

Making Youth a Leading Force for Promoting Agri-Food Systems, A Case of Rural Nakuru, Kenya

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Abstract: Food insecurity remains a significant issue, with the developing world and more so a major challenge in Sub-Saharan Africa, which continues to pose a threat to the existence of millions of the inhabitants of the continent. The international community's desire to create sustainable food systems in coming years will have long-lasting effects, not least for future generations. This paper review the implications of making youth a force in enhancing food systems. As the food systems discussions take off now and beyond, the enormous challenges of food security are intensifying. Thus, the youth's future role in food systems is central in the transformation towards more sustainable and resilient food approaches. While it is recognized that youth have their own important roles to play in developing other systems, they also have a lot to give and gain through working with communities and applying their knowledge to local and global food challenges. Through youth empowerment and development of youth, as food systems change agents, they could become a leading force for positive change in their community and internationally. This paper present assessments of youth towards their engagement in food systems. The paper highlights a great number of initiatives shared by youth and institutions supporting them in agri-systems promotion. The paper argues that promotion of youth involvement in agri-enterprises has the catalytic effect of seeking solutions to food security issues. It concludes that improving agri-enterprises should be the main target of agrifood systems and remains an important source of employment and economic activity for Kenyan rural youth.

Keywords: Agri-food systems, food security, self-reliance projects, rural youth, livelihoods, agri-entrepreneurship, value chain

I. INTRODUCTION

70% of our global food requirement comes from over 500 million rural households around the world (FAO, 2014). And yet, farming is often associated with poverty as these farms usually operate on small scales (mainly for subsistence) and generate low revenues. Thus, it is not a surprise that youth are not attracted to agri-enterprises. But looking at the other side of the picture, there are many young people already involved in farming. By undertaking their daily tasks, they acquire knowledge and skills from their elderly family members and apply these techniques in their farming activities. They also bring agricultural technology and innovation into the farm enterprises and are often involved in management activities that require their educational knowledge (keeping accounts, communication with partners, etc.).

There is also another category of youth who are not directly involved in food and farming systems, but are

developing information technology applications or offering related support services. New and evolving knowledge and information are becoming more and more readily available through digital platform and communication pathways. These are some of the salient issues of youth in food systems, that are discussed in this paper. The paper provides insights into aspiring young agripreneurs in in Nakuru, Kenya and outlines potential pathways for promoting food systems among rural youth. It explores thematic areas; skills and education, access to financial capital and mentorship that are at the core of food systems.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The State of Food systems in the World today requires continuous review of progress towards achieving a world without hunger and malnutrition. The second Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 2) calls on countries to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture” by 2030. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest Prevalence of Undernourished, affecting an alarming 22.7 percent (FAO 2017) The situation is especially urgent in Eastern Africa, where one-third of the population is estimated to be undernourished. The success of efforts to improve food systems will depend on a better understanding of the complex relationships between food security and nutrition, the food systems in which they are embedded and the social, political and economic forces shaping them. The assessments in this paper are intended to promote more integrated and critical thinking on these issues as relates to youth involvement.

According to FAO (2019) Countries in sub-Saharan Africa face a number of pressing food system related issues, including high prevalence of food insecurity, hefty food imports bills, low incomes for farmers, missed job, wealth creation opportunities and environmental degradation linked to agriculture. In sub-Saharan Africa (Kenya included), 600 million people are currently under the age of 35. A majority those still do not have access to reliable livelihoods. The economic and social costs of this challenge are too high. The need for changing the approach to youth involvement in agri-food systems is slowly gaining acceptance as the reality of food systems takes hold. This is becoming obvious as youth find it increasingly difficult to get formal jobs. At an International Workshop on promoting multi-disciplinary research approaches for Sustainable Agricultural Development held in Nyahururu, Kenya (July 2021), where

early career researchers were engaged, they agreed that youth need to be more market oriented, more engaged in agri-food system, should be innovative and is self-motivated in agri-entrepreneurship. The author thus concurs that if it is anticipated that long term sustainability our food systems will be attained there is need to appreciate the challenges encountered towards enabling youth become promoters of agri-foods systems. There is thus a need to learn from aging farmers towards addressing youth particular needs such as; Creation of new economic opportunity for hundreds of youth seeking for employment is key, market assessments that could help calibrate the balance between market needs, youth aspirations and opportunities and the fact that agriculture remains an important source of employment and economic activity for Kenyan rural youth. In Kenya over half of the total population is rural youth and are still the demographic majority in most parts of Nakuru County in particular, a majority of them living in rural areas and are unemployed. This is why most rural youth are engaging in agri-enterprise projects to improve their livelihoods.

