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Influence of Kenyan Youth's Perception towards Agriculture and Necessary Interventions; a Review

Lucy K. Njeru[1*], Bernard M. Gichimu[2], Mary C. Lopokoiyit[3] and John G. Mwangi[3]

[1]Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, Embu University College (A Constituent College of University of Nairobi), P.O.Box 6 – 60100, Embu, Kenya.
[2]Department of Agricultural Resource Management, Embu University College (A Constituent College of University of Nairobi), P.O.Box 6 – 60100, Embu, Kenya.
[3]Department of Agricultural Education and Extension, Egerton University, P.O.Box 536, 20115, Egerton, Kenya.

Authors' contributions

This work has been carried out in collaboration between all authors. It forms the basis of an on-going research project being conducted by author LKN, a PhD student at Egerton University under the supervision of authors JGM and MCL. Author BMG provided technical assistance during the manuscript development in consultation with authors JGM and MCL. The authors read and approved the final manuscript for publication.

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ABSTRACT

Approximately 64% of unemployed persons in Kenya are youth, most of which live in rural areas and lacks formal education and vocational or professional skills. In spite of this, youth participation in agriculture has been relatively low in the country. This may be partly attributed to, among other factors, thepoor perception of the youth on agriculture. Agriculture which is basically a rural-oriented sector remains the backbone of the Kenya's economy contributing over 30% of GDP. The sector provides over 80% of employment opportunities in the country but remains unattractive to the youth. This implies that most of the Kenyan youth are not fully engaged in productive economic activities which put their dependency index quite high. If the perception of youth towards agriculture

**Corresponding author: E-mail: lucykarega@gmail.com;*

is not changed, they will remain a big burden to the society and to their families in particular. There are various activities along the agriculture value chain which the youths can engage in to ensure their self-reliance and create employment thus reducing youth-related social problems and improving national economic growth and self-sufficiency. The paper seeks to analyze and discuss the influence of Kenyan youth's perception towards agriculture and required interventions. This information will be useful in developing policies that will make agriculture attractive to the youth.

Keywords: Youth; agriculture; employment; economy; Kenya.

1. INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment is one of the most acute problems affecting developing countries. Lack of basic education ranks high among the reasons behind this problem [1]. UNICEF [2] reported that youth unemployment is compounded by the fact that a large portion of the population in developing countries tends to be youth. In Kenya, for example, it is estimated that 78.31% of the population are below 35 years and that 64% of unemployed persons in the country are the youth [3]. The formal economy is unable to create enough employment opportunities to absorb this constant supply of labor-seeking youth [1,4]. Besides, over 92% of the unemployed Kenyan youth have no vocational or professional training with only 1.5% having formal education beyond secondary school level [3]. According to Kanali and Mutua [5], the unemployment rate among the Kenyan youth has always been ranked very high in the country and continues to be a great hindrance to the country's development. Although agriculture contributes over 80% of all employment opportunities in Kenya [6], youths are not taking advantage of these opportunities due to their poor perception towards agriculture.

The passion of the youth towards agriculture is more often inspired and moulded by role models. Most of the African farmers are between the ages of 55-70 years thus lacking farming enthusiasm and practice traditional subsistence cultivation, which gives low returns [7]. For this reason, the young generation perceive agriculture as an occupation for the old, illiterate, and poor rural people [7]. A study by Gitau [7] revealed that such a perception has caused rural-urban migration among the youth in search for jobs. This has resulted in scarce formal employment opportunities due to high population in the urban centres consequently resulting in desperation particularly among the youth [7]. This has led to youth indulgence in substance abuse, crimes and violence, and exposes them to HIV and AIDS. This is therefore a multilevel problem that requires a great deal of coordination and in-depth thinking on how to attract young men and women into the agricultural sector [1]. Mobilizing youth to national development through participation in agriculture is paramount since they are the major catalyst for change and the backbone of the nation [3,8].

