



THE APATHY OF THE NIGERIAN GEN Z TOWARDS AGRICULTURE: A THREAT TO FOOD SECURITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Agriculture remains a fundamental pillar of Nigeria's economy, food systems, and rural livelihoods. However, the declining interest of Nigerian Generation Z in agricultural participation poses a significant challenge to national food security and sustainable economic development. Despite the sector's potential for employment creation, poverty reduction, and industrial growth, young Nigerians increasingly perceive agriculture as unattractive, risky, and incompatible with modern aspirations. This paper critically examines the causes of Gen Z apathy toward agriculture in Nigeria, analyzes its implications for food security and economic development, and evaluates existing institutional and policy responses. Using recent empirical studies, policy documents, and development reports, the study identifies structural constraints, socio-cultural perceptions, educational gaps, and policy failures as major drivers of youth disengagement. The paper concludes that without deliberate reforms and youth-centered agricultural strategies, Nigeria risks deepening food insecurity, unemployment, and economic stagnation. It offers targeted recommendations to reposition agriculture as a viable and attractive sector for Nigerian Gen Z.

Keywords: Generation Z, Nigerian youth, agriculture, food security, economic development, agri-business, youth policy

Introduction

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and one of the fastest-growing youth populations globally. Generation Z constitutes a significant proportion of this demographic, positioning them as critical actors in the country's future economic and food systems. Agriculture historically served as Nigeria's economic backbone, contributing substantially to employment and rural income generation. However, youth participation in the sector has steadily declined over the past two decades (Osabohien & Al-Faryan, 2024).

The apathy of Nigerian Gen Z toward agriculture represents more than a generational preference; it is a structural development challenge. As older farmers dominate food production, the absence of younger, innovative participants threatens productivity, sustainability, and national food security (Professions.ng, 2024). This paper argues that Gen Z's disengagement from agriculture constitutes a serious threat to Nigeria's food security and long-term economic development.

Conceptualizing Youth Apathy and Generation Z

Defining Generation Z in the Nigerian Context

Generation Z generally refers to individuals born between approximately 1997 and 2012. This cohort is distinguished by early exposure to digital technologies, social media, and global information flows. In Nigeria, Gen Z has grown up amid rapid

urbanization, economic volatility, high unemployment rates, and increasing exposure to globalized lifestyles through digital platforms (UNDP, 2020). Unlike previous generations, Nigerian Gen Z tends to prioritize flexibility, innovation, financial independence, and social status in career choices. Their aspirations are shaped by visible success narratives centered on technology, entertainment, entrepreneurship, and white-collar professions. Agriculture, particularly small-scale farming, is often excluded from these narratives, further reinforcing disinterest (Professions.ng, 2024).

Youth Apathy as a Structural and Rational Outcome

Contrary to popular discourse that frames youth disinterest in agriculture as attitudinal failure, recent studies argue that youth apathy is largely a structural outcome. Limited access to land, capital, markets, and modern inputs creates a high-risk environment for young entrants into agriculture. As rational economic actors, Gen Z youths assess these risks against alternative livelihood options and often choose non-agricultural pathways (OECD, 2020). Furthermore, the absence of adequate social protection mechanisms in agriculture exacerbates vulnerability. Unlike formal sector employment, agricultural livelihoods offer limited income security, health insurance, or retirement benefits, making them unattractive to a generation already facing economic precarity (World Bank, 2019).

Social Perceptions and Identity Formation

Social identity plays a crucial role in shaping Gen Z's attitudes toward agriculture. Farming in Nigeria is frequently framed as a subsistence activity associated with rural poverty and limited education. These perceptions are reinforced through media portrayals, peer influence, and societal expectations, leading many youths to distance themselves from agricultural identities (Agribusiness Space, 2026). For Gen Z, whose identity construction is heavily influenced by digital culture and social validation, agriculture lacks the symbolic capital associated with success and modernity. This disconnect between agricultural work and aspirational identity contributes significantly to youth apathy.

Education, Skills Mismatch, and Aspirations

Although Nigeria produces thousands of agricultural graduates annually, there remains a mismatch between educational outcomes and labor market realities. Agricultural education often emphasizes theoretical knowledge while neglecting practical skills, entrepreneurship, and value-chain integration. This disconnect limits graduates' ability to transition into profitable agribusiness ventures, reinforcing negative perceptions of the sector (NJAAT, 2025).

