

## Engagement and Management of Migrant Workers for Sustainable Crop Farming by Households in South-Eastern Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Traditional farming in South-Eastern Nigeria is characterized with drudgery and manual labour. Household members do not provide sufficient labour required in the farms and labour is hired from amongst migrant workers. A panel of sixty (60) farm households in the region was constituted following a three stage cluster sampling technique. Management of migrant farm workers by households using their services was observed for four years, 2008 to 2011. Results showed that young men and women migrated into the states within the region during farming seasons in groups and were engaged in farm activities. Decision to engage such migrant workers was positively influenced by farm size in excess of 3.0 hectares, availability and provision of housing to accommodate the workers and availability of persons to supervise them while they worked. Factors that had negative influence in households' decision to engage the services of these farm workers included household size, and provision of food as an addition to daily cash wage. The men were engaged mainly in preparation of farm lands (bush clearing and tillage) while the women were engaged in weeding, fertilizer applications and harvesting of staples. Cost of feeding was a single highest other cost items, and cost of labour search was the least other cost items in managing migrant farm workers. Hand drawn machines and two wheel tractors should be used to substitute human labour to reduce operational costs while maintaining and/or increasing crop yields.*

**Key Words:** Migrant farm worker, Labour search, Mound making.

### 1.0 Introduction

Farming had been a traditional occupation of inhabitants of south-eastern Nigeria where the people had produced and exported oil palm produce like red palm oil, and palm kernel; and had cultivated variety of roots/ tuber crops and vegetables. Labour autarky and traditional system of agriculture characterized farming in south-eastern Nigeria until lately when economic and demographic changes have forced the farm households to diversify means of their livelihood to increase their farm and nonfarm incomes (Okafor, 1991). Culturally in the area, children and youths worked with their parents and guardians in household farms learning skills of crop, livestock and land management which they would need as adults, but today this category of workers are forced by poverty to work for their own and for their household's survival as street vendors (UNICEF, 2006) and commercial motorcyclists in urban and non-urban areas. Agriculture literally has been abandoned to the aged and a few able-bodied men and women who cannot do otherwise, creating a big gap between farm labour needs and farm labour supplies even under the outcome of analysis of trends and differentials in household size which suggests that convergence to smaller and predominantly nuclear households is proceeding rather slowly in contemporary developing countries including Nigeria (Bongaart, 2001). The true situation is that increasing number of members of farm households are currently engaged in off-farm works with many migrating to other countries and sectors (Emerole, 2008; Nwajiuba, 2012), worsening the problem of shortage of farm hands in southeastern Nigeria. These contemporary developments have forced farmers to rely on hired casual labour provided by migrant farm workers who are available seasonally during period of land preparation, crop cultivation and harvests.

An increased reliance of households on hired casual farm labour have obvious management implications on costs of labour search, provision of temporary housing or accommodation, feeding, supervision and adoption of enterprise mix especially by those that depend less on family labour (Doole *et. al.*, 2009). These are challenging evolvments that involve changing interrelationships between consumption and investment decisions, household endowments, production and exchange decisions, and household entitlements. Farm households need to have a comprehensive understanding of the ways to manage this emerging circular relationship amongst aforementioned factors, which are further impacted upon by household institutions, labour markets, and have outputs in terms of environmental impact, resource use, food production and redistribution of wealth. An important factor, still little understood, hard to precisely quantify and often completely overlooked, is human mobility (UNAIDS and IOM, 2003). Women have chosen to migrate to neighbouring states in search of jobs and money to cushion excruciating bites of poverty in their respective households. Migrant workers (men and women) forced to join by unemployment (Obadan and Ayodele, 2000) face

numerous social and health challenges when they leave their communities for other places. They have limited access to recreation, health facilities and are relatively deprived and some prone to sex trading to get whatever they need to facilitate their mission. The specific objectives of this study therefore are to: (i) describe socio-economic characteristics of migrant labour hired by farm households in south-eastern Nigeria; (ii) explain the gender mobility and distribution for tasks hired in crop production in the area; (iii) estimate the mean annual costs incurred by households on hired services of migrant farm workers in the area; and (iv) determine factors that influenced decision to use services of migrant farm workers in farm operations.

