



Effect of Agribusiness Clusters and Youth Policy Engagement on Promoting Sustainable Agricultural Practices among Young Agripreneurs in Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract

The agricultural sector in Nigeria faces significant challenges, including insufficient youth engagement and limited adoption of sustainable agricultural practices, despite its potential for economic growth and employment. This study investigates the effect of agribusiness clusters and youth policy engagement on the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices among youth agripreneurs in Southwest Nigeria. Adopting a cross-sectional survey design, the study sampled 369 youth participants from Oyo, Ogun and Ekiti states, who participated in agribusiness training programmes funded by national and international development partners. Using descriptive and inferential statistics, including multiple regression analysis, the findings revealed that agribusiness clusters ($\beta = 0.29, t = 5.44, p < 0.05$) and youth policy engagement ($\beta = 0.43, t = 8.17, p < 0.05$) significantly predicted the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices. The study highlights the importance of collaborative networks and inclusive policymaking in promoting sustainability and recommends investing in agribusiness clusters as hubs for innovation and fostering youth participation in policy development. These approaches are critical to empowering youth, enhancing sustainability and driving agricultural transformation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Agribusiness Clusters, Youth Policy Engagement, Sustainable Agricultural Practices, Regulatory Incentives, Southwest Nigeria.

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Introduction

The agricultural sector in Nigeria serves as a cornerstone of the country's economy, accounting for a substantial proportion of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and providing employment for millions, particularly among the youth. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2021), agriculture remains one of the largest employers of labour in the country, with a majority of rural communities relying on it as their primary source of livelihood. This underscores the sector's potential to drive inclusive economic growth and mitigate the high unemployment rates among the rapidly expanding youth population. Despite its vital role, Nigeria's agricultural sector faces numerous challenges that hinder its optimal performance and capacity for economic transformation. Key issues include inefficient resource management, such as the underutilisation of arable land and water resources, as well as outdated farming techniques that result in low productivity. Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure, including poor road networks, insufficient storage facilities and limited access to markets, exacerbates post-harvest losses and reduces the profitability of agricultural ventures (Afolabi et al., 2022). These deficiencies are compounded by a lack of strategic policy interventions to address systemic gaps and support long-term sectoral development (Olaniyi & Akinwunmi, 2019).

The youth demographic, which constitutes a significant portion of Nigeria's population, faces specific barriers to engaging meaningfully in agriculture. Limited access to financing is a critical issue, as many young people lack the collateral required to secure loans or the financial literacy needed to navigate available credit facilities. Additionally, the absence of comprehensive skills development programmes prevents the youth from acquiring the technical and entrepreneurial competencies necessary to succeed in agribusiness. Weak institutional support further restricts opportunities for innovation and sustainable practices, leaving young people unable to fully exploit the potential of agriculture as a viable career path (Izuogu et al., 2023). These challenges significantly undermine the sector's potential to empower the youth and contribute to economic innovation. The unemployment crisis in Nigeria, exacerbated by these challenges, poses a significant threat to national stability and economic sustainability. Youth unemployment and underemployment not only contribute to rising poverty levels but also increase the risk of social unrest and insecurity. If left unaddressed, these issues could escalate into widespread economic instability, with far-reaching consequences for national development (Afolabi et al., 2022).

To unlock the agricultural sector's potential for inclusive economic development, a multi-pronged approach is essential. Effective management frameworks must be established to improve resource allocation, modernise farming practices and enhance productivity. Investments in infrastructure, such as

transportation networks and storage facilities, are critical to reducing post-harvest losses and ensuring that farmers can access domestic and international markets (Olaniyi & Akinwunmi, 2019). Furthermore, strategic policy interventions should prioritise youth engagement by facilitating access to financing, offering training programmes tailored to agribusiness and fostering public-private partnerships to drive innovation. Institutional reforms are equally necessary to strengthen the support systems available to young farmers and entrepreneurs. This includes creating platforms for collaboration, providing mentorship opportunities and establishing regulatory environments that encourage investment in agriculture. By addressing these systemic barriers, Nigeria can transform its agricultural sector into a driver of economic empowerment, technological advancement and sustainable development (Izuogu et al., 2023).