Additionally, Gen Z's exposure to global opportunities through digital platforms heightens expectations for rapid economic returns. Agriculture, which often requires long-term investment before profitability, is

therefore perceived as incompatible with their aspirations (Knowledge for Policy, 2025).

Implications of Conceptualizing Youth Apathy

Understanding youth apathy as a complex, rational, and structurally induced phenomenon is essential for effective policy design. Simplistic narratives that blame youth attitudes risk misdiagnosing the problem and implementing ineffective interventions. Instead, a nuanced conceptualization highlights the need for systemic reforms that address access, perception, education, and institutional support. By re-conceptualizing agriculture as a dynamic sector encompassing technology, entrepreneurship, and innovation, policymakers can better align agricultural opportunities with the values and aspirations of Nigerian Generation Z. In Nigeria, agriculture is often associated with subsistence farming, rural poverty, and low social prestige, perceptions that sharply contrast with Gen Z's aspirations for technology-driven and financially rewarding careers (Businessday NG, 2025). These perceptions play a crucial role in shaping career choices and reinforcing disengagement. Youth apathy extends beyond primary production to other segments of the agricultural value chain, including processing, storage, marketing, and logistics. While these areas offer significant employment potential, inadequate awareness and limited policy emphasis have constrained youth participation (IFAD, 2019). This narrow association of agriculture solely with

farming obscures opportunities in agribusiness, agritech, and agro-processing that may otherwise appeal to Gen Z's skills and interests.

Overview of Agriculture and Food Security in Nigeria

Agriculture has historically played a central role in Nigeria's economic structure, social organization, and food systems. Prior to the discovery of oil, agriculture was the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, accounting for the bulk of export earnings and employment. Although the sector's relative contribution to national revenue has declined due to oil dependence, agriculture remains indispensable for livelihoods, food availability, and rural development (World Bank, 2023). In contemporary Nigeria, agriculture employs a substantial proportion of the labor force and serves as a primary source of income for rural households. The sector encompasses crop production, livestock, fisheries, and forestry, with smallholder farmers dominating production systems. Despite its importance, agricultural productivity remains low, constrained by limited mechanization, inadequate infrastructure, climate variability, insecurity, and weak institutional support (FAO, 2018).

Structure and Performance of the Agricultural Sector

Nigeria's agricultural sector is largely characterized by subsistence-oriented smallholder farming, with most farmers cultivating less than two hectares of land. These production systems rely heavily on rain-fed agriculture, making them highly

vulnerable to climate shocks such as droughts and flooding (World Bank, 2019). Low adoption of improved seeds, fertilizers, and modern technologies further limits output and efficiency. Although agriculture contributes significantly to gross domestic product, its potential as a driver of industrialization and export diversification remains underutilized. Weak linkages between agriculture and agro-processing industries reduce value addition and limit employment opportunities, particularly for youth (Osabohien & Al-Faryan, 2024).

Understanding Food Security in the Nigerian Context

Food security is achieved when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet dietary needs for an active and healthy life. In Nigeria, food security challenges are persistent and multidimensional, affecting millions of households across rural and urban areas (FAO et al., 2022).

The four pillars of food security availability, access, utilization, and stability are all under strain in Nigeria. Domestic food availability is undermined by low productivity and post-harvest losses, while access is constrained by poverty and rising food prices. Utilization is affected by poor nutrition and food safety standards, and stability is threatened by conflict, climate change, and economic volatility (AP News, 2025).

Trends and Drivers of Food Insecurity

Recent data indicate a worsening food security situation in Nigeria, with increasing numbers of people facing moderate to severe food insecurity. Factors contributing to this trend include rapid population growth, farmer–herder conflicts, insurgency in food-producing regions, and disruptions to agricultural supply chains (World Bank, 2023). Climate change has emerged as a critical driver of food insecurity. Erratic rainfall patterns, desertification, and flooding have reduced crop yields and displaced farming communities, particularly in northern Nigeria. Water scarcity for irrigation further compounds these challenges, limiting year-round food production (AP News, 2025).

Role of Youth in Agricultural Sustainability and Food Security

Youth participation is widely recognized as essential for sustaining agricultural production and enhancing food security. Young people bring physical energy, innovation, technological adaptability, and entrepreneurial skills that can transform traditional farming systems (IFAD, 2019). However, Nigeria’s agricultural workforce is aging, with many farmers over the age of 50, raising concerns about the future of food production (Knowledge for Policy, 2025).

