

Review Article

**Perception of Kenyan Youth towards
Agriculture and Necessary Interventions; a
Review**

ABSTRACT

It is estimated that 64% of unemployed persons in Kenya are youth out of which only 2% have formal education. The remaining over 92% lacks vocational or professional skills and the majorities are found in the rural areas. Despite this, youth participation in agriculture has been relatively low in Kenya as it is in many developing countries. This is partly attributed to their poor perception on agriculture, associated risks, discouraging costs and its labor intensive nature. Kenyan economy heavily depends on Agriculture (over 30% of GDP), which is basically a rural-oriented sector. 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 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 establish the perception of youth 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 [4]. Besides, only 1.5% of the unemployed Kenyan youth have formal education beyond secondary school level and over 92% have no vocational or professional training [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 ambitions of the youth in agriculture are more often than not triggered and moulded by role models. Farmers in Africa are mostly elderly people between the ages of 55-70 years, who lack enthusiasm as they engage in traditional subsistence cultivation, which gives poor returns [7]. For this reason, this economic activity has not been embraced by the young generation who perceive it as an occupation for the old, illiterate, and poor rural people, having seen their parents in rags, majority of whom are involved in agriculture. A study by

Gitau[7] revealed that the misconception has led to rural urban migration among the youth in search for greener pastures. Consequently formal employment opportunities are scarce due to population explosion in the urban centres. This has caused desperation particularly among the youth leading to indulgence in substance abuse, crime and violence, while the ravaging scourge of HIV and AIDS has not spared them. Whatever the solution(s) to this multilevel problem, a great deal of coordination and in-depth thinking is pertinent in order to attract gadget loving and efficiency prone young people into the agricultural sector [1]. Youth are the major catalyst for change and a backbone of a nation hence mobilizing them for national development through participation in agriculture is paramount [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 it has been used in schools in the administration of punishments to errant and in-disciplined children[12]. In addition, those under detention in prisons have many a times been hired to work on farms with the head of prisoners cruelly whipping the lazy and weak to match the pace of those who are energetic working ahead of them[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. Consequently, possibilities for agriculture-led growth are jeopardised. This leaves agriculture in the hands of the ageing rural population 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 [2]. This is not to suggest that developing countries like Kenya should not plan for economic expansion but 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. In many instances, agriculture is incorporated as an optional component that is taught with minimal enthusiasm [14]. Its broad-based and compulsory inclusion with the appropriate resources will help to motivate youth towards having a more favorable 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 PAFNet[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 younger household heads who are engaged in farming derive a higher income from their agricultural activities than older household heads. 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 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 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. There is need to address the long held belief that agriculture and rural areas are for those who cannot make a livelihood anywhere else [18]. Agriculture need to be rebranded as the new unexplored frontier for growth in business opportunities. 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 Mburuet *al.* [22] suggested that specialization need to be encouraged in order to re-direct and train youth to specialize either on production, processing or marketing. 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 entrepreneurs in the sector by developing financial packages that are tailored to the diverse production, marketing conditions as well as risk factors [9]. Investment in value addition through processing, branding and quality shelf life improvements would lead to higher prices, new jobs and eventually increased aggregate incomes for the youth [22]. 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 of farming business, from 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. This calls for rapid transformation of the agriculture sector to address the underlying issues to ensure self-reliance, food and nutritional security and poverty reduction among the youth and the general community. In so doing, youth-in-agriculture policies should be created and integrated with other policies on youth matters such as education, training and investment since most young people do not own land which is a primary requirement in farming business. This will make the youth to perceive agriculture as an economically rewarding venture thus ignite their interest and empower them to play a greater role in agricultural advancement.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

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Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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