Sustainable agribusiness practices (which integrate environmental stewardship, economic viability and social equity) offer a viable pathway to addressing these challenges. However, many youth agribusiness programmes fail to resolve key issues such as inadequate financial support, agribusiness clusters, limited access to green jobs and insufficient youth representation in policy dialogues. These gaps significantly impede the sector's sustainability and productivity (Sanginga et al., 2023; Barth et al., 2021). Development initiatives, including those led by organisations such as the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), aim to bridge these gaps by promoting youth participation in agribusiness. Nevertheless, significant obstacles persist, including the absence of agribusiness clusters, lack of post-training support and inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development [FMARD], 2020; International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], 2019). Agribusiness clusters are essential for fostering collaboration, innovation and resource-sharing. Moreover, engaging youth in policy dialogues is crucial to aligning agribusiness strategies with their needs, thereby advancing sustainable agricultural practices that promote economic growth and resilience (Sanginga et al., 2023).

The transition to sustainable agricultural practices is critical for a variety of reasons. Beyond being an environmental imperative, it plays a key role in enhancing food security, strengthening rural economies and building resilience against climate change (Amede et al., 2023). The shift to sustainable agricultural practices is especially pressing in regions such as Southwest Nigeria, where agriculture is a vital part of the economy. With its favourable demographics and expanding market opportunities, Southwest Nigeria has the potential to become a major driver of sustainable economic growth, making the adoption of sustainable practices in agriculture crucial for the future (Afolabi, 2015). The growing population in the region is contributing to

increased food demand, while the agricultural sector also faces the pressures of climate change, soil degradation and water scarcity.

However, continued dependence on traditional agricultural methods has hindered the region's ability to fully realise its economic potential. These conventional farming practices, while familiar, are often inefficient, unsustainable and contribute to environmental degradation, including deforestation, soil erosion and reduced biodiversity. Furthermore, the over-reliance on these methods stifles innovation and limits the capacity to adopt modern agricultural techniques that can improve yields, reduce environmental impact and ensure long-term sustainability (Kuyah et al., 2021). This situation underscores the urgent need to transition to more sustainable practices that incorporate advanced technology, environmentally-friendly approaches and efficient resource management.

The challenges facing agriculture in Southwest Nigeria are multifaceted, requiring comprehensive and innovative solutions. One promising approach involves a management-oriented strategy that integrates agribusiness clusters and strong policy engagement to drive systemic change. Agribusiness clusters can create synergies among stakeholders, including farmers, processors, marketers and government entities, thereby fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange. Such clusters can also enhance access to markets and inputs, increase access to finance and improve the overall efficiency of agricultural systems. On the policy front, effective engagement with government policies is crucial to incentivising the adoption of sustainable practices and supporting the long-term viability of agriculture. This includes policies that promote sustainable land management, investment in research and development, access to sustainable agricultural technologies and capacity-building for farmers. Policymakers must recognise the importance of sustainable agriculture not just for environmental reasons but also as a strategic economic priority that can lead to greater agricultural productivity and profitability, which in turn supports rural economies and employment.

Despite the importance of these solutions, the effectiveness of government- and donor-funded programmes designed to promote sustainable agriculture has been difficult to assess. While several initiatives have been launched in Southwest Nigeria to address environmental sustainability, agricultural productivity and rural development, there remains a lack of robust empirical evidence regarding their impact on fostering sustainable agricultural practices. The existing body of research indicates that while these programmes have contributed to some degree of progress, their scope and implementation often face challenges, including inadequate funding, limited outreach and insufficient monitoring and evaluation frameworks (Smith et al., 2020).

