

Rural youth participation in Agriculture: Exploring the significance and challenges in the control of agricultural sector in Zambia

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Abstract

Agriculture plays a major role in the economic growth and development of most countries. Consequently, the need for effective and progressive agricultural development is fundamental. To achieve this, the active group of individuals, constituting the youth needs to be involved extensively. Even though literature indicates that youth face constraints that hinder their active involvement in agricultural activities, studies that assess youth participation in agriculture and the challenges they face in most developing countries especially Zambia are rare. Therefore, this study assessed rural youth participation in agriculture and the challenges they face in view of identifying ways of enhancing rural youth involvement in agriculture. Data for the study were collected from eighty (80) rural youths in Kafue, Itimpi and Luangwa agriculture blocks of Kitwe district using a self-administered questionnaire and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Results showed that rural youth engagement in agriculture serves as an important source of income, as well as provision of the much needed labor force in critical farming activities among others. Results also revealed that rural youth face challenges in agriculture such as lack of access to capital, poor storage facilities, poor access to agriculture insurance and lack of technical assistance. Implications were drawn based on the study findings and recommendations for future research were made.

Key words: Agriculture, challenge, participation, rural youth, significance

Résumé

L'agriculture joue un rôle majeur dans la croissance et le développement économique de la plupart des pays. Par conséquent, la nécessité d'un développement agricole efficace et progressive est fondamentale. Pour ce faire, le groupe actif des individus, constitué par la jeunesse, doit être fortement impliqué. Même si la littérature indique que les jeunes font face à des contraintes qui entravent leur participation active dans les activités agricoles, les études qui évaluent la participation des jeunes dans l'agriculture et les défis auxquels ils sont confrontés dans la plupart des pays en développement en particulier la Zambie sont rares. Par conséquent, cette étude a évalué la participation des jeunes en milieu rural dans l'agriculture et les défis auxquels ils sont confrontés en vue d'identifier les moyens de renforcer

la participation des jeunes en milieu rural dans l'agriculture. Les données pour cette étude ont été recueillies auprès de quatre-vingts (80) jeunes ruraux à Kafue, Itimpi et Luangwa, dans la région agricole du district de Kitwe, à l'aide d'un questionnaire auto-administré et analysé en utilisant le modèle de «Statistical Package for Social Sciences ». Les résultats ont montré que l'engagement de la jeunesse rurale dans l'agriculture est une source importante de revenu, ainsi que la fourniture de la main-d'œuvre si nécessaire dans les activités agricoles critiques, entre autres. Les résultats ont également révélé que la jeunesse rurale, dans l'agriculture, font face à des défis de tels que le manque d'accès aux capitaux, l'insuffisance des installations de stockage, le manque d'accès à l'assurance agricole et le manque d'assistance technique. Les implications ont été établies sur la base des conclusions, et les recommandations de l'étude pour les recherches futures ont été faites.

Mots clés: Agriculture, défi, la participation, la jeunesse rurale, l'importance

Background

Agriculture remains critical to the economic development of most if not all developing countries across the globe. The agricultural future of most developing countries may be bleak if the bulk of the production efforts are left in the hands of aged subsistent farmers who presently constitute the major farming population (Adefalu *et al.*, 2009). This is because the productivity level of the aged farmers cannot meet the food and fiber needs of the rapidly growing population and they are likely to phase out on account of age (Cook, 1996). Consequently, fostering youth involvement in agriculture is fundamental. According to Adeogun (2015) youth are an important and vital segment of human resources that can shoulder the responsibility of development including agriculture. However, even though research has been conducted on youth involvement in agriculture, there are still knowledge gaps on the significance and challenges of rural youth participation in agriculture in most developing countries, Zambia inclusive. Consequently, the significance and challenges of rural youth participation in agriculture in most developing countries especially, Zambia remains poorly understood.

Literature summary

Agriculture remains an important source of national income for most developing countries (Mashindano *et al.*, 2011). For instance, the agricultural system in Iraq is the third contributor to GDP in that country (AFCAP and FAO, 2014). Furthermore, for many countries, the production of agricultural commodities, both for domestic use and export is an important source of economic growth and livelihoods (UNEP, 2012). According to UNEP (2011) approximately 2.6 billion people depend on agriculture for livelihood, the majority of whom are small holder farmers in rural areas. Hence, agricultural growth can reduce poverty directly by raising farm incomes and indirectly, through labour markets and reduction of food prices (World Bank, 2008).