The declining involvement of Gen Z in agriculture threatens the long-term stability of food systems. Without generational renewal, the sector risks stagnation, reduced productivity, and weakened resilience to shocks. Evidence suggests that farms

managed or co-managed by young people tend to adopt improved technologies and achieve higher productivity levels (PubMed, 2025).

Agriculture, Food Security, and Economic Development

Agriculture’s contribution to food security is closely linked to its role in economic development. A productive agricultural sector supports income generation, reduces poverty, stabilizes food prices, and supplies raw materials to manufacturing industries. Conversely, persistent food insecurity undermines human capital development and economic growth by exacerbating malnutrition and health challenges (UNDP, 2020). Nigeria’s aspiration for economic diversification and sustainable development cannot be realized without strengthening agriculture and ensuring active youth participation. The marginalization of young people from the sector therefore poses a dual threat: deepening food insecurity and limiting inclusive economic growth.

Drivers of Gen Z Apathy toward Agriculture

Socio-Cultural Perceptions and Stigmatization

Agriculture is widely perceived among Nigerian youth as a last-resort occupation reserved for the uneducated or economically disadvantaged. This stigma discourages educated Gen Z individuals from viewing agriculture as a viable career path (Professions.ng, 2024).

Limited Access to Productive Resources

Access to land, finance, and modern inputs remains a major barrier. Customary land tenure systems often exclude young people, while financial institutions impose stringent collateral requirements that youth cannot meet (Osabohien & Al-Faryan, 2024).

Inadequate Agricultural Education and Training

Many agricultural training institutions rely on outdated curricula that fail to integrate agribusiness, digital agriculture, and innovation. As a result, graduates lack both practical skills and entrepreneurial orientation (Agribusiness Space, 2026).

Rural-Urban Migration and Youth Aspirations

Rapid urbanization has reshaped youth aspirations. Nigerian Gen Z increasingly associate success with urban employment, technology, and white-collar professions, leading to mass rural-urban migration and labor shortages in agriculture (Knowledge for Policy, 2025).

Implications for Food Security

Declining Agricultural Productivity

An aging farming population limits innovation adoption and productivity growth. Studies show that youth participation correlates positively with farm productivity and household welfare (PubMed, 2025).

Increased Food Import Dependence

Reduced domestic food production forces Nigeria to rely heavily on food imports, exposing the country to global price shocks and foreign exchange pressures (AP News, 2025).

Heightened Vulnerability to Food Crises

Climate change, insecurity, and supply chain disruptions amplify food insecurity risks. Without youth engagement, Nigeria's adaptive capacity remains weak (Muhammad Salahudeen et al., 2024).

Economic Development Consequences

Agriculture offers significant opportunities for employment, industrial linkages, and export diversification. Youth disengagement constrains these opportunities, contributing to high unemployment and lost economic output. Nigeria reportedly loses trillions of naira annually due to insufficient youth inclusion in agriculture (Falaju & Osuji, 2025). Furthermore, agriculture-led industrialization through agro-processing and value addition cannot thrive without a skilled and motivated youth workforce.

Review of Existing Policies and Interventions

Several government programs aim to attract youth to agriculture, including youth empowerment schemes and agribusiness financing initiatives. However, these programs often suffer from weak implementation, limited coverage, and political inconsistency (NJAAT, 2025). A

lack of coordination between agricultural, educational, and youth development policies further undermines impact.

Conclusion

The apathy of Nigerian Generation Z toward agriculture presents a profound threat to food security and economic development. Addressing this challenge requires dismantling structural barriers, transforming perceptions, and implementing youth-centered agricultural reforms. With deliberate policy action and sustained investment, Nigerian Gen Z can become a powerful force for agricultural transformation and national development.

Recommendations

In the light of the conclusion above, the following are hereby recommended;

Rebranding Agriculture for Gen Z

Public campaigns should reposition agriculture as a modern, technology-driven, and profitable sector. Highlighting success stories of young agripreneurs can shift negative perceptions.

Improving Access to Land and Finance

Governments should establish youth-friendly land banks and flexible credit schemes tailored to young agribusiness entrepreneurs.

Reforming Agricultural Education

Curricula should integrate agribusiness management, digital agriculture, climate-

smart farming, and innovation hubs to align with Gen Z interests.

Promoting Agritech and Innovation

Supporting agritech startups, mobile farming applications, and digital marketplaces can attract tech-savvy youth and enhance productivity (Muhammad Salahudeen et al., 2024).

Strengthening Policy Coordination

Aligning youth employment, education, and agricultural development policies will ensure coherent and sustainable interventions.

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