## 2.0 Methodology

This study involved a survey of farm households in states sampled from within the southeastern geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Five states namely Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo all of which are of Ibo tribe in Nigeria constitute this geopolitical area. Farming is the predominant traditional occupation of many households in this high population density (> 900 persons per square kilometer) region (Okafor, 1991; NPC, 2006), which naturally form the core of south eastern Nigeria. The region stretches from the rainforest vegetation of Abia and Imo states to the derived savanna vegetative belt of Anambra state. Two distinct seasons (rain and dry) characterize the region. The rain season stretches from month of April to October and the dry season comes from month of November to March yearly. The topography is partly flat and rolling in many parts of Imo and Abia States and partly hilly and undulating in other parts of Anambra and Abia States. Flood and gully erosion are ecological problems ravaging the area as the soils are of the deep porous ferrallithic type (Nweke and Winch, 1980; Ugwumba *et. al.*, 2010). Prominent Rivers draining the region are Niger, Imo, Anambra, Orashi, Aba, Azumini blue, and Cross River.

In selecting respondent households, three-stage random sampling technique was adopted. In the first stage of the sampling, three states out of the five were randomly selected. These were Abia, Anambra and Imo states. Abia and Imo States have three agricultural zones each; with Anambra state having four agricultural zones. Thus, ten agricultural zones were involved in this survey. Abia State has seventeen (17) Local Government Areas (LGAs); Anambra State has twenty one (21) LGAs; and Imo State has twenty seven (27) LGAs. These gave a total of sixty five (65) LGAs in the ten respondent agricultural zones (Aba, Umuahia, and Ohafia (Bende) in Abia State; Owerri, Orlu and Okigwe in Imo State; Onitsha, Ihiala, Aguata, Anambra and Awka in Anambra State). In the second stage, one agrarian community was chosen from each agricultural zone. The communities are Umuekechi Asa from Aba zone, Ndioro from Umuahia zone, Eluama Isuikwuato from Ohafia zone in Abia State; Ohaji from Owerri zone, Ehime Mbanjo from Okigwe zone and Nkume from Orlu zone in Imo State; Ogbaru from Onitsha zone, Otuocho from Anambra zone, Okija from Ihiala zone and Agulu from Awka zone in Anambra State. In the third stage, six farm households were chosen at random from each of the selected communities, giving a sample of sixty (60) farm households involved in the study. The chosen households were visited at the end of each farming season to collect primary data on migrant labour sources, gender, use, cost, and annual welfare issues for four years from 2008 to 2011 cropping seasons. Six enumerators were used in generating this four-year panel data, two for each state collecting the same data from the same households using the same semi-structured questionnaire.

The collected data were analyzed both descriptively and inferentially in addressing the study objectives. Frequency distribution table and mean estimates of socio-economic variables was used in realizing objectives (i) and (ii). Objective (iii) was realized with limited response data which were analyzed with multiple regression probit model. Factors that determined households decision to use migrant labor were subjected to a model of limited dependent variable as introduced by Tobin (1958) and as applied by Amamiya (1981) and corrected for bias in participation decision (Heckman, 1976). This probit model was stated as follows:

$$Y_{ij} = \alpha_j + \beta_j \sum_{k=1}^s H_{ijs} + e_{ij} \quad \text{-----(1)}$$

Where the  $H_{ijs}$  are vectors of  $s$  explanatory variables of the  $j$ th household using services of migrant farm workers;  $Y_{ij}$  is a vector of binary variables such that  $Y_{ij} = 1$  if the  $j$ th household employs the services of migrant labourers, and 0 otherwise. Since  $Y_{ij}$  can only assume two different values for the decisions, 1 or 0, the expected probability can be defined as follows:

$$E(Y_{ij}) = E[\alpha_j + \beta_j \sum_{k=1}^s H_{i,js} + e_{ij}]$$

$$E(Y_{ij}) = \alpha_j + \beta_j \sum_{k=1}^s H_{i,j} E(H_{ij}) \text{ -----(2)}$$

Equation (2) defines the proportion of households with characteristics (H<sub>ij</sub>) likely to use the services of migrant labourers in their farms. The empirical model was specified thus:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{EXP}_{ij} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \ln(\text{LB}_{ij}) + \beta_2 \ln(\text{FS}_{ij}) + \beta_3 \ln(\text{FD}_{ij}) + \beta_4 \ln(\text{DW}_{ij}) \\ & + \beta_5 \ln(\text{ED}_{ij}) + \beta_6 \ln(\text{OC}_{ij}) + \beta_7 \ln(\text{HA}_{ij}) + \beta_8 \ln(\text{CA}_{ij}) \\ & + \beta_9 \ln(\text{LS}_{ij}) + \beta_{10} \ln(\text{MR}_{ij}) + \beta_{11} \ln(\text{HS}_{ij}) + \varepsilon_{ij}. \text{ -----(3)} \end{aligned}$$