In order to foster a country's economic development, the agriculture sector must be viable and the youth should be encouraged to effectively participate. This is because they constitute

an important component in society and are the greatest assets that any country can have (Kimaro, 2015). Furthermore, youth constitute an important resource for sustaining agricultural productivity which is fundamental for economic development (Afande *et al.*, 2015). The youth are also among the most productive in any society given that they are resilient, persevering and resourceful stakeholders in developmental processes (Naamwintome and Bagson, 2013). Furthermore, compared to the older population, youth are the ideal catalysts for agricultural developmental change given their greater ability and willingness to adopt new ideas, concepts and technology which are all critical to changing the agriculture sector (Suriname, 2009). Consequently, fostering youth involvement in agriculture is a worthwhile investment (Ahaibwe *et al.*, 2013). However, while youth involvement in agriculture is fundamental for economic development and poverty reduction, the significance and challenges of rural youth involvement in agriculture remains poorly understood in most developing countries, especially Zambia. Therefore, to address this gap, this study investigated the significance and challenges of rural youth participation in agriculture using a Zambian context.

To foster effective and progressive agricultural development, an active work force is required (Ugwoke *et al.*, 2005). To achieve this, the active group of individuals, constituting the youth need to be involved extensively. This is because the youth have qualities which when nurtured and utilized are invaluable assets to agricultural and rural development. These qualities include great physical strength, innovation proneness, minimal risk aversion and faster rate of learning among others (Jibowo and Sotomi, 1999). With dynamism and flexibility, extraordinary resilience and ability to cope, even in most adverse and risky situations, youth have the potential to foster enhanced agricultural productivity (Naamwintome and Bagson, 2013).

Description of the study

Youth involvement in agriculture remains critical given the direct and indirect benefits of agriculture. Past studies note that in the 21st Century, agriculture is a fundamental contributor to poverty reduction and economic growth (World Bank, 2008). It is also viewed as a viable solution to tackling the rising youth unemployment levels in most developing countries (Afande *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, this study examined the significance and challenges of rural youth participation in agriculture using a Zambian context. Data for the study were collected from eighty (80) rural youths in Kafue, Itimpi and Luangwa agriculture blocks of Kitwe district in Zambia using a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was pre-tested on rural youth in the study area before undertaking the main survey. Some items in the questionnaire were modified based on feedback from the pretest. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

Research application

Agricultural activities that youths reported as being involved in are shown in Table 1. Apart from breeding and processing, youths were heavily involved in all other activities associated with farming. They were involved in bush clearing to harvesting and marketing of produce. Factors constraining youth involvement in agriculture are outlined in Table 2. The topmost four constraints were poor access to agricultural insurance, high cost of farming inputs, lack of technical assistance and lack of access to capital.

Table 1. Types of pre-farming and post farming activities respondents engaged in

Farm activity	Percent (%)
Bush clearing	91.2%
Cultivation	96.2%
Planting	100%
Weeding	100%
Fertilizer application	100%
Harvesting	93.8%
Processing	17.5%
Feeding livestock	61.3%
Breeding	5.0%
Selling farm produce	85.0%

Table 2. Factors constraining youth involvement in agriculture in Zambia

Factors influencing youth participation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
Animal pests and diseases	2.28	1.40	
Poor access to basic farming information	2.48	0.98	
Poor road network	2.79	1.19	*
Crop pests and diseases	3.09	1.40	*
Labour intensive nature of agricultural activities	3.39	1.45	*
Poor access to markets for farm produce	3.40	1.64	*
Low prices of farm produce	3.46	1.29	*
Poor access to land	3.51	1.26	*
Poor storage facilities	3.60	1.37	*
Poor access to agricultural insurance	3.70	1.10	*
High cost of farming inputs	3.83	1.13	*
Lack of technical assistance	3.90	1.14	*
Lack of access to capital	3.96	1.29	*

* Important

Therefore, by investigating the significance and challenges that rural youth face in agriculture using a Zambian context, this study reveals the importance of engaging rural youth in agriculture as well as the constraints they face. Consequently, by highlighting the importance and challenges that rural youth face in agriculture; this study reveals aspects that need to be addressed in order to enhance rural youth's participation in agriculture. Specifically, based on the findings of this study, policy makers and practitioners should pay particular attention to addressing factors such as poor road network, lack of technical assistance, poor access to markets and lack access to capital that hinder rural youth participation in agriculture.

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