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Agri-Systems as a Bridge between Subsistence Farming and Youth Economic Welfare in Sub Sahara Africa: A Case of Nakuru County Kenya

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Date Published: ABSTRACT

20 May 2022 Young people represent around one-fifth of the world's population and half of the total unemployed global workforce are the youth. In Kenya, over half of the total population is youth and a majority of them live in rural areas and are unemployed.

Keywords: Most rural youths engage in self-reliance projects to improve their livelihoods. This paper examines the future of rural youth agri-projects in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Self-Reliance Projects, The article is based on a study conducted to determine the effects of self-reliance projects on the livelihoods of youth in selected rural areas of Nakuru County, Kenya. Thorough surveys of youth self-reliance projects and livelihoods were conducted in Nakuru County, Kenya in 2017 by the author. The study surveyed youth who were actively undertaking self-reliance projects aimed at enhancing their livelihood. The surveys included information on the nature and type of self-reliance projects undertaken, the contribution of self-reliance projects to youth economic welfare and the challenges facing the youth and how they overcome them when undertaking the projects. The overall conclusion of this study and other related studies is that youth agri projects are having a significant contribution to their economic welfare in the rural areas, thus improving their livelihoods and hence bridging the way Agri-systems are being enhanced.

Youth, Economic, Livelihoods

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INTRODUCTION

According to FAO (2016), successfully meeting development goals and responding to new priorities and changing circumstances would require a fundamental shift in Agri-system, including science, technology, policies, institutions, capacity development, and investment. Further, it is observed that such a change would recognise and give increased importance to the key players, accounting for the enhancement of agricultural systems within diverse social, ecological, and economic contexts. In other documentation, it is noted that it would require new arrangements to promote an inclusive approach toward the development of agricultural projects (FAO,2014). This would mean recognising farming communities, farm households, and young people as players in farming ecosystems. Such a shift may call for changing the incentive systems for youth along the value chain to internalise as many externalities as possible. Such development would also depend on the extent to which youth can find gainful employment and help fuel general economic growth. Youthful farmers continue to be important pay-off targets of Agri-systems, especially in the area of food systems and other value chains.

70% of our global food requirement comes from the 500 million smallholder farmers around the world (FAO, 2014). However, farming in Sub-Sahara Africa is often associated with poverty as small farms usually operate on subsistence scales and generate low revenues. Thus, it is not a surprise that youth were not attracted to farming in the past. But

looking at the current trends, there are many young people who are venturing into Agri-systems. Youth bring agricultural technology and innovation into farming and are often involved in management activities that require their educational knowledge (keeping accounts, communicating with partners, etc.) (Jacqui et al.,2013). There is another category of youth who are not directly involved in direct farming but are developing Information Communication Technology (ICT) applications or offering ICT services which are useful to agricultural systems. Enhancing youth engagement in agriculture will require support for rural youth, as well as improving rural conditions and encouraging adequate processes for the transition of farming from the elderly to the youth.

Statement of the Problem

Young agripreneurs face a number of pressing issues, missed job and wealth creation opportunities, high prevalence of food insecurity, low incomes from farming, and environmental degradation linked to agriculture. Unemployment has become a perennial problem in Kenya and other Sub-Sahara African Countries and very few youths are entering the formal job market (ILO,2013). The majority of jobs created in Kenya have been through self-reliance projects and particularly Agri-enterprises. Over the past few years, the issues of youth engagement in agricultural-related projects have gained growing prominence as a key agenda for many governments in Sub-Sahara Africa. Many times the youth have been unable to implement the desired agri-projects characterised by low

productivity and earnings as well as reduced social effects. This paper sought to examine opportunities existing for youth in bridging their livelihood and agri-systems within the selected sub-counties of Nakuru County, Kenya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive research design. It used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Questionnaire administration was conducted face to face with the help of trained research assistants. The survey had varied information inquiries; Kind of Youth Self-Reliance Projects implemented, Agri-enterprise projects, Entrepreneurial Skills and Enterprise Development and Economic / Social Welfare of youth in relation to their participation in those projects. Data collected were analysed using SPSS, where frequencies and percentages were derived. The quantitative analysis was used to determine frequencies and percentages of the responses, while qualitative analysis was used to determine relationships. Simple random sampling was used to select two members from each of the 69 groups giving a total of 138 as the sample size. This research used a cross-sectional survey that included the use of questionnaires and interview guides. Different instruments were developed to collect data from the respondents. Structured questionnaires, interview schedules and interview guide were developed to gather the required data

FINDINGS

Nature of Youth's Projects

The study sought to identify the nature of respondents' projects. The findings indicated that the rural youth in Nakuru County consisted of a mixture of those in informal and formal sectors but majorly in the farming ventures. Six occupations were identified, which included part-time farmers, full-time farmers, full-time employees, part-time employees, self-employed and other employees. The findings further indicated that 25% of the respondents were part-time farmers, 21.2% were full-time farmers and 23.4% were involved in other self-reliance projects. These findings indicated that agriculturally based projects had played a vital role in the creation of youth livelihood opportunities. This shows that a reasonable percentage of self-employed (46.2 %) engaged in business through the incorporation of agricultural development projects. The rest were employees in the formal sectors (28.4%). It is evident that the majority of the respondents had farming projects as, under normal circumstances, rural areas are favourable environments for farming, as observed by Dalla (2012).

