the productivity of rice.

Nature of labour Scarcity in rice production within Ukough Community

Information gathered on the nature of labour scarcity in the study area revealed that, major rice production activities like; land clearing, ploughing, spraying and weeding of rice lacked workers at all seasons within Ukough community, however other activities like panting/broadcasting, harvesting and threshing did not lack workers as presented on table 3 below.

Table 3 Nature of Labour scarcity inrice Production within the study area

| Nature of labour | Frequency | of | Respondents |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|------------------------|
| Work activities | Labour Available | | Labour Scarcity |
| Land clearing | 30 (25%) | | 90 (75%) |
| Ploughing | 23 (19%) | | 97 (81%) |
| Planting/Broadcasting of the seeds | 110 (92%) | | 10 (8%) |
| Spraying | 69 (58%) | | 51 (42%) |
| Weeding | 25 (21%) | | 95 (79%) |
| Harvesting | 103 (86%) | | 27 (14%) |
| Threshing | 100 (83%) | | 20 (17%) |

Field Study 2023

From the table above, 75%, 81%, and 79% of the respondents stated that labour was scarce in the aspects of clearing of land for rice production, ploughing and weeding respectively while other activities like planting/broadcasting (92%), harvesting (86%) spraying (58%) and threshing (83%) did not lack workers. Therefore while some aspects of work in rice production lack workers other aspects did not lack workers. It was however critical to note that the activities of rice farming lacking workers were very necessary and time dependent since delay in accessing workers can mar the entire rice production process affecting the yield and quantity of rice produced per season. In an interview with one of the key-

informants who was a seasoned indigenous rice farmer in Ukough community, he explained that, rice farmers prefer handling some sensitive aspects of rice work like broadcasting and spraying of herbicides by themselves or their family members. This he said was to avoid mistakes or carelessness from hired workers which may cause much damage to the germination of the rice or its yields. In the same vain it was discovered that harvesting and threshing of rice did not lack workers in Ukough community because many workers rush to get involved in order to access rice or daily pay usually apportioned for such services.

Quantity of Rice Produced per Year in Ukough Community

An examination of the quantity of rice produced in Ukough community shows that, greater number of the farmers produce between 41 to 80bags of rice per year, others produce between 1 to 20 bags of rice per year, some produce between 21 to 40 bags of rice while few (23) farmers produce 81 bags and above per farming season, the data is as presented on table 4 following.

Table 4 Respondents according to the quantity of Rice produced per year in bags

| Quantity of Rice produced pre year | Frequency | Percentages |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1-20 | 21 | 18 |
| 21-40 | 35 | 29 |
| 41-80 | 40 | 33 |
| 81-above | 23 | 20 |

Field study 2023

Information gathered from the respondents on the quantity of rice produced per year indicated that, majority (33%) of the people in this community produced between 41 to 80 bags of rice in a year,, some (18%) of them produce between 1 to 20 bags of rice per year, 29% of the respondents produced between 21 to 40 bags of rice while 20% of them produced up to 81bags of rice and above. This information indicates that given opportunity Ukough community has the tendency to produce much rice needed by the state. In a key- informant interview with one of the old time rice farmers in the community, he expressed a concern over the underutilization of the fertile land in Ukough community due to inadequate inputssaying:

“there is a vast land very fertile for rice production in this community such that many famers within and those coming from outside can cultivate much rice unhindered, the only major problem here isworkers to help in doing the work since we do not have machines we depend wholly on workers and once you can't get them on time, production will be affected”

This indicate the burning desire by rice farmers for production within the community

Below is sample picture of a rice farm in Ukough community.



Rice farm in Ukough Community. Field study 2023.

