

SECURING FOOD SYSTEMS IN AFRICA THROUGH REBRANDING AGRICULTURE TO ATTRACT YOUTH PARTICIPATION.

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Abstract

Development of the agricultural crop value chain is an important driver to attract youth into agriculture in Africa, thereby promoting future food security. In most African countries, agriculture is a major contributor to economic growth and youth involvement in agriculture can be a strong determinant of food security as well as job creation leading to poverty alleviation. The lack of interest in agriculture among the youth in Africa is of great concern, not only to food security and unemployment, but also to peace and such a scenario is likely to delay projected development goals. The rising demand for varied foods gives the youth agribusiness opportunities along the value chain. In this paper we look at the reasons why youth shun agriculture and how agriculture can be made attractive to the youth. Data were collected through a review of previous studies done on youth and agriculture in Africa. The findings indicated that African youth are losing interest in subsistence agriculture due to the non-innovativeness in agricultural technologies, drudgery and low and unstable incomes resulting from uncoordinated or nonexistent markets for agricultural products. This is aggravated by lack of relevant skills and education and limited access to land and capital. The existing policy initiatives need to be adjusted so as to work for youth development and engagement in agriculture as most sub-Saharan Africa countries already have relevant agricultural development strategies and policies. This therefore calls for not only rebranding agriculture but also getting the youth involved in decision making at policy level.

Keywords: Africa, Agriculture, Food security; Agriculture Value chain, Youth.

INTRODUCTION

About 80% of Africa's population live in rural areas, where agriculture provides 60% of employment and constitutes the backbone of the national economy. In most countries, it is still the largest contributor to Gross National Income (GNI), the biggest source of foreign exchange and the main generator of savings and tax revenues (NEPAD, 2002). Agriculture is also the leading provider of industrial raw materials thus crucial determinant for economic growth. However, agricultural production in many African countries is on the decline (Chauvin *et al.*, 2012), due to among other factors the access to land and investment resources and limited national budgetary allocation to research coupled by poor information sharing with farmers and other stakeholders along the agricultural value chain. Moreover, unfavorable market conditions and poor access to markets pose major problems for farmers in Africa (Poulton *et al.*, 2006)

In addressing the above challenges, the African governments need to leverage on the youth's (ages of 15 and 35) demographic superiority that make up over 35% of the total population and therefore has the potential to secure the continents' food security and economic development (Page 2012; Ashford, 2007).

Report by the UN Population Fact, indicate that in the year 2015 there were 226 million youth aged 15-24 years in Africa, accounting for 19 % of the global youth population, the report further projected that by the year 2030, the number of youth would increase by 42% and double by 2055 (AGRA, 2015). African countries have the youngest population and according to the Youth Division of the Africa Union Commission, 65% of the total population in Africa is below the age of 35 years and with 10 million youth entering the labor market annually the future of the continent is in the hands of the youth (AGRA, 2015; Losch, 2012). The youth are educated, dynamic, enthusiastic, resourceful, creative, innovative and adventurous, thus

with proper planning and well-structured social and economic policy formulation and implementation, Africa's youth can be mobilized to provide goods and services for the continent and the world (Union, 2011). Africa can benefit and substantially grow, both economically and socially, if both the public and the private sector tap the energy of Africa's young labour force and channel it to the agricultural sector where a huge proportion of the population is currently employed (AGRA, 2015).

Fine *et al.*, (2012) indicate that with the present rates of job growth, about half of the youth will be absorbed into formal employment. Under the most favorable policy and growth scenarios, the urban and non-farm sectors will absorb about two-thirds of these people into wage employment. The viability of family farming is therefore, likely to determine whether the remaining youth looking for jobs would be effectively engaged in agriculture and the informal sector or whether they will join the category of the unemployed. To counter this scenario, African governments need to establish enabling environments that will propel private investment and job creation in non-farm sectors. In addition to specific policies and investments consistent with broad-based agricultural growth, investments in physical infrastructure, Agricultural research and development, as well as investment in and re-training of extension officers (Fan *et al.*, 2008; EIU, 2008) will help alleviate poverty. This paper reports on reasons why young people shun agriculture and advocates for ways and means to turn around agriculture so as to attract the youth and also documents some case studies of youth involvement in agriculture. In this paper, youth is defined according to the African Youth Charter, as people between the ages of 15 (exclusive) and 35 (inclusive) years.

