

Youth Engagement in Agribusiness

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Abstract:

The agricultural sector, essential to developing economies, faces complex challenges related to sustainability, modernization, and food security. A critical issue arises from the increasing age of the agricultural workforce, underscoring the urgent need to involve younger generations. This chapter explores the multifaceted aspects of youth engagement in agribusiness services, emphasizing its transformative potential. The demographic shift towards an older farming population, highlights the urgency to bridge the generational gap. Youth engagement holds promise for innovation, technological integration and sustainable practices that can revolutionize traditional farming landscapes. However, various challenges persist, including negative perceptions, limited access to resources and gaps in skill development. This article elucidates these challenges while emphasizing the indispensable role of youth in driving agricultural modernization, entrepreneurship and technological adoption. Strategies such as policy support, education, collaboration and resource mobilization are examined to facilitate effective youth engagement. By reconceptualizing youth not merely as passive participants but as proactive contributors, leaders and innovators, this discourse advocates for a holistic approach. This comprehensive perspective underscores the imperative of cultivating a new generation of agriculturalists.

Engaging youth in agribusiness is essential for ensuring the sustainability and advancement of the agricultural sector. This article explores various strategies to promote youth involvement in agribusiness, including education and training programs, access to resources, mentorship and support networks, policy and advocacy, the use of technology and innovation, entrepreneurship and business development, and awareness and promotion initiatives. Key initiatives such as agricultural courses, vocational training, funding, land access, mentorship programs, digital platforms, and community engagement events are highlighted. Additionally,



successful case studies and examples, like 4-H, Future Farmers of America (FFA), AgriCorps and StartUp Africa, demonstrate the positive impact of these strategies. By fostering an enabling environment through these approaches, stakeholders can enhance youth participation in agribusiness, driving innovation and ensuring the sector's future growth and vitality.

Keywords: - Youth, Agribusiness, Entrepreneurship, Innovation

Introduction

Agriculture, often considered the backbone of developing economies, faces significant challenges in terms of sustainability, modernization, and food security. One of the most pressing issues is the ageing of the agricultural workforce. As older generations retire, there is a growing need to engage the youth in agriculture to ensure its continuity and innovation. The concept of youth engagement in agricultural extension transcends mere participation; it embodies a paradigm shift towards fostering innovation, sustainability and resilience in the agricultural sector. The agricultural sector remains a cornerstone of developing economies, playing a critical role in sustaining livelihoods, driving economic growth and ensuring food security. However, this sector faces a confluence of challenges that threaten its long-term viability, including the urgent need for sustainability, modernization, and enhanced productivity. Among these challenges, the escalating age of the agricultural workforce stands out as a significant concern. As the current farming population ages, there is an increasing necessity to involve younger generations in agribusiness to sustain and transform the sector. Youth engagement in agribusiness is not merely an option but an imperative. The demographic shift towards an older farming population with a burgeoning youth population, underscores the urgency of bridging this generational gap. Engaging youth in agribusiness holds immense potential for introducing innovation, integrating advanced technologies, and implementing sustainable farming practices. Young people bring fresh perspectives, enthusiasm, and a readiness to embrace change, all of which are crucial for the evolution of the agricultural landscape.





Despite its potential, youth engagement in agribusiness faces numerous obstacles. Negative perceptions of agriculture as an unprofitable and labour-intensive sector deter many young people. Additionally, limited access to essential resources such as land, capital, and technology presents significant barriers. Furthermore, there are gaps in skill development, with many young individuals lacking the necessary training and knowledge to succeed in modern agribusiness. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. This chapter explores the transformative potential of youth engagement in agribusiness and examines the strategies necessary to overcome existing barriers. It emphasizes the need for policy support, targeted education and training, collaborative efforts among stakeholders, and effective resource mobilization. By reconceptualizing youth as proactive contributors, leaders, and innovators, we can unlock their potential to drive agricultural modernization, entrepreneurship, and technological adoption. The imperative to cultivate a new generation of agriculturalists is clear. This introduction sets the stage for a detailed exploration of the strategies and approaches necessary to engage youth in agribusiness, highlighting the critical role they play in ensuring the sustainability and advancement of the agricultural sector.