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of agribusiness clusters and youth policy engagement on the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices among youth agripreneurs in Southwest Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to investigate the impact of youth agribusiness clusters on the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices and analyze the effect of youth engagement in policy dialogues on sustainable agricultural practices. This study highlights how collaborative networks and inclusive policymaking drive sustainable innovations. Findings will inform policymakers and stakeholders, offering strategies to empower youth agripreneurs while promoting food security, economic resilience and environmental sustainability.

Literature Review

Sustainable Agricultural Practices

Sustainable agricultural practices are integral to addressing global food security challenges while ensuring environmental preservation. Often referenced as the cornerstone of modern agricultural transformation, the "Green Revolution" highlighted the potential of innovative practices to meet food demands effectively (Ojadi, 2023). However, sustainable agriculture extends beyond productivity; it encompasses strategies that safeguard natural resources such as soil, water and biodiversity while promoting profitability and poverty alleviation (Adigun et al., 2017; Adeyanju et al., 2021). This multidimensional approach integrates agricultural production sustainability, rural economic resilience and ecological balance to achieve long-term viability. In Nigeria, the pursuit of sustainable agriculture has yielded mixed outcomes. Successes in enhancing productivity are counterbalanced by challenges such as land degradation, unsustainable pesticide use and improper wastewater management (Ufiobor, 2017). These issues underscore the need for comprehensive strategies that address environmental concerns while ensuring agricultural profitability.

For agribusinesses, sustainability is not just an ecological imperative but a strategic necessity for maintaining competitiveness in an increasingly resource-constrained world. Representing 40% of global land use and 70% of terrestrial water consumption, the sector faces intensifying pressures from population growth and socio-economic demands (Rosano-Pena et al., 2014; Danley, 2019). Achieving sustainable agricultural practices within agribusiness requires addressing financial, ecological and social barriers. Escalating global food prices, health risks and fluctuating macroeconomic indicators present significant challenges, necessitating innovative solutions (Sehnm & Oliveira, 2017). For youth agripreneurs in Southwest Nigeria, sustainable practices offer a pathway to balance environmental stewardship with economic growth. By integrating efficient resource management, biodiversity conservation and stakeholder engagement, these practices not only address immediate

agricultural needs but also secure long-term environmental and socio-economic benefits. This shows their critical role in ensuring the success of youth-focused agribusiness training programmes and advancing sustainable agricultural practices in the region.

Agribusiness Clusters

Some writers have defined clusters as non-random geographical agglomerations of firms with similar or closely complementary capabilities (Ellison & Glaeser, 1997), while others describe them as geographically proximate groups of interconnected companies and associated institutions in a particular field, linked by commonalities and complementarities (Porter, 1990). The modern conception of agribusiness development clusters initially emerged in the 1960s around traditional export commodities such as coffee, cotton and cocoa. However, over time, the emphasis has shifted to non-traditional agricultural exports and horticultural crops such as fruits, berries, vegetables and cut flowers. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) represent a somewhat older development model but gained prominence in the mid-20th century.

Agribusiness incubators, a relatively more recent development, first emerged in Latin America in the 1970s and have only started gaining traction in Sub-Saharan Africa over the past decade (Anderson et al., 2015). This brings us to the specific concept of "youth agribusiness clusters" and their significance in the Nigerian context. In light of the challenges faced by youth in agribusiness, it becomes imperative for Nigeria to establish a policy direction that promotes the introduction of agribusiness courses at all levels. Additionally, the establishment of agribusiness incubators in selected Nigerian universities offering agriculture and its allied courses is crucial. This strategic approach is seen as a sustainable driver for youth employment in agriculture, as emphasised by Etela and Onoja (2017). This policy direction aligns with the evolving landscape of agribusiness development clusters and acknowledges the need for tailored solutions to address the specific challenges faced by youth in Nigeria's agricultural sector.