2. INFLUENCE OF YOUTHS' PERCEPTION ON THEIR PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE

Poor perception towards agriculture by the youth could be attributed to several factors. Children from rural areas have less access to education than their urban peers. Apart from lack of educational infrastructure in rural areas, finding good and motivated teachers in rural areas may be a big challenge especially in developing countries [2]. In addition, moving children up from primary to secondary school is not self-evident in many of these countries [2]. For instance, some parents are hesitant in investing in secondary education for their daughters and instead marry them off after primary school. Not only do rural youth have less access to education, but the education in rural areas is often of less quality and not relevant to rural lives [2]. Agricultural curricula have disappeared in schools despite the need to include it from primary school level. Agriculture is seen as a less worthwhile subject or as a last resort for under-achievers hence influencing rural youth aspirations in a negative way; while urban students see agriculture as a 'dirty job' [4]. Rural youth not only need general education but they also need skills and training on agricultural activities. Studies by van der Geest [9] and FAO [10] revealed that agricultural training targeting rural youth can be highly effective in raising agricultural productivity. Training and capacity building can therefore change the perception of the youth towards agriculture.

In the Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa, agricultural activities are often used in schools as a punishment [11] thus contributing to its

negative perception by the youth. In Uganda, for example, agriculture has remained unattractive to the youth partly because schools administer agricultural-related punishments to errant and in-disciplined children [12]. In addition, prisoners have many a times been forced to work on farms under harsh working environment created by their supervisors [13]. Sandys [13] further argues that these cases portray agricultural-related activities as deserving for wrongdoers hence limiting the youth enthusiasm to pursue livelihoods in agriculture. As a result, opportunities for agriculture-led growth among the youth are reduced leaving agriculture in the hands of the ageing rural population and consequently leading to low productivity [13].

The current mode of education is geared towards educating white collar workers, which doesn't reflect the economic and social context for which they are being trained [1,2]. This is to suggest that although developing countries should plan for economic expansion, those plans should not negate the existing needs of the economy. According to Tyrone [1], one response is to encourage partnerships with the education sector to integrate agriculture into the primary and secondary school curriculum. A report by KIE [14] revealed the absence of agriculture from the curriculum in Kenyan schools, particularly at the compulsory levels of education. Many a times, agriculture is included in the curriculum as an optional component that is not taught with passion [14]. If its inclusion can be broad-based and compulsory and supported with appropriate resources, it would help to motivate youth towards having a more positive view of employment opportunities in the agricultural sector [2].

Poor perception towards agriculture by the youth can also be attributed to the fact that most young farmers are not interested in receiving agricultural training since they work on other people's land and are thus not motivated to improve their agricultural skills [15]. In many cases, training programmes reach mostly young men and do not cater for the needs of young women [15]. FAO [11] confirmed that restricted mobility; young motherhood; and limited schooling as well as literacy levels are factors contributing to poor perception. According to World Bank et al. [16] the timing of trainings are at times inconvenient for young women as they are busy with household chores.

3. INTERVENTIONS TO POOR PERCEPTION ON AGRICULTURE BY THE YOUTH

Schools can play a big role in shaping the perceptions of youth towards agriculture. A report by PAFP Net [4] confirmed that teachers could instil a more positive image towards agriculture by explaining to their students the many aspects of agriculture; its importance to everyday life; and its career opportunities. Studies by van der Geest [9] and FAO [10] revealed that the youth earn a relatively higher income from their agricultural activities than the elderly. This is possibly because youths have the potential to overcome some of the major constraints to expanding agriculture such as pest control and genetic improvement because they are often more open to new ideas and practices [7]. Thus, agricultural training targeting rural youth can be highly effective in raising agricultural productivity.

Williams and Lindsey [17] argued that creation of workshops and training courses designed for youth attending and not attending school is essential in efforts to address youth participation in agriculture and improve agricultural education. In particular, courses and workshops ought to be designed to cater for the formal and informal educational needs of the populations targeted [4]. This will ensure that some of the constraints imposed on agricultural education by the formal education system are not reproduced. Youth ought to be trained on financial sustainability and management of membership-based organizations in order to encourage the creation of strong and sustainable young farmers' organizations [10]. A study by Kangai et al. [18] revealed that youth organizations can promote and facilitate youth participation in their own structures and can consider need for gender equity and understand the issues affecting rural youth. Through these organizations, youth can also be actively involved in defending their social, political and economic rights [4].