Importance of Youth in Agriculture

Demographic Shifts

The global agricultural sector is experiencing a demographic shift, with an increasing number of ageing farmers. This leads to concerns about succession planning, labor shortages and the transfer of agricultural knowledge and practices to younger generations. In many parts of the world, the average age of farmers is increasing. The ageing farming population is a significant concern in many countries around the world, including developed and developing nations. In Europe, the average age of farmers is 51.40 years and in the United States, it is 57.50 years (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017) compared to the average age of 50.10 years of Indian farmers (Government of India, 2016).

The greying of the agricultural workforce underscores the urgency of attracting youth and new entrants to the sector to ensure its viability and resilience. Moreover, the reluctance or disinterest of youth in pursuing careers in agriculture may stem from perceptions of low profitability, strenuous physical demands, or limited access to resources and support systems. Addressing these concerns necessitates proactive efforts to engage, educate, and empower the



next generation of farmers by creating opportunities for training, mentorship, financial incentives, and technological advancement, thereby ensuring a resilient and vibrant agricultural landscape for generations to come. Engaging young extension workers is useful for understanding the challenges faced by youth and their mindsets (FAO,2014).

Innovation and Modernization

Youth bring a revitalizing energy and innovative spirit to the agricultural sector, infusing it with fresh perspectives that can catalyze transformative changes. Their innate familiarity and adeptness with modern technologies, including digital platforms, precision agriculture, and biotechnology, position them at the forefront of driving productivity, efficiency, and sustainability within farming practices. Unlike previous generations, many young individuals have grown up in an era characterized by rapid technological advancements, making them naturally inclined to leverage digital tools, data analytics and automation to optimize crop yields, resource utilization and supply chain management. This technological savvy enables them to implement more precise and data-driven decision-making processes, leading to reduced input costs, minimized environmental impact and enhanced profitability. Furthermore, their innovative ideas and willingness to experiment with novel farming techniques or alternative business models can unlock new opportunities for diversification, value-added products and market expansion. By engaging youth in agriculture extension, the agricultural sector can evolve, adapt and thrive in an increasingly complex and interconnected global landscape, ensuring long-term sustainability and resilience for farmers and communities alike.

Food Security and Sustainability

The active involvement of youth in agriculture becomes paramount for ensuring food security, fostering sustainable agricultural practices, and mitigating the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change. The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) acknowledged in its Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPoW) for 2020–2023, young people are one of the keys to achieving sustainable development, (Committee on World Food Security, 2021). The youth, equipped with fresh perspectives, technological acumen and a vested interest in long-term sustainability, are well-positioned to spearhead initiatives that optimize resource efficiency, minimize waste and enhance resilience to climate-related risks. Furthermore, youth-led research, education, and advocacy efforts can catalyze policy reforms, investment strategies



and collaborative partnerships aimed at building more inclusive, equitable, and resilient food systems. By harnessing the creativity, passion, and expertise of young individuals, the agricultural sector can navigate the complex interplay of demographic growth, resource limitations, and climatic variability, paving the way for a more sustainable, secure, and prosperous future for all.

Opportunities for Youth Engagement in Agribusiness:

1. Innovation and Technology Adoption

The integration of modern technology into agriculture is transforming the sector, making it more efficient and productive. Youth, being more tech-savvy, are well-positioned to drive this transformation. Opportunities for innovation and technology adoption include:

- **Precision Agriculture:** Utilizing GPS, IoT, drones, and data analytics to enhance crop monitoring, optimize resource use, and improve yields.
- **Agri-tech Startups:** Developing and deploying new technologies and digital solutions that address specific agricultural challenges.
- **Smart Farming Solutions:** Implementing automated systems and robotics to reduce labour intensity and increase efficiency.