Youth Policy Engagement

Socio-cultural norms often hinder youth participation in collective action, limiting their recognition as valuable partners in development efforts. TeLintelo (2012) highlights these barriers, which stem from deeply ingrained societal beliefs that underestimate the contributions of young people. Furthermore, Amanor and Chichava (2016) stress that youth are frequently excluded from critical decision-making stages in agribusiness interventions, such as setting objectives and designing institutional frameworks. This lack of inclusion undermines the effectiveness of such

programmes by ignoring the perspectives of the very demographic they aim to empower. Participatory approaches are vital for successful collective action, as insufficient focus on inclusivity diminishes both youth group performance and overall programme outcomes (Latynskiy & Berger, 2016). Addressing these gaps requires challenging socio-cultural norms and fostering policies that integrate youth into every stage of intervention planning and execution.

On the other hand, successful examples of youth engagement in agribusiness demonstrate the potential of structured interventions to drive empowerment and inclusivity. Programmes like the ENABLE Youth initiative, funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB) and supported by IITA, illustrate how agribusiness incubators and mentorship can improve access to resources and markets while creating employment opportunities for youth (AfDB, 2017; TeLintelo, 2012). Despite these achievements, challenges persist, as many programmes involve youth only during the execution phase, limiting their ability to negotiate their priorities (Hartley, 2014; Gebremariam, 2017). Furthermore, the reliance on pre-existing youth groups often fails to represent the diverse needs of young people, resulting in missed opportunities for innovative engagement (Tadele & Gella, 2012). To ensure the sustainability of agribusiness interventions, it is essential to prioritise youth in policy-making processes, leveraging their unique strengths as digital innovators, agripreneurs and active decision-makers in shaping an inclusive green economy (Fulai et al., 2015).