Why Scarcity of Agricultural Labour in Ukough Community

In the process of data collection, several reasons were advanced for inadequate labour in rice cultivation within Ukough community including, rural to urban migration, the tedious nature of rice cultivation, alternative income earning activities, decrease in youths involvement in agriculture, negative perception of farm work, low wages paid to workers, massive involvement of youths in motorbike transport business. The information is however continuous in nature since same views were expressed by different respondents as presented on table 5

Table 5 Reasons for labour scarcity in rice production within the study area

| Reasons | Frequency |
|--|-----------|
| Rural Urban migration | 114 |
| Tedious nature of the work | 112 |
| Presence of alternative ventures | 98 |
| Decrease in youths farming | 67 |
| Labourers negative perception of farm work | 91 |
| Payment of Low wages | 66 |
| Motor bicycle transport business | 93 |

Field Study 2023

From table 5 rice farmers gave diverse reasons for labour scarcity in Ukough community, the information was continuous in nature since all the respondents mentioned same reasons. However prominent among the reasons advanced were the movement of youths to urban areas (114), tedious nature of rice farming,(112), availability of alternative ventures (98), negative perception of farm work (91) and the motorbike transport business (93) which has become very lucrative due to increase in transport fair occasioned by the hike in fuel prices. Others were decrease in youth farming (67) and low wages in agricultural labour (66). Most of the reasons pointed to how agriculture and rice cultivation has been positioned in the society, When efforts are made to improve the life of those in agriculture it will attract labour for maximum rice production.

In a key-informant interactive session with some prominent seasoned rice farmers in Ukough community, they revealed some basic reasons for scarcity of labour in the community to include:

- i. Preoccupation of workers with work on their personal rice farms: these felt that rice production is not any other farm work that can be done by everybody some people don't know it and most of those who know it also have their rice farms and can only be hired when they are done with farming their rice. This then makes workers to be very scarce when it is the season for rice production.
- ii. Decrease in population of youths on farm: Generally not many youths were comfortable with farm work therefore the number

of workers on farm drastically reduced affecting rice production.

- iii. Difficult nature of rice farming activities: information gathered shows that almost all aspects of rice cultivation are tasking therefore the village youths prefer engaging in less difficult activities that can fetch them money to the neglect of rice farming.
- iv. Low wages paid to rice farmers: Some respondents were of the view that, wages paid to workers on rice farm can't be compared with the nature of the work done, making many youths to run away from rice farm work.
- v. Availability of other alternative measures to access money without farm work brings negative attitude to farming.

These views collaborates with information obtained through the structured interview and

Effect of labour Scarcity on Rice Production and Yield in the Study Area

Interview with rice farmers in Ukough community revealed how short supply of labour has affected the cultivation of rice in several ways like delay in production, decrease in quantity produced, improper maintenance, poor yields, decrease in farmers income and capital and discouragement in reinvestment in rice production, the data overlaps as several respondents mention same problems suffered due to inadequate labour supply as indicated on the table below:

Table 6 Effects of Labour Scarcity on Rice Farming and Yields

| Effects of Labour Scarcity | Frequency |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| Delay in rice cultivation | 100 |
| Improper maintenance of rice | 97 |
| Decrease in production | 113 |
| Poor yield | 87 |
| Increase in cost of labour | 101 |
| Decrease in farmers income | 79 |
| Discouragement from rice farming | 40 |

Field Study 2023

Most (113) respondents were discovered to have reduced their sizes of rice farm simply because they could not access the required labour. (101) of the respondents complained of increase in cost of labour occasioned

by decrease in labour supply, with this some farmers found it difficult to access labour for rice production. Some (100) respondents were of the view that, inability to get workers usually cause delay in cultivation of rice which is critical in rice yields since rice has specified season for its planting, weeding spraying and even harvesting. Others (97) felt that lack of labour has brought about improper maintenance of rice since weeding becomes very difficult. In the same way some (87) of the respondents view poor yields as consequence of inadequate labour since it hampers proper cultivation of rice. 79 of respondents were of the view that due to increase in cost of labour their inputs have increased leading to decrease in profit and thereby income. Some (40) respondents confessed discouragement from farming rice for want of worker. In an interactive session with some of the key-informants, it was realised that, some rice farmers who totally depend on hired workers, without children to help them on farm have packed out of rice production since it became impossible for them to access workers. Those who could afford, go to other villages to bring labourers at high cost. This increases the cost of production and reduces the gain thereby.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings of this research substantiate the fact that, there is labour scarcity in the study area which affects rice production and yield. This agrees with the views of Tasker (2018) and Nmadu et-al (2015) that, labour scarcity is the major problem in agriculture. The nature of labour required for rice production was discovered to be land clearing, digging, sowing, spraying, weeding, harvesting and threshing. Most of these activities suffered short supply of labour due to, youth's negative perception of farm work, availability of other quick money making alternative economic activities for youths, and disdain for the tedious nature of rice production. This situation was discovered to have affected the quantity and quality of rice produced in the study area since it leads to delay in production, poor farm maintenance and poor yields. With this farmers income is decreased leading to discouragement from rice cultivation. Commenting on this a prominent farmer at Ichighki Ukough settlement lamented saying "due to lack of workers to clear my rice farm before digging, sometimes I am forced to broadcast my rice seedlings in the bush and allow workers to just plough it which sometimes hinders the rice from germinating properly" This indicates that inadequate workforce affects rice production in Ukough community. Another process of rice production lacking workers was discovered to be Ploughing of land, some