WHY YOUTH ARE NOT INVOLVED IN AGRICULTURE

In the mind of many youth, a farmer is someone involved in

difficult and intensive field activities with limited returns. African agriculture is mostly of hoe and machete which makes it very energy and labor intensive, thus the image of poor, ragged and weather-beaten farmer puts off many young people (Brooks, 2013). In addition, if children did not want to go to school or failed exams, they would be intimidated that they would end up as farmers creating the notion that agriculture was a career for those who fail in life (Busani, 2014). Moreover, farming is tied to notions of punishment as most African children were and are still disciplined through activities such as digging and slashing grass. Dethier & Effenberger (2012) reported that in the past agriculture was neglected in favour of industrialization as a means of getting Africa out of poverty and this resulted in parents and society at large placing greater emphasis on careers other than agriculture. According to the Youth Agribusiness, Leadership, and Entrepreneurship Summit on Innovation (YALESI, 2016), youth want to emulate their peers who enjoy economic prosperity and career progression in other sectors like ICT, Financial services, Telecoms and oil sector, hence to many, the dream careers are not in agriculture. Njenga *et al.*, (2012) reported that the flow of information on agricultural production, marketing and availability of loans/ grants is hampered by under-utilization of information and communication technologies, further dampening youth interest in agriculture and argue that digitization of agricultural production and marketing information would result in wider outreach and use given that the few available extension officers do not effectively reach the majority of the farmers hence most youth are left out (Njenga *et al.*, 2012). Relatively few students choose to study agriculture probably because they do not see any promising future. Agriculture training should be linked to advances in technology, facilitate innovation and have relevance to a diverse and evolving agricultural sector with a focus on agribusiness and entrepreneurship (FAO 2014).

Youth who may be interested in venturing to Agriculture face the challenge of limited access to agricultural credit as the few financial institutions that offer services often focus on credit rather than savings and limits young people since their main goal is to invest in assets or insurance. More importantly, these products are not tailored for youth because they are not considered as potential clients (Brooks *et al.*, 2013; FAO, 2013; Timmer, 2014). As a result, young people continue to rely on informal sources (i.e., family, friends, suppliers and traders) to access financial services. This is worsened by the fact that agriculture is often perceived as a high risk business by financial institutions. Majority of these financial service providers end up inflating the risk resulting in high interest rates on farm microfinance loans.

ICT offers a wide range of products for accessing financial services but many people in rural SSA lack internet connectivity, an obstacle for young people wishing to stay in rural areas and conduct their agricultural enterprises at grass root (Dalla-Valle *et al.*, 2011). Rural youth are yet to organize themselves into groups to generate savings and improve their ability to borrow, such as done by women groups. Even where young people have shown that they are reliable in terms of loan repayment, young women face additional constraints in accessing financial services due to their higher rates of illiteracy, restricted independence of action and lack of approval by family members as a result of gender bias and ingrained negative social norms (IFAD, 2014; FAO, 2014 and CTA, 2014).

ENHANCING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN AGRICULTURE

Despite its low growth rates and declining share in terms of

contribution to GDP, agriculture remains the foundation for both skilled and unskilled labour and could be a viable solution to tackling Africa's rising youth unemployment as the industrial sector picks pace. Attracting and maintaining the young people in agriculture does not only give a solution to the unemployment crisis but will also enhance national development in terms of increased agricultural outputs and productivity (Ahaibwe, 2013). Achieving this would require identifying the challenges faced by the youth in the agricultural value chain and the prospects of youth engagement in agriculture, which this paper discusses in the following sections.