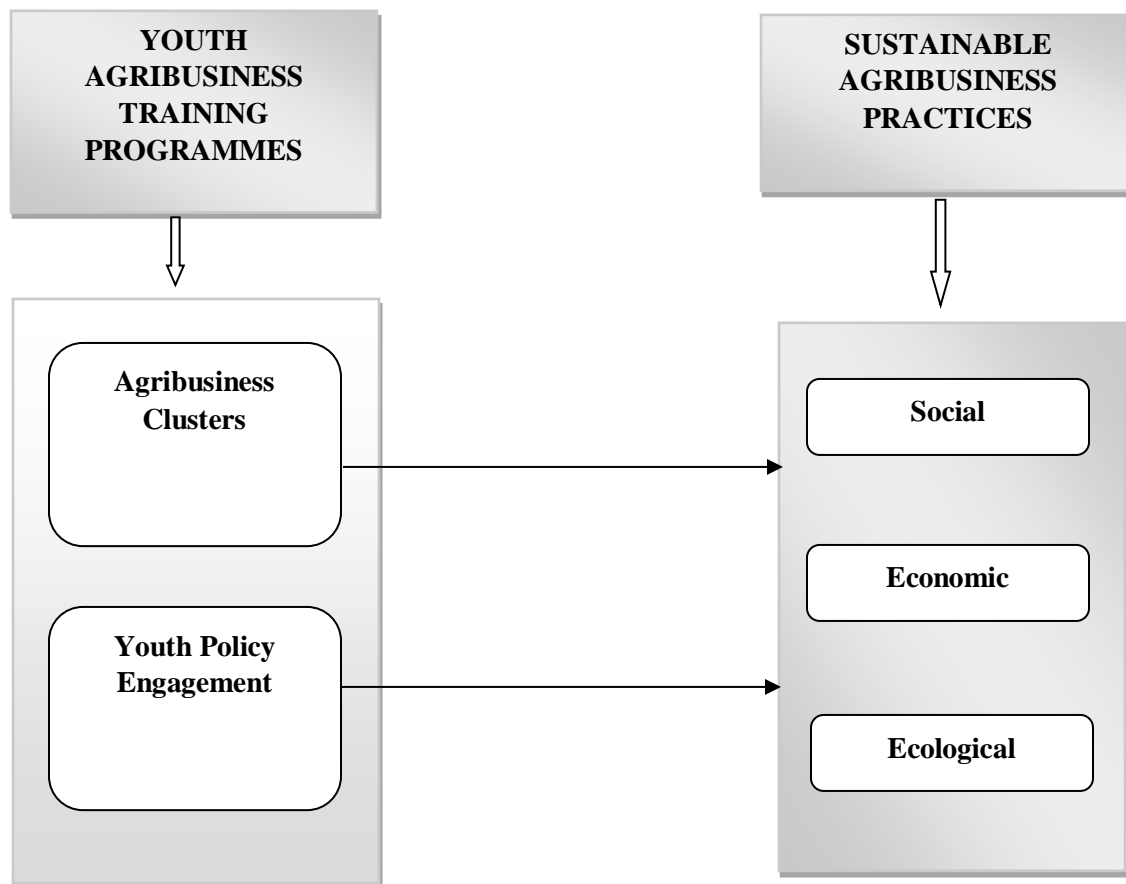
Gap in the Literature

Despite the increasing focus on sustainable agricultural practices as a means to enhance food security and economic resilience, the literature remains insufficient in addressing the role of youth agribusiness clusters in fostering their adoption. While Nyabam et al. (2018) explore the potential of agricultural initiatives to attract and engage youth, there is a notable lack of research on how agribusiness clusters facilitate knowledge exchange, resource sharing and market access which are critical factors that influence the sustainability of agricultural practices among young agripreneurs. Similarly, Warinda et al. (2020) highlight the importance of adaptable technologies, market opportunities and capacity-building in driving sustainability in East Africa. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how these elements, when integrated into youth agribusiness clusters, contribute to the widespread adoption of sustainable agricultural practices in Southwest Nigeria.

Moreover, the limited engagement of youth in policy dialogues on sustainable agricultural practices remains an underexplored area in the literature. While Haruna et al. (2019) emphasize the role of agricultural education, little attention has been given to the systemic barriers preventing youth from actively shaping policies that govern

sustainable agriculture. Njora and Yilmaz (2022) further highlight how negative perceptions of agriculture among youth in Kenya contribute to their reluctance to engage in policymaking, suggesting that a similar trend may exist in Nigeria. The absence of youth voices in policy discussions restricts the development of inclusive and youth-driven agricultural policies that could enhance the adoption of sustainability-focused strategies. This study aims to bridge these gaps by examining the effect of agribusiness clusters and youth policy engagement on promoting sustainable agricultural practices among youth agripreneurs in Southwest Nigeria. It explores how agribusiness clusters facilitate collaboration, resource sharing and market access to enhance the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices. Additionally, it investigates the role of youth policy engagement in shaping inclusive agricultural policies that support sustainability. By addressing these critical factors, the study seeks to provide evidence-based strategies for strengthening agribusiness clusters and fostering youth participation in policymaking, ultimately promoting the widespread adoption of sustainable agricultural practices in the region.

Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework*



Source: *Authors' Conceptualization (2024)*

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the Theory of Change (Chen, 1990; Coryn et al., 2011) and Empowerment Theory (Rappaport, 1981; Zimmerman, 1995), which served as the primary conceptual frameworks. These theories were selected due to their strong alignment with the study's objectives and the key variables under investigation. The Theory of Change posits that the achievement of desired outcomes in social programmes is facilitated through a series of interconnected steps. Central to this framework is the identification and mapping of causal relationships between programme activities and their intended outcomes. According to this theory, programme success hinges on the establishment of clear, measurable goals, the active engagement of stakeholders throughout the process and the ongoing evaluation of progress. Continuous evaluation is critical, as it informs the refinement of strategies and enhances the overall effectiveness of the programme (Weiss, 1995). By focusing on a systematic approach, the Theory of Change offers a clear pathway for understanding how various activities within a programme work synergistically to bring about social change.