Variables are as defined in Table 1. The dependent variable is household’s decision to hire services of migrant farm workers as defined in equation (1). The explanatory variables were both the continuous and binary variables. It was hypothesized that hiring the services of migrant farm labour by a household would positively be influenced by: LB<sub>ij</sub>, FS<sub>ij</sub>; OC<sub>ij</sub>; HA<sub>ij</sub>; ED<sub>ij</sub>; SV<sub>ij</sub> and CA<sub>ij</sub>; but would negatively be influenced by: LS<sub>ij</sub>; DW<sub>ij</sub>; FD<sub>ij</sub>; and HS<sub>ij</sub>.

Table 1.0 Description of Probit Analyzed Variables:		
Variable	Type	Description
EXP <sub>ij</sub>	Binary, 1	if the jth household decides to hire services of migrant farm workers; 0 otherwise;
LB <sub>ij</sub>	Binary, 1	if the household cultivates their farmland with hired labour; 0 otherwise;
FS <sub>ij</sub>	Binary, 1	if size of farmland is greater than 3.0 hectares; 0 otherwise
FD <sub>ij</sub>	Binary, 1	if food is provided in addition to daily wage to the hired labour;
DW <sub>ij</sub>	Continuous,	Daily wage/contract charge per day in Naira;
ED <sub>ij</sub>	Binary, 1	if household head had at least primary education; 0 otherwise;
OC <sub>ij</sub>	Binary, 1	if household major occupation was farming; 0 otherwise;
HA <sub>ij</sub>	Binary, 1	if housing accommodation was available and provided to the hired labour;
CA <sub>ij</sub>	Continuous,	Amount of credit obtained for farming in Naira;
LS <sub>ij</sub>	Continuous,	Cost of labour search in Naira;
SV <sub>ij</sub>	Binary, 1	if person(s) was/are available to supervise hired labour; 0 otherwise;
HS <sub>ij</sub>	Continuous,	Household size - refers to number of persons living and feeding from same pot.

### 3.0 Results and Discussions

#### 3.1 General Characteristics

The characteristics of sampled Sixty (60) farm households in Southeastern states of Nigeria are as summarized in Table 2.0.

<b>Table 2.0 General Characteristics of Farm Households in Southeastern Nigeria, 2008 - 2011</b>			
Variable	Number	Mean of continuous Variables n=60	Percentage (%)
<b>Annual Farm Size (Hectares):</b>			
< 1.0	24	0.81	40.0
1.0 – 3.0	26	2.53	43.3
> 3.0	10	5.12	16.7
<b>Household Size (Number):</b>			
1 – 6	20	4.84	33.3
7 – 13	25	7.91	41.7
> 13	15	14.82	25.0
<b>Education Level of Household head (Years):</b>			
No formal Education	15	0.0	25.0
Primary Education	14	5.1	23.3
Secondary Education	20	9.2	33.3
Tertiary Education	11	14.8	18.3
<b>Annual Labour Source Used in household farm (Man days):</b>			
Household only	16	247.0	26.7
Household/Hired local	18	75.5	30.0
Household/ Hired Migrant	26	575.9	43.3
<b>Daily Wage Rate (NGN Naira):</b>			
Adult Male		500.0	
Adult Female		350.0	
Youth below 18years		250.0	

**₦150.00 ≈ US \$1.00; 1 man day ≈ 8 hrs of adult male labour; Source: Field Survey, 2008 - 2011.**

Table 2.0 revealed that farm sizes to a good proportion of the farm households (43.3%) was at most three hectares with only a small proportion (16.7%) cultivating more than three hectares. Forty percent (40.0%) of the households cultivated farms of less than one hectare on the average and this farm size was adjudged small. Small sizes of farms have implications on enterprise mix, technical efficiency of labour used as well as on source and type of labour used (Shehu *et. al.*, 2010). Households was the cheapest source of labour and this could be the remote cause of relatively large household size of at least 7 persons observed cumulatively in 66.7% of farm households involved in this study. All farm households made use of their own labour, and this was sufficient for only 26.7% of the respondents while 73.3% cumulatively had cause to hire labour. The table further revealed that two sources (other farm households-local, and migrants) provided the labour hired by these households to augment own labour in their farms.