Rebranding Agriculture

Farming should be presented as a business opportunity and young people made aware of the opportunities that exist throughout the agricultural value chain. Re-branding agriculture calls for the establishment of policies to empower young people as agricultural entrepreneurs, as well as give a favorable environment (FANRPAN, 2012). The Agribusiness need also to have clear linkages along the value chain, from input manufacturer and supply to agro processing to marketing and financing to production processes and eventually to consumption (Nwanze, 2011), while at the same time agricultural enterprises undertaken and managed by youth should be identified, encouraged and targeted for marketing. In this context, young farmers also need access to financial advisory services, as well as extension services that assists them with technical and managerial skills (Asenso-Okyere & Jemaneh, 2012). As the productivity increases there will be need to provide a range of technical skills according to the type of production process and machinery (Brooks *et al.* 2013).

Agriculture can further be made attractive through employing the household methodology, which combines livelihood strategies pursued by women, men and adult children into one family vision, encouraging equitable intra-household relations in decision-making processes, and working together as a win-win solution that benefits everyone (IFAD, 2015) - agricultural extension services have the opportunity to transform farming households into family enterprises, and thus engage young people constructively, not only by providing them with technical advice on crops or livestock activities (Brooks *et al.* 2013), but also teaching them about better and/or innovative farming practices, such as conservation tillage, hydroponics, mechanization at all levels and the production of higher value products in response to market demand.

Additional opportunities for on-farm training for youth and for agricultural enterprise development need to be identified and utilized especially for such value chain activities such as post-harvest handling, food processing, packaging and marketing (FANRPAN, 2012). In Ghana for example the Youth-in-Agriculture Programme (YiAP) involves training on processing and marketing of agricultural produce (both crops and livestock), which has not only improved their incomes but has also helped contain the youth in the villages (Ohene, 2013).

Capacity Building and Empowering Youth in Agriculture

Developing skills and capacities are key strategies for engaging the youth in agriculture. It is therefore important to broadly address all components of rural learning, both formal and informal (Vargas-Lundius & Suttie, 2013). Given the modern dynamics of agricultural and rural livelihoods, young people need to be empowered through skills related to modern farming, agriculture-based entrepreneurship and marketing. Training in functional literacy and numeracy is crucial if youth are to help raise Africa's agricultural productivity as this will

give young women and men who may have dropped out of school the opportunity to learn new skills

(Godfrey, 2003). One of the best practices is seen in FAO's approach to youth capacity development through Junior Farmer Field and Life Skills (JFFLS) approach. The JFFLS initiative aims at passing on agricultural knowledge and life skills to boys and girls between the ages of 12 to 17, providing them with employment and livelihood options (FAO, 2014; CTA, 2014; IFAD, 2014). JFFLS is participatory in approach and provides vocational training on subjects chosen in consultation with the students, all of which have been developed in collaboration with partners and on the basis of local needs. JFFLS programs cover topics such as agriculture as a business (e.g., entrepreneurship, marketing and accounting), hygiene, sanitation, nutrition, HIV-AIDS, personal development and the prevention of child labor.

The JFFLS approach and curriculum are based on three pillars; an experiential learning field, special topics in agriculture and life skills. It uses an experiential learning or a 'living classroom' approach in which the students observe the crops throughout the growing season with the help of a facilitator. Agricultural topics are linked to life skills so that when children talk about how to protect their plants from diseases they also learn how to protect themselves from diseases and other adverse conditions. The school builds the students' self-confidence and problem solving skills by having them decide for themselves what steps are required to solve a particular problem and then given the chance to defend their decisions in front of their peers in open discussions. Additionally the approach facilitates access to credit, strengthens the capacity of involved institutions and aligns their activities to national priorities and employment programs (Baha, 2011). The JFFLSs were developed as a pilot initiative in Mozambique in 2003 and have since been adopted in other countries in Africa, for example in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, JFFLS focuses on orphans and vulnerable children resulting from civil violence and displacement (Ajani, 2010). Apart from technical skills, building capacity for management, decision-making, communication and leadership should also be central to higher education. Reforms to agricultural tertiary education should be designed for young people and as such the process requires their direct engagement to achieve the desired impact (FAO, 2014).