In contrast, Empowerment Theory centres on the intrinsic potential and capabilities of individuals, particularly those from marginalised groups, such as youth in agribusiness. This theory asserts that individuals possess latent abilities that can be activated through targeted interventions. It emphasises the importance of fostering self-efficacy an individual's belief in their own capacity to achieve goals as well as a sense of control and agency, which are essential for the attainment of positive outcomes. Empowerment Theory further underscores the significance of creating enabling environments that provide individuals with access to the necessary resources and information, thereby facilitating transformative change. By ensuring that individuals are equipped with the tools and opportunities to make informed decisions, this theory facilitates the development of skills and knowledge that are crucial for long-term success (Rappaport, 1981; Zimmerman, 1995).

These frameworks offer a comprehensive approach to understanding how youth in agribusiness can be empowered to achieve sustainable outcomes. The integration of the Theory of Change, with its focus on structured, goal-oriented processes and Empowerment Theory, with its emphasis on individual agency and resource access, provides a holistic model for driving meaningful change in agribusiness contexts. This dual-theoretical approach offers valuable insights for the design and implementation of interventions aimed at enhancing the capabilities and outcomes of youth in this sector.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional research design to capture participants' thoughts at a single point in time, using questionnaires as the primary data collection tool. To ensure representative sampling, a proportional stratified random sampling technique was used. The data were analysed using both descriptive statistics, presented in bar charts and inferential statistics, which included multiple regression analysis.

Population of the Study

This study examined youth participants in agribusiness programmes implemented by IITA across Oyo, Ogun and Ekiti states in Nigeria, with funding from both national and international development partners. The target population comprised 9,099 youths engaged in these youth-focused agribusiness training programmes. Using Taherdoost's (2017) guidelines, based on Yamane's (1967) formula for large populations, the sample size for the study was 369.

Reliability of Research Instrument

A pilot study was conducted to validate the reliability of the research instruments, refining them based on participant feedback. The Cronbach's Alpha method, applied to data from 37 participants, yielded reliability coefficients exceeding the 0.7 benchmark across all scales. These results confirm the instruments' robustness for the study.

Model Specification

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{i1} + \beta_2 X_{i2} + \beta_3 X_{i3} + \beta_4 X_{i4} + \beta_5 X_{i5} + e \quad (1)$$

Where: Y = Sustainable Agribusiness Practices (SAP)

(β_i , $i = 0, 1, 2, 3, 4$) = various coefficients for the independent variables

X_1 = Agribusiness Clusters

X_2 = Youth Policy Engagement

X_3 = Age of the respondent (years)

X_4 = Gender (Male or Female)

X_5 = Educational background (No formal education, Primary education, Secondary

education, Vocational/Technical Training, Graduate or Postgraduate)

e = Error Term

Results and Interpretation

H₀: There is no significant effect of agribusiness clusters and youth policy engagement on sustainable agricultural practices in Southwest Nigeria.

To test this hypothesis, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. The independent variables, agribusiness clusters and youth policy engagement, were analysed alongside demographic factors (age, gender and educational level) to evaluate their combined effect on the dependent variable, sustainable agricultural practices. For the analysis, responses to all items under agribusiness clusters were aggregated to generate a composite score and similarly, a composite score was derived for youth policy engagement. Sustainable agricultural practices were represented by a composite index created by combining responses from pertinent items. The results of this analysis, along with parameter estimates, are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis of the effect of Agribusiness Clusters and Youth Policy Engagement on Sustainable Agricultural Practices

N	Model	B	Sig.	T	ANOVA (Sig.)	R	Adjusted R ²	F (5, 363)
369	Agribusiness clusters	0.29	0.00***	5.44	0.00**	0.744	0.608	51.52
	Youth policy engagement	0.43	0.00***	8.17				
	Age	0.01	0.85	0.19				
	Gender	0.07	0.11	1.58				
	Educational level	0.03	0.04**	2.69				
	Constant	2.95	0.00***	7.24				
	Predictors: Agribusiness clusters, Youth policy engagement, Age, Gender and Educational level							
Dependent Variable: Sustainable Agricultural Practices								