FAO (2020) notes that agribusiness entrepreneurs are key drivers in the development of sustainable food systems and value chains, contributing to rural poverty reduction. In addition to bringing economic benefits, such as job and income generation, entrepreneurs also have the potential to bring positive social change, such as gender and youth empowerment. According to an assessment by Agripreneurship Alliance, a Swiss based non-profit organisation, African food entrepreneurs need practical knowledge in a wide range of processing technologies. Nutrition knowledge needs to be applied to food production and processing to produce safe and healthy food products. Young people are better positioned to undertake these processes. As part of youth empowerment there is need to promote agribusiness development that aims at supporting the young agripreneurs who fuel the emergence and growth of food industry.

Statement of the Problem

Key developments have taken place over the last 10 years in agri-food systems in Kenya and globally. While there has been an exponential growth in food systems, there nevertheless has been minimal engagement of youth in agri-food systems. Farming in Sub-Saharan Africa is often associated with the elderly where smallholder farmers usually operate on subsistence scales and generate low revenues. Thus, it is not a surprise that youth have not been attracted to farming in the past. The current food systems require a new agricultural revolution that is based on system innovation and active role of gender equity in food sustainability. Unlocking agri-food potential will enhance the achievement of both the SDGs and Paris Agreement. Establishing clear targets to engage youth participation in food system transformation is an important step in realizing this opportunity.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To determine the nature and kind of self-reliance projects being implemented by youth in selected areas of Nakuru County
2. To evaluate the relationship between entrepreneurial skills and viability of agri-food projects on livelihoods of youth in selected rural areas of Nakuru County
3. To determine the contribution of agri-food Projects to socio-economic welfare of youth in the rural areas of Nakuru County

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was descriptive and exploratory employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. A comprehensive literature review was conducted via desk research to provide the preliminary contextual understanding and inform the survey design. Primary data were gathered through focus group discussions (FGDs) and surveys with over 130 participants, including youth support organisations (YSOs), local agri-food experts, and agripreneurs. YSOs were engaged on questions of Youth self-reliance projects, entrepreneurial skills, enterprise development and economic / social welfare of youth in relation to agri-food projects. The study used semi-structured questionnaire to get data from the youth in order to determine the agri-food systems status. Data collected was analysed using SPSS where frequencies and percentages were derived.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Occupation and Types of Projects youth were engaged in

The first objective of the study sought to describe the nature and kind of Self-Reliance Projects undertaken by youth in the rural areas of Nakuru County.

Nature of rural 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 as shown in figure 1. Six occupations were identified which included part-time farmers, full-time farmers and part-time employment. The findings further indicated that 25.5 percent of the respondents were part-time farmers, 21.2 percent full-time farmers and 23.4 percent were involved in other self-reliance projects. These findings indicated that agricultural projects have played a vital role in creation of youth livelihood opportunities. This shows that a reasonable percentage of youth (46.2 %) engaged in business through incorporation of agricultural development projects. It is evident that majority of the respondents had farming projects as under normal circumstances rural areas are favourable environments for farming as observed by Dalla (2012). However, with the changing realities a good proportion of the youth are also engaged in other agri-value chain activities as part of their occupation.

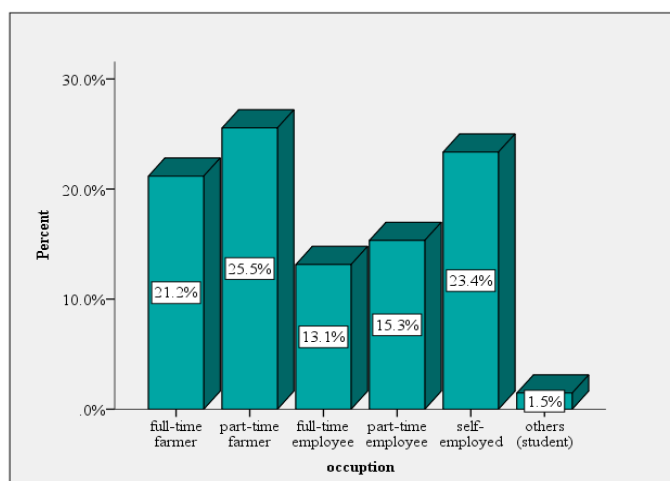


Figure 1: Occupation Status of the Respondents

Kind of projects implemented by the youth

This section describes types of projects and activities that were found being undertaken by the youth in the studied areas. The types of projects enumerated by the respondents are given in table 1;