Facilitating youth to innovate and apply new technologies

Africa should strategically position itself to capitalize on the enormous opportunities offered by the bulging youth population, by taking into account the aspirations, energy and innovative capacity of young people. According to the African Youth Charter (2006), youths should be seen and treated as partners, assets and prerequisites for sustainable socio-economic development of the continent. One strategy of encouraging youth to get involved in agricultural activities in Africa would be to devise approaches that would involve them into development of appropriated technologies that would address their requirements (FANRPAN, 2012). Such technologies would include hydroponics, greenhouse farming, access to input and output market information through mobile phones, marketing of products using social media, and micro/macro-agro-processing industries (FANRPAN, 2012). Other key strategies will include establishing ICT centers run by youth groups, stimulating youth interest through young farmers clubs and facilitating joint activities including competitions between groups which should be recognized and rewarded. There are many opportunities for improving market access for young farmers with the use of ICTs and educational and training

institutions need to equip young farmers with skills needed beyond basic education (Lohento & Ajilore, 2015) in Kenya Mkulima Young is an online platform that engages young people interested and using agriculture to generate income and employment. The platform assists youth with access to information, market access, and financing. Mkulima Young is also building a community of young people working in agriculture and creating a space for them to connect (Lohento & Ajilore, 2015).

Access to inputs and Markets

Governments will need to improve the business environment to stimulate private sector investments, especially in sections of the value chain where funds are missing like during input accusation and marketing (FAO, 2014). The development of public-private partnerships (PPPs) provides opportunities for bringing together diverse groups of public and private actors in the agricultural sector in joint ventures, linking up with family farms and creating opportunities for growth and youth employment. For example, larger farms, processing units, supermarkets and other market actors can help smallholders access productive resources and technologies, facilitate value addition, and provide access to competitive markets. They can also facilitate capacity development through apprenticeships and mentoring of the youth.

According to Feighery *et al.* (2011), increasing investment in agricultural research and improving access to agricultural inputs like seeds and fertilizer have been known to stimulate agricultural production. For example, the 'Farmers of the Future' program in Niger educates young people on how to move from subsistence farming to market-oriented farming with new technologies. As a result, young people have been able to implement a technological revolution in their communities (Feighery *et al.*, 2011). The Commercial farm activities have been organized in each village with a dual purpose to provide income for parents and experiential learning for students. The activities include establishment of fruit trees nurseries, orchards, irrigated vegetables garden using solar pumps and an enclosure for fattening small animals.

Facilitate youth to access land

In the African socio-cultural and economic context, access to land is of utmost importance. A significant barrier for youth acquisition of land rights is embedded in the customary land tenure systems, where the head of the household owns land which is passed on to male descendants when they marry, or when fathers die. This means that many young men have to wait for a long time before they can have their own rights to land (Bicchieri, 2013). For young women, it is more difficult to acquire land, as both statutory and customary laws continue to govern land rights in most SSA countries and communities (FAO, 2010). Women are expected to access land through their husbands or male relatives.

Options for facilitating youth access to land are complex and land policy reforms that make rental and intergeneration transfer easier need to be put in place for youth who wish to engage in Agriculture (FAO, 2014; CTA, 2014 and IFAD, 2014). Land markets, though for sustainable land management and economic development, are mostly poorly developed due to lopsided information about land quality, lack of land titles, underdeveloped credit markets, and inability of poorer farmers to pay for the collateral value (Besley & Burgess, 2000). Where they exist, land rental are potentially important in enabling poor households (including youth and women) access land for cultivation (Jin & Jayne, 2013). However, improved land markets could provide youth with the ability to purchase land of

their own. Such improvements could be accompanied by youth access to loans and training to develop viable agricultural-based business plans. Leasing land to youth interested in undertaking agricultural entrepreneurship opportunities is another option to be considered as land ownership tends to encourage the use of agricultural inputs as well as general sustainable management (FANRPAN, 2012). There is need also to recognize and accommodate youth when designing and executing policies and programs aimed at mitigating their socio-political exclusion and economic marginalization (Lohento & Ajilore, 2015), for instance the Global Forum for Agricultural Research (GFAR) supports young people in agriculture by facilitating access to capacity building and to contributing to policy debates through the Young Professional for Agricultural Development (YPARD) network. In Malawi this is coordinated at the NEPAD Fish Node, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (Lohento & Ajilore, 2015)