Types of Self-Reliance Projects

The respondents were asked what type of project they were engaged in from the areas surveyed. The types of projects enumerated by the respondents are given in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Kind of projects implemented by the youth

Projects in which Youth are Involved	Frequency	Per cent
Tree planting	9	5.9
Crop farming / livestock farming	69	51.1
Bee-keeping	5	3.0
Milk collection and distribution	6	3.7
<i>Boda-boda</i> (motor-cycle) transport	7	5.2
Savings scheme	19	14.1
Other projects (Dress-making, saloon, fish farming)	23	17.0
Total	138	100.0

A majority of the respondents, representing 51.1% were involved in crop farming and livestock farming. The project with the least youth involvement was beekeeping, with only 3.0% of the youth. These results indicate that farming played a major role in generating income to sustain many rural youths. These results agree with findings by Mburu (2008), who studied entrepreneurs' empowerment in the Ruiru division and Wamahiu (2012) on the *Influence of Entrepreneurship Development on Employment Creation among Youth in the Kikuyu Division*, which revealed that 63% of the respondents reported that there were no alternative income sources other than agricultural projects. Those who indicated that there were other sources of income (21%) varied from paid employment, casual labour, and self-reliance projects. The findings show that most of the projects that youth in rural areas engage in are agriculture-related. This can be attributed to the fact land is easily available from family land and land that can be leased.

Expansion and Growth of Youth Agri-Projects

To find out the progression and continuity of agri-projects, the respondents were asked whether they were expanding their implemented projects. A large proportion of the respondents, 117 (86.7 %), indicated that they were expanding the projects, and only 13.3% were not expanding. An analysis of the expansion of the projects by the youths indicated that there were varied reasons given for expanding the projects. The majority (43.9 %) of the respondents indicated that they would expand the project in order to increase incomes, while 11.4% said that they would expand in order to meet customers' demand, and 7.9% said they would expand in order to be able to provide their family needs. This is indicated in table 2. It is thus clear from the study that economic benefits were the main driving forces behind implementing projects among the youth in the rural areas. First, these projects were conceived to be a source of increasing income and meet customers' demands who, through their purchases, would bring in more income.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by reasons for expanding the projects

Reasons for expanding projects	Frequency	Percent
Gain financial stability	10	7.0
Increase income	56	43.9
Meet customers demand	16	11.4
Increase yields/ produce	6	3.5
Provide family needs	11	7.9
Future growth focus	6	3.5
Personal satisfaction / needs	10	7.0
Improve living standard	6	3.5
Other reasons for expansion (growth, occupation)	17	12.3
Total	138	100.0

The findings matched with Jacqui et al. (2013), who said that young people start and expand businesses for a wide range of reasons. Many strive for the independence that comes from working for them, while for others, the current economic climate and a shortage of job opportunities motivate them to

establish their own businesses rather than face unemployment. While the youth cited a number of reasons for expanding their projects, the common motivator among almost all of them was the right opportunity in the market to enhance their financial incomes and meet customers' demands. These

findings are consistent with the previous findings by Simiyu (2010), which had shown that the youth were necessity-driven entrepreneurs seeking growth of projects to increase incomes.

DISCUSSIONS

This study sought to determine the contribution of Agri-Projects to the economic welfare of the youth in the rural areas of Nakuru County. Majority of the respondents (95%) indicated they earned income from the self-reliance projects. The study determined that the main source of income for the youths was farming activities (66.9%), followed by running small businesses (17.3 %). In terms of income satisfaction, the majority (75%) of the respondents were not satisfied with the level of income accrued from the self-reliance projects, and thus, the youth desired to continuously expand the projects for better returns. A large proportion of the respondents, 117 (86.7 %), indicated that they were expanding the projects. Varied reasons were given for expanding the project, with 43.9% of the youths saying that they would expand the project in order to increase income/profits, others to meet customers' demand or to provide for family needs. This is in line with the fact that most rural youths are exposed to farming opportunities and hence their main focus is on farming activities. The data demonstrates that most rural youths interviewed were engaged in diverse kinds of projects but mostly related to farming.

The findings revealed that Agri-entrepreneurship offers unemployed youth an opportunity to engage in self-reliance projects and a chance to build sustainable livelihoods. This study established that the incomes of members had improved and that they had used these incomes to provide for their economic and personal needs at the family level. Similarly, the studies established that the youth, through participation in Agri-system activities, had significantly contributed to an increase in their livelihood outcomes. The research findings further showed that Agri-systems act as a bridge for the

youth involvement in SRPs and thus increasing the viability of the projects as well as the attainment of their livelihoods goals.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that majorly agriculturally based projects were being undertaken by the youth of Nakuru County. This conclusion makes an important contribution in terms of strategising on how to engage rural youth as it identifies the variables which can be manipulated to better bridge the implementation of Agri-projects. The majority of the rural youth are embracing Agri-based projects as a way of creating self-employment and improving their livelihoods. Overall, projects are having a significant contribution to their economic welfare, thus improving their livelihoods. Thus, the Agri-projects are a source of income and financial support, giving the youth high hopes for improved livelihood opportunities.

Given the past notion that farming was for the elderly in Sub-Sahara Africa, this paper makes a significant contribution to the synthesis of the effect of youth involvement in Agri-projects implementation. Further, the paper has offered a logical explanation of the relationship between Agri-systems and youth livelihoods in changing agricultural dynamics.

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