Table 1: Frequency of projects youth were involved in for self-reliance

Projects which Youth are Involved	Frequency	percentage
Tree planting	9	5.9
Crop farming/ livestock farming	69	51.1
Bee-keeping	5	3.0
Milk collection and distribution	6	3.7
Boda-boda (motor-cycle) transport	7	5.2
Savings scheme activities	19	14.1
Others informal projects (dress-making, saloon)	23	17.0
Total	138	100.0

A majority of youth respondents assessed showed that 51% were involved in crop farming /livestock farming. Equally 3.7 % of youth assessed were engaged in other agri-system ventures along the food value chain such as milk collection and distribution of farm produce. This clearly indicates that youth are now taking up the agri-food related activities and joining the promotion of food security unlike in the past when it has been undertaken mainly y elderly Kenyans

Importance of the projects to the livelihoods of the youth

The respondents were also asked to indicate the level of importance of the projects to their livelihoods. The importance was assessed using a four point Likert- type scale and the findings are shown in Table 2. The four-point scale was used in measurement of the importance of projects was: *very important* – referring to having a major contribution of projects to youth’s livelihood; *important* – referring to a

good contribution of projects; *somehow important* – referring to an average contribution and *not important* –as little contribution to livelihoods of rural youth by self-reliance projects.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Importance of Projects

Importance of Projects	Frequency	Percent
Not important	2	1.5
Somewhat important	10	7.4
Important	62	44.9
Very important	64	46.3
Total	138	100.0

The study established that most respondents agreed that the projects were important to them in terms of contribution towards their livelihoods. The data in the table shows that 64 (46.3 %) of the youth felt that the self-reliance projects were very important, 62 (44.9 %) important while 10 (7.4 %) stated that the projects were somewhat important. Only a small number 2 (1.5 %) indicated that the projects were not important to them.

Effect of Agri-food projects on the youth economic welfare

Ninety-four percent (94.1%) of youth assessed from the study area were participating in some form of income generating activities such as; farming activities (66.9 %), running agro-food businesses (17.3 %) and other small enterprises ventures (8.4 %). In a related study conducted between 2021 and 2022 by St. Martins Social Apostolate a community based institution, 81% of mainly young people supported in small enterprises ventures are likely to sustain their livelihoods and hence improve their resilience and earnings. The study further revealed that 70% of households supported with farming inputs harvested enough food for household consumption to last for more than 12 months.

Kind of support provided to the youth for empowerment

The study also sought to understand the kind of support provided to the youth towards their projects. It was established that 43.1 percent of the youths received credit, 30.1 percent were offered entrepreneurial skills / training while 26 percent were enabled to access enterprises and funding information as indicated in table 3.

Table 3: Kind of Support Provided to the Youth

Kind of Support	Frequency	Percent
Credit	60	43.1
Information provision	35	26.0
Entrepreneurial Skills / training	41	30.1
types of support (group formation information, networking with contacts...)	2	0.8
Total	138	100.0

The support was from various sources. For instance, about 82 percent received advice and guidance from county

youth officers. Further, a proportion of 14 percent % received advice from other sources whereas only small proportions of 1 percent had received assistance from micro-finance consultants. These findings indicate that micro-finance has been a minimal source of rural youth support and hence it is evident that youth officers play a vital role in providing most of the required support and empowerment information.

Analysis of data from service providers on the type of support the youth need for their projects presented in Table 4 shows that majority of service providers (50 %) reported that financial funding was important and 16.7 % suggested that entrepreneurial skills needed to be availed to youth.

This is in concurrence with a similar study by Mburu (2008) who found out that capacity building and fund access are essential factors for the sustainability of agri-system projects promotion. It is thus evident from this study that promoting youth agri-food projects through funds access, training opportunities and increased private sector participation increases their participation in agri-food systems improvement.

Table 4: Type of support suggested to youth by service providers

Support suggested	Frequency	Percent
Financial / funding	3	50.0
Entrepreneurship skills	1	16.7
special premises for businesses	2	33.4
Total	6	100.0

The views from service providers indicate the importance of entrepreneurial skills and financial capacity for youth agri-projects to better respond to their livelihood challenges. Youth beneficiaries benefited from increased or facilitated access to self-employment and income levels.