Source: Researchers' Field Results, 2024. **Significant at 5%, *** Significant at 1%

The results in Table 1 revealed that agribusiness clusters ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 5.44$, $p < 0.05$) and youth policy engagement ($\beta = 0.43$, $t = 8.17$, $p < 0.05$) had a positive and statistically significant effect on sustainable agricultural practices in Southwest Nigeria. This result suggests that agribusiness clusters and youth policy engagement are significant predictors of sustainable agricultural practices. Additionally, educational level also showed a positive and significant effect on sustainable agricultural practices ($\beta = 0.03$, $t = 2.69$, $p < 0.05$). However, age ($\beta = 0.01$, $t = 0.19$, $p = 0.85$) and gender

($\beta = 0.07$, $t = 1.58$, $p = 0.11$) do not have a statistically significant effect on sustainable agricultural practices.

The model has an R value of 0.744, indicating a strong positive relationship between the predictors and sustainable agricultural practices. The adjusted R² value of 0.608 suggests that approximately 60.8% of the variation in sustainable agricultural practices can be explained by the model, with the remaining 39.2% attributed to other factors outside the model. The F-statistics ($df = 5, 363$) = 51.52, with $p = 0.00$ ($p < 0.05$), indicate that the overall model is statistically significant.

The regression equation is expressed as:

$$\text{Sustainable Agribusiness Practices} = 2.95 + 0.29\text{Agribusiness Clusters} + 0.43\text{Youth Policy Engagement} + 0.01\text{Age of the respondent} + 0.07\text{Gender} + 0.03\text{Educational level} + e$$

From the above regression equation, it was revealed that agribusiness clusters, youth policy engagement and educational level are key determinants in promoting sustainable agricultural practices. Specifically, for every 1-unit increase in agribusiness clusters, while keeping other variables constant, youth involvement in sustainable agricultural practices increases by 0.29 units. Similarly, for every 1-unit increase in youth policy engagement, while keeping other variables constant, youth involvement in sustainable agricultural practices increases by 0.43 units. The results indicate that the null hypothesis (H_0), which posits no significant effect of agribusiness clusters, youth policy engagement and educational level on sustainable agricultural practices in Southwest Nigeria, is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study highlight the pivotal role of youth participation in agribusiness clusters in promoting the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices. Agribusiness clusters provide a platform for collaboration, knowledge exchange and mentorship, which creates an enabling environment for sustainability. As highlighted by Lang et al. (2022), these clusters serve as hubs where young people can access the resources and expertise needed to adopt innovative and environmentally friendly practices. This aligns with Empowerment Theory, which emphasises the importance of enhancing individuals' capacity and agency through collective support systems. By engaging youth in these clusters, the theory suggests that their self-efficacy can be strengthened, enabling them to take active roles in shaping the sustainability of their practices. Furthermore, the Theory of Change supports this view by stressing the need for well-structured interventions to achieve specific, long-term outcomes. According to this theory, success in agribusiness clusters depends on mapping out the steps

necessary for adopting sustainable practices, ensuring that each intervention is linked to broader objectives of environmental and economic sustainability.

As Wojtynia et al. (2021) noted, aligning the objectives of youth, mentors and other stakeholders within these clusters is crucial for fostering cohesive efforts towards sustainability. Without this alignment, the collective efforts may lack direction and impact. Effective agribusiness clusters require both social and structural alignment. Social alignment fosters trust and relationships among participants, enabling open communication and collaboration. Structural alignment ensures that frameworks for resource sharing, such as funding, technical support and training, are in place to sustain these efforts. By integrating these elements, agribusiness clusters can empower youth, not only to adopt sustainable practices but also to contribute to long-term environmental and economic benefits.