Access to agricultural finance and insurance

Even where youth may access land, the young entrepreneurs will need significant financial support to enable them sustainably step-up their productivity. They will need finance for investments in productive assets, and to access insurance schemes in the event of adverse effects arising from climate variability and other eventualities like damages (Warner *et al.*, 2012). In accessing finance by the youth, opportunities exist for innovative collateral schemes. Crop or weather insurance schemes address some of the uncertainties that youth may face in agriculture, however affordable agricultural insurance remains out of reach of many young farmers and thus exposes their production to risks that otherwise could be managed through insurance (AGRA, 2015). There is need therefore for financial service providers to develop products targeting youth. For example, the youth could be targeted through their groups, where individuals are given loans to be paid back through accountability systems organized within the group. Financial service providers can also use contractual arrangements with agro dealers and extension workers to guarantee input quality, markets, and access to training. If financial institutions make use of these suggested strategies, the expected risk in financing the youth in agriculture will be manageable (IFAD, 2014; FAO, 2014 and CTA, 2014).

To further address the financial barriers affecting youth, alternative forms of credit could be allowed like accessing loans against future harvests and in contract arrangements, where market for products is assured. Use of e-transfers and e-payments is bringing banking services to rural areas and young people have are quick to adopt this mobile technology for easier access to loans (AGRA, 2015). Providing loan guarantees to encourage banks to provide agricultural finance is another alternative to cater for the youth. The private sector thus has a fundamental role to play in facilitating access to agricultural finance and markets for young women and men, while also providing an enabling work environment (AGRA, 2015).

Involving Youth in Agricultural Policy Dialogues and Planning

Youth are a part of a rapidly evolving environment, yet are often excluded in policy and program development (MIJARC, 2012). Policy dialogue on youth-related topics involves working closely with governments and partners, which are well aware of the need to address youth issues (IFAD, 2014). Facing a growing challenge of youth unemployment, African governments need to review and formulate sound rural development policies that maximize opportunities for young people, strengthen their capacities to

participate, and facilitate their access to productive resources needed to drive broad-based growth to enhance agricultural productivity and rural economies. Platforms and mechanisms for their engagement need to be put in place to enable them to fully engage in the policy dialogue as their involvement will strongly affect ownership and their commitment to new policies (Johnson, *et al.*, 2013). The Young Professionals' Platform for Agricultural Research for Development (YPARD) aims at providing a platform for young people to discuss opportunities in agricultural development, share experiences and advocate for greater youth engagement and representation. The revised agricultural policies need to address the needs and priorities of youth, and for their voices to be heard, youth need to build their capacities for dialogue and negotiations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Agriculture holds substantial promise for economic growth and development in Africa. Considering the high rate of youth unemployment, agriculture presents a vital pathway to job creation for the burgeoning youth population, and opportunities to lift many people out of poverty and food security problems. African governments therefore have to transform the agriculture sector so as to make it attractive to the youth. While African youth have in the past shown a dwindling interest in agriculture, the emerging trend of using ICT is attracting youth back to agriculture. These young people often bring their energy, creativity and knowledge in technology to agriculture hence bringing change to African agriculture. For agriculture to be attractive, it will have to be profitable, competitive and dynamic. Engaging youth to increase agricultural productivity will also mean engaging them in the decision-making processes in areas that affect them for example in. There should be land policy reforms that ensures equitable access to land by young people so as to facilitate their active participation in agriculture as a business. To further make agriculture attractive, significant investments must be made in education so as to develop their skills at all levels. Agricultural innovation need to be supported through improving the market, rural infrastructure as well as strengthening the business environment in ways that will raise incomes and expand agricultural value chains. Effective integration and inclusion of young women and men in Africa's agricultural revitalization through well-designed public investments in agriculture and continued progress on policy reforms will certainly result in enhanced food security and the continent's economic growth.

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