Youth integration in promoting Agri-food systems

As observed in the reviewed literature (FAO, 2014), many interventions have found it imperative to gain service providers' involvement and support when initiating any youth livelihood self-reliance projects. Government officers, including business people may serve as educators, trainers and mentors. They may also help facilitate linkages to knowledge, funding, employment opportunities and networks. In addition, they can offer valuable support and encouragement to youth, especially needed through the tough times (like when youth businesses fail) and help young people to extract the lessons from those experiences. The youth officers interviewed suggested that the youth could be integrated by venturing into agri-projects through different ways. The findings are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Different Ways Suggested for Integrating Youth into Agri-Projects

Integration of youth into projects	Frequency	Percent
Inclusion into decision making	2	33.3
Identify business opportunities	1	16.7

Access funding	1	16.7
Sensitizing youth on self-reliance	2	33.3
Total	6	100.0

Most respondents said that inclusion into decision making (33.3 %) and sensitizing them on agri-projects (33.3%) more actively encouraged the growth of the implemented projects. Others identified access to funding (16.7 %) and business opportunities (16.7 %) as equally important to youth integration. As noted, the findings agree with other documented literature, that notes that agri-food projects growth cannot be achieved without support services, where the youth can significantly increase the promotion of agri-food activities and livelihood outcomes.

Progress towards making youth promoters of Agri-food systems

The studies conducted by the author and other related studies indicate that there is remarkable self-esteem among the youth surveyed in taking up agri-enterprises ventures. Their sense of security against shocks like unemployment, income gaps and basic livelihood needs has improved as they feel they have something to cushion themselves for their livelihoods.

There are a number of service providers who view youth as critical in agri-food systems promotion and engage them in the process. However, it is worth noting that as per study findings, enhanced empowerment is required to promote youth projects engagement. Therefore, more efforts need to be taken in the area of policy and law gaps in order to provide proper guidance for rural youth programmes designing and implementation. Appropriate policy frameworks are vital to foster the participation and development of the projects for young people.

Spaces for dialogue with governments should be created so that youth servicing groups can participate in the drafting, implementation, monitoring and assessment of policies directed at young agripreneurs. The policy makers should equally seek creation of a supportive social, economic and political environment that will empower the youth to be proactive in agri-food systems. The policy options should further enable an integrated strategy that promotes these systems and livelihoods enhancement. This integrated approach should combine macro-economic policies and targeted strategies for addressing agripreneurship as well as the kind of projects implemented by the youth. There is need to include all the stakeholders involved in youth livelihood activities. This may help in addressing the constraints that face the youth when implementing the agri-projects. Equally as revealed from the study findings with regards to providing an integrated approach of promoting agri –food systems, service providers rarely have all the resources and capacity required to offer youth the full range and depth of empowerment needed. There is thus a need for the strengthening of institutional linkages and partnership at all

levels in order to enhance engagement of youth in the food systems to ensure food security.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The first objective of the study sought to describe the kind of self-reliance projects undertaken by youth for their livelihoods in the rural areas of Nakuru County. The study findings established that youth were actively participating in various projects. The degree of participation in the projects varied as per the findings. The survey further established that a majority of the youths were engaged in crop farming / livestock farming as their main project. The findings indicated that 94.1 percent were involved in some form of income generating projects ranging from farming activities (66.9 %) as their main source, running small businesses and casual labour in that order. The study equally revealed that 91.2 per cent of the youth thought that the self-reliance projects were either important or very important to them. The youth project grows and gains strength and independence as it gets linked to various actors.

The study confirmed that a majority of rural youths have taken up the opportunities to promote Agri-food systems. The findings further indicated that there is need to encourage adequate processes for transition of agri-food systems management from elderly people to youth. It further concludes that facilitating young agripreneurs' through various modes of empowerment identified can be an engine for improving food systems, job creation for youth searching for employment among other livelihood needs in Kenya.

Recommendations

The study recommends that stakeholder in food systems should empower the youth to promote success stories of youth venturing in agri-foods activities by strengthening strategies employed. Equally strengthening the role of rural youth as agricultural information mediators is of importance to food systems improvement. In order to improve prevailing agri-food systems, comprehensive initiatives are needed to be taken by the stakeholders in the agri-food systems. The study also recommends that, in order to enhance the full participation of rural youth in agri-food systems and improve their engagement, they should be facilitated to access affordable financial and investment support. Also the government in collaboration with other service providers

should build capacity the youth. The following specific measures may increase the enhancement of agri-food systems and improve youth livelihoods as well as promote food system by actively integrating the youth;

- i. Empower the youth to take advantage of opportunities that exist in agri-food ventures that will improve the agri-food systems and livelihood openings of youth.
- ii. Facilitate capacity building that is relevant to youth involvement in agri-food systems
- iii. Encourage establishment youth's groups, develop leadership and linkages with service providers among the youth engaged in food systems
- iv. Government should enable the enactment of policy frameworks that ensure a conducive environment for the youth to utilise existing opportunities to take over from elderly farmers to enhance agri-food systems

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