farmers' laments that inability to access workers to plough the land for rice cultivation delay their work, sometimes they have to take turns waiting for a tractor which comes once in a while. Some farmers have to move out of the community to look for workers and pay heavily for them to accept coming to work on their rice farms, this increases cost of production decreases amount produced and delays rice production. It was discovered that, with this situation rice farmers sometimes miss the actual season for the cultivation of rice in the community which is usually between May and early July leading to poor yields. In an interview with one farmer from Gboko town who usually lease land to farm rice in Ukough community he confirm this assertion narrating his ordeal that, sometimes he has to travel to Gboko town in search of workers to help him weed his rice farm. This he says becomes necessary at a certain stage of growth of rice after spraying herbicides, and it is time bound since rice needs to be free from weeds to enable it grow and produce well. Where workers are not available the rice is always overtaken by weeds hindering good yields and bountiful harvest. This findings were in line with the views of Madu&Aniobi. (2018) who felt that scarcity of labour is major factor affecting rice production in Nigeria.

Ukpogh Community was discovered to be a very fertile land good for rice production, farmers were also very enthusiastic about rice production, the few who were able to access labour either from family members, friends or hired produced above eighty bags of rice in a year. However majority of the farmers were found incapacitated due to inadequate work force and could not produce as much rice as desired. This findings collaborates the views of Oyeyinka et-al, (2018) that, human labour is about the main source of labour available to smallholder farmers in Nigeria as it accounts for domestic food supply in the nation

Since there is a move towards discouraging importation of rice, efforts needs to be intensified by the government and non-governmental organisations to encourage workers on farm to improve the quality and quantity of rice produced in the country. On the contrary it was discovered that, harvesting, threshing, sowing and spraying process of rice production did not lack workers, , this was explained that majority of the farmers prefer handling the broadcasting of rice and spraying of herbicides by themselves or their relations to ensure accuracy. It was also gathered that, many workers rush to partake in rice harvesting and threshing been an easier task with quick money since wages for such

aspect of work were paid promptly right on farm. Other workers even collect rice as wages in exchange for their labour. Since rice must be cultivated and properly maintained before harvesting, its production still suffer as its major activities lack workers

CONCLUSION

Rice is a staple food to most families in Nigeria and Tiv land not excluded, its consumption is very high and the production must keep to that pace to avoid adverse shortage. This study has therefore examined the effect of labour scarcity on rice production in a rural community of Ukough in Gboko Local Government Area. It was discovered that above other things labour needed for weeding and ploughing is not available and this is very critical since it affects the quantity and quality of rice produced at any given time. It was gathered that a lot of farmers don't fulfil their desired goals in terms of the quantity of rice produced per year due to challenges of labour. Even when some manage to produce, the challenge of labour makes it difficult to be properly maintained leading to poor yield. Something has to be done to improve the availability of labour in order to increase rice production needed to address for security in Benue and by extension Nigeria.

Contradiction of interest: The study had no contradiction of interest because both the community and the respondents were interested to see that their ordeal of labour scarcity is addressed with hope of accessing solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Government should make available adequate tractors to plough the land for rice production.
- ii. Selective herbicides be made available to aid weeding of rice even when it becomes matured.
- iii. Rural areas be made attractive to youths through provision of social amenities
- iv. Rice farmers be granted agricultural loans to enable them pay well the wages of farm workers to attract them to farm
- v. Government and non-governmental organisations should reward those in rice farm to boost their morale for increased productivity.

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