As much as 43.3% of the households relied on migrant farm workers to meet their farm labour needs. Use of hired migrant labour enabled some farm households to invest relatively higher mean annual labour of 575.9 man days compared to 75 and 250 mean annual man days invested by households who patronized neighbours selling labour locally and those using own labour respectively. The mean daily wage paid to males was ₦500.00 and that paid to the females was ₦350.00 with the youths aged below 18 years paid a mean daily wage of ₦250.00 in the area during the period under review. The educational level of heads of farm households in the area was relatively high since only 25.0% of them had no formal education. Level of literacy of a household head could influence his/her decisions on source and type of labour used in farm operations.

### 3.2 Decision To Engage Migrant Labour in Farm Operations

The Maximum likelihood estimates of Probit model is shown in Table 5.0. The Table revealed five factors influencing decisions to engage services of migrant farm workers in southeastern Nigerian states. Three of the factors, farm size in excess of 3.0 hectares, availability and provision of housing to accommodate the workers and availability of persons to supervise the migrant workers while they work had positive significant influences on the decision of households to use services of migrant farm workers in the area. These findings were in line with the espoused hypotheses of the study. Positive influence meant that a farm household decided to hire more the services of a migrant farm worker when their farm land was relatively large and when they had spare rooms to accommodate the workers and when there was available personality to supervise the workers while working in the field. Relatively large farm lands offer opportunities for use of more labour to accomplish the tasks effectively within required time. Availability of accommodation helps to save major logistic hindrance and assure safety of the worker. Supervising the workers in great measure ensures consistency in quality of work they render and limit excesses in enjoyment of leisure at a time they are supposed to be working.

**Table 5.0 Maximum Likelihood Estimates of First-Stage Probit Model Explaining Household Decisions to Hire Migrant farm labour in Southeastern Nigeria.**

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	T Statistic
LB	1.328	0.982	1.352
FS	3.244	0.712	4.556***
FD	-0.774	0.418	-1.852**
DW	0.216	0.483	0.447
ED	0.472	0.677	0.697
OC	0.535	0.474	1.129
HA	0.999	0.552	1.809**
CA	0.597	0.747	0.799
LS	-0.226	0.287	-0.787
SV	1.514	0.561	17.825***
HS	-1.038	0.466	-2.227***
Intercept	-3.197	0.253	-12.636***
Log-Likelihood	74.222	-	-
R-Squared	0.699	-	-

**Dependent variable (D) = Augmenting Household labour with hired migrant Labour**

**\*\* significant at 5.0%; \*\*\* Significant at 1.0%.**

**Source:** Field Survey Data, 2008-2011

However, two other variables, household size, provision of food as an addition to daily cash wage, had negative significant influences on decision to hire migrant farm labour. Negative influence means that as the size of the household increased the need to hire services of the migrant labour decreases. Use of household labour in farming was predominant amongst the households in the area. In all the farm households, hired labour of any form was only meant to augment household labour in execution of farm activities. This was plausible since farm households under the traditional African farming system depend greatly on own land, seed stock and the labour supplied by their members for executing farm activities than on hired labour of any type (Shehu, *et. al.*, 2010). Provision of food in addition to the wage, is an additional hospitality that increases cost of the labour to the household deciding to enjoy the services of the migrant farm worker.

### 3.3 Hired Migrant Farm Workers, Farm Activities and Costs to Farm Households

Gender role in farm operations in the area was an issue that governed deployment of hired migrant casual labour in southeastern states of Nigeria. Table 3.0 revealed that men hired were used in land clearing, making of mounds for roots and tuber crops and harvesting of yams; while the women hired were deployed in planting of seeds (maize, melon, pepper, okra, telferia, cassava cuttings, cocoyam etc), application of fertilizers, harvesting of crops and post harvest processing. The mean daily wage rate for hired men was ₦500.00 and for the women was ₦350.00. Mean number of hired migrant labour varied from 10 to 40 amongst the households, using the least (29 man-day) for post harvest processing and the highest (120 man-day) in weeding operations in the farms. The Table revealed that more women migrant workers on the average (15) were engaged than the males (11) for harvesting operations by the households. Fertilizer application was an operation that exclusively engaged services of female migrant labour while making of mounds exclusively engaged the services of men migrant workers in the area.