The study also revealed a strong positive correlation between youth participation in policy dialogues and the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices, highlighting the critical role of inclusive policymaking in fostering sustainable agricultural development. Youth engagement in policymaking processes helps to shape policies that directly affect their futures, fostering a sense of ownership. By involving young people in the decision-making process, they are empowered to advocate for and implement sustainability-focused practices. As Umeh et al. (2020) emphasised, youth participation in policy discussions strengthens their commitment to sustainability, as they become active stakeholders in shaping the policies that govern their communities and industries. This finding aligns with the Theory of Change, which underscores that inclusive policy engagement can drive lasting behavioural shifts. According to this theory, when young people are given the opportunity to influence governance structures, they are more likely to adopt and promote sustainable practices. By incorporating youth perspectives into the policymaking process, policies can be more effectively designed to meet the needs of future generations. Additionally, youth involvement can result in innovative solutions and fresh perspectives on sustainability challenges, particularly as they are often more attuned to emerging environmental issues and technological advancements.

However, as Surya et al. (2021) cautioned, symbolic involvement without genuine influence may undermine these efforts, limiting the potential for positive outcomes. Tokenistic engagement, where youth are merely consulted but do not have the power to effect meaningful change, could lead to disillusionment and disengagement. Therefore, to maximise the impact of youth involvement in policymaking, it is crucial for policymakers to ensure that youth have a genuine voice in the decision-making process. This includes creating avenues for active participation,

such as representation on advisory boards, working groups, or decision-making bodies that influence agricultural policy.

Moreover, providing youth with training in policy advocacy, negotiation and leadership is essential to ensuring they are equipped to engage meaningfully in these discussions. These skills will enable young people to effectively champion sustainability and advocate for the implementation of policies that promote long-term environmental and economic resilience. Through targeted capacity-building efforts, youth can be empowered to navigate complex policy landscapes, advocate for evidence-based agricultural practices and drive transformative change. By ensuring that youth participation is not only symbolic but also substantial, policymakers can unlock the full potential of youth as change agents in the agricultural sector. These efforts can lead to the development of policies that promote sustainable practices, enhance agricultural productivity and foster resilience to environmental challenges. Ultimately, empowering youth through meaningful policy engagement not only benefits them but also contributes to the broader goal of creating a more sustainable and equitable agricultural system that can meet the needs of current and future generations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the impact of agribusiness clusters and youth policy engagement on the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices among youth agripreneurs in Southwest Nigeria. The findings indicate that both agribusiness clusters and youth participation in policy dialogues play a crucial role in fostering sustainability in the agricultural sector. Agribusiness clusters provide essential platforms for training, knowledge exchange and access to modern farming technologies, enabling youth to adopt innovative and sustainable agricultural methods. Additionally, active participation in policy development empowers young agripreneurs by ensuring that agricultural policies reflect their needs and aspirations, making them more relevant and effective in addressing sustainability challenges. The study also emphasizes the importance of education and capacity-building initiatives, as they enhance youth engagement in both agribusiness and policymaking. By equipping young people with the necessary skills, resources and policy influence, these strategies contribute to a more sustainable and resilient agricultural sector.

Given these findings, targeted interventions are needed to strengthen agribusiness clusters, enhance youth engagement in policy processes and create an enabling environment for sustainable agricultural practices. To achieve this, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

1. The government, private sector and development partners should establish and expand agribusiness clusters as innovation hubs, fostering collaboration between young agripreneurs, industry experts and agricultural institutions.
2. Policymakers should create structured platforms that allow youth to participate in agricultural policy discussions, ensuring their voices influence sustainable agricultural policies.
3. Collaboration between governments, agricultural organizations and private investors should be encouraged to drive innovation, funding and implementation of sustainability-focused policies in agribusiness.

This study offers valuable insights but is limited by its cross-sectional design, which captures data at a single point in time. Future research could adopt a mixed-methods and longitudinal approach to examine how personal, socio-cultural and economic factors influence the long-term sustainability of youth agribusiness initiatives. Additionally, further studies could explore the role of digital technologies and artificial intelligence in advancing sustainable agricultural practices.

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