Agriculture is a major contribution to gross domestic product in Kenya, and youth could play a dominant role in this contribution, but their productivity and growth is hindered by limited access to finances [19]. To expand access to credit for the promotion of youth and women businesses and thereby enhance their contribution towards realization of the Vision 2030, Kenya government came with the Uwezo Fund initiative in 2013. Kanali and Mutua [5] revealed that the government through the

initiative set aside Kshs 6 billion (approximately 68 million US dollars) for disbursement to youth and women. Beneficiaries of Uwezo Fund can therefore take advantage of their talents as well as resources within their locality and participate in agriculture for economic development. Ensuring credit accessibility by the youth is therefore a good incentive and an innovative intervention by the Government.

Using information and communications technology (ICT) for training seems to be popular among young farmers which can enhance information flows on marketing and facilitate contacts between various actors in the value chain. A study by FAO [11] confirmed that youth are able to pick up more easily new technologies related to farming unlike elderly people who many a times do not trust new techniques. Rural youth could thus be an asset in their communities by helping elderly farmers to work with ICT. Access to technology (internet, social network, productivity tools) by youth should also be guaranteed in order to start a new development era [20]. Such access to technology if used properly can increase productivity and make farming activities profitable while protecting the environment.

The capacity building activities of rural youth organizations often focus on generating leadership skills of their members [20]. According to van der Geest [9], education and capacity-building programmes for rural youth should be defined in a more participatory way and focus on agricultural best practices, land laws and knowledge sharing. He further argued that governments should review their youth policies and propose measures which are adapted to rural life, guarantee the rights of rural youth and provide them with a better and more decent life. Kangai et al. [18] expressed the need to address the long held belief that agriculture and rural based activities are for those who cannot make a living anywhere else. Agriculture need to be rebranded as the new unexplored frontier for growth in business opportunities [18]. A report by FAO [15] confirmed that women and men should have equal access to training and education and that gender aspects should be taken into consideration while deciding the themes and setting the timing of these trainings.

Most rural youth do not foresee a prosperous future for themselves in the agricultural sector mostly because of the lack of profitability of agricultural activities and the lack of infrastructure and (social) facilities in rural areas. Youth can be motivated to engage in agriculture through transforming agriculture from subsistence to commercial farming [21]. This will not only aid in achievement of Vision 2030 that positions agricultural sector as a key driver for delivering the 10% annual economic growth, but will provide employment for the unemployed youth. This can be possible through increasing productivity, commercialization and competitiveness of agricultural commodities and enterprises in order to make agriculture more attractive to the youth [18]. A study by Mburu et al. [22] suggested that specialization either on production, processing or marketing of agricultural commodities needs to be encouraged among the youth. This will be more effective than when one person carry out all activities in a value chain.

There is need to provide incentives for young agricultural entrepreneurs by developing financial packages that are tailored to the diverse production, marketing conditions as well as risk factors [9]. A report by Mburu et al. [22] showed the need to invest in value addition through processing, branding and quality shelf life as this would lead to higher prices, new jobs and eventually increased aggregate incomes for the youth.Agribusiness centers with storage and processing facilities should be created for young farmers in order to link farmers and traders and to act as a venue for training, sensitization and capacity building programmes [23]. Young farmers should also be trained on financial sustainability as well as creation and management of strong and sustainable membership-based young farmers' organizations [12]. Therefore, youth training on various aspects along the agricultural value chain including production, value addition, marketing and sustainability should be a priority of the governments and development agents.

4. CONCLUSION

This review provided a better understanding of the youth's perception towards agriculture and further suggested some of the interventions that the Government can apply to make agriculture more attractive to the youth. Application of these interventions would transform agriculture to an economically rewarding venture and ensure food and nutritional security, poverty reduction and self-reliance, among the youth and the general community. To achieve this, there is need to create youth-in-agriculture policies and integrate them with other policies on youth matters such

as education and investment. This will empower the youth and change their perception towards agriculture thus igniting their interest in agricultural activities.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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