**Table 3.0: Distribution of Hired Migrant Farm Labour by Activities and Paid Wages in South-eastern Nigeria (n=60)**

Farm Operation	Gender of hired migrant labour	Mean Annual Number hired	Mean Annual Man day Supplied	Mean Daily Wage (₦)	Mean Annual Investment as Paid wage (₦)
Bush Clearing	Men	22	56	500	28,000.00
Mound Making	Men	31	62	500	31,000.00
Planting	Women	30	71	350	24,850.00
Weeding	Women	40	120	350	42,000.00
Fertilizer Application	Women	10	30	350	10,500.00
Harvesting	Men	11	11	500	5,500.00
	Women	15	45	350	15,750.00
Post harvest Processing	Women	10	29	350	10,150.00
<b>Total</b>			424		167,750.00

₦150.00 ≈ US \$1.00; 1 man day ≈ 8 hrs of adult male labour

Source: Field Survey, 2008 - 2011.

Farmers have learnt over the years that tilled soils helped greatly to increase growth, yield and facilitate harvest such that farm households now prefer tilled soils and mounds in cultivating their crops even though no serious adverse reports on yield of staples have been advanced against zero tillage in the area. Total investment as wages paid by labour hiring households to migrant farm workers on the average ranged from ₦10, 150.00 in post harvest operations to ₦42, 000.00 in weeding of the farms in the area.

### 3.3 Other Migrant Labour Management Costs

In addition to paid wages or contract charges, the households hiring the services of these migrant farm workers incurred some other costs as shown in Table 4.0. These costs were incurred in respect of labour search, transportation, accommodation, feeding, toiletries, and task supervisions.

**Table 4.0 Distribution of Labour Management Costs by Farm Households in Southeastern Nigeria.**

Management Item	Number of Households	Total Amount (₦)	Mean Annual Cost (₦)
Labour Search	66	17,000.00	4,250.00
Transportation	60	78,600.00	19,650.00
Accommodation	47	23,470.00	5,867.50
Feeding	42	139,000.00	34,750.00
Toiletries	47	31,420.00	7,855.00
Supervision	39	27,500.00	6,875.00

₦150.00 ≈ US \$1.00;

Source: Field Survey, 2008 - 2011.

Table 4.0 revealed that not all the migrant labour hiring households incurred all the anticipated costs in managing migrant farm workers in the area. However, all the labour hiring households incurred labour search and transportation costs to enjoy the services of these workers. The migrant workers arrived in groups of at least two persons and according to their gender too. The search cost included expenses incurred in making inquiries (phone calls, search travels), negotiating and booking for the available migrant farm workers. This item of cost gulped the least (₦17, 000.00) or an annual mean sum of ₦4, 250.00 from the studied farmers. The transportation of the workers to and fro the farms was also a cost borne by all the farm households who used the services the migrant workers in the area. They transported their workers by roads using either local bus shuttles or commercial motor cycles popularly called 'Okada' which ever was convenient to the hiring farm household in the area. A total of 42 or 63.64% of the respondent households provided food to their hired migrant farm worker. Feeding cost the households whose bargains included feeding took a total of ₦139, 000.00 over the period under review giving an average annual cost of ₦34, 750.00 that comparatively was the highest of these other management costs borne by the households. Supervision of the workers was meant to ensure consistency in the quality of work done and avoid unnecessary leisure amidst work time. These checks were provided by only 39 or 59.10% of the migrant farm worker hiring households and took an estimated sum of ₦27, 500.00 or an annual mean cost of ₦6, 875.00 from the affected households.

#### **4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study showed that migrant labour was available for hire during farming seasons in southeastern Nigeria. All farm households in the region used the labour of their members in carrying out their farming activities, but those whose own labour was not sufficient on account of cultivating relatively large farm lands or having few own labour engaged the services of migrant farm workers. Ability of a household to provide accommodation for lodging and other hospitalities including feeding, transportation and a person to supervise labour motivated decision to engage services of the migrant farm workers in the area. Workers were hired for farm activities in line with prevailing gender roles with men involved in land preparation (land clearing, mound making), and the women involved in fertilizer application, weeding, harvesting, and post harvest processing. These activities were performed with traditional farm implements. To enhance efficiency and reduce costs in farm operations, hand drawn machines and two wheel tractors should be used by households and persons selling labour to substitute human labour, reduce drudgery and make farming attractive while maintaining and/or increasing crop yields in the area.

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