2. Sustainable Farming Practices

With a growing global emphasis on sustainability, young people can lead the way in adopting and promoting environmentally friendly farming practices. Opportunities in this area include:

- **Organic Farming:** Engaging in organic farming methods that avoid synthetic chemicals and prioritize soil health.
- **Conservation Agriculture:** Practicing techniques that preserve soil structure, reduce erosion, and maintain biodiversity.
- **Climate-Smart Agriculture:** Implementing practices that enhance resilience to climate change while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

3. Agribusiness Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship in agribusiness offers significant opportunities for youth to create innovative enterprises that contribute to the agricultural value chain. Key areas include:

- **Value-Added Products:** Creating products that enhance the value of raw agricultural commodities, such as processed foods, biofuels, and natural fibers.
- **Agritourism:** Developing farm-based tourism activities that provide additional income streams and promote agricultural awareness.



- **Supply Chain Innovations:** Establishing new distribution channels, improving logistics, and reducing post-harvest losses through better storage and transportation solutions.

4. Access to Digital Platforms

The rise of digital platforms provides young people with unprecedented access to information, markets, and resources. Opportunities include:

- **E-commerce:** Using online marketplaces to reach broader markets and sell agricultural products directly to consumers.
- **Information Services:** Accessing agricultural extension services, market prices, weather forecasts, and best practices through mobile apps and websites.
- **Networking and Collaboration:** Joining online communities and platforms that connect farmers, agripreneurs, and investors for knowledge sharing and collaboration.

5. Policy and Advocacy

Youth can play a critical role in shaping agricultural policies and advocating for the interests of young farmers. Opportunities in this area include:

- **Youth Organizations:** Participating in or establishing organizations that represent young farmers and agripreneurs, providing a collective voice in policy discussions.
- **Advocacy Campaigns:** Leading or supporting initiatives that promote favorable policies for land access, financial support, and training programs for young people in agriculture.
- **Policy Development:** Engaging with policymakers to contribute to the creation and implementation of strategies that support youth engagement in agribusiness.

6. Skill Development and Education

Investing in the education and skill development of young people is crucial for their effective engagement in agribusiness. Opportunities include:

- **Agricultural Education Programs:** Enrolling in formal education programs that provide technical knowledge and practical skills in agriculture.
- **Vocational Training:** Participating in specialized training programs that focus on specific aspects of agribusiness, such as farm management, agri-processing, and marketing.
- **Mentorship and Apprenticeships:** Gaining hands-on experience through mentorship programs and apprenticeships with experienced farmers and agripreneurs.

Challenges in Engagement of Youth in Agribusiness

1. Negative Perceptions of Agriculture

One of the most significant barriers to youth engagement in agribusiness is the negative perception of agriculture as an unattractive career choice. This is driven by:

- **Stereotypes:** Agriculture is often viewed as low-status, labor-intensive and unprofitable compared to urban, white-collar jobs.
- **Cultural Attitudes:** Many communities view farming as a fallback option rather than a viable career, leading to low interest among young people.

2. Limited Access to Resources: Young people frequently face substantial barriers in accessing the resources needed to start and sustain agribusiness ventures:

- **Land:** Difficulty in acquiring land due to high costs, inheritance issues, and legal complexities.
- **Capital:** Limited access to credit and financial services, with many financial institutions perceiving young farmers as high-risk borrowers.
- **Inputs and Equipment:** Challenges in obtaining high-quality seeds, fertilizers, machinery, and technology due to cost and availability constraints.

3. Gaps in Skill Development: There is often a disconnect between the skills that young people possess and those required for modern agribusiness:

- **Education:** Lack of relevant agricultural education and training programs that equip youth with the necessary technical and entrepreneurial skills.
- **Training Opportunities:** Insufficient access to practical, hands-on training and mentorship programs that can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application.

4. Inadequate Policy Support: The absence of robust policy frameworks and support systems can hinder youth engagement in agribusiness:

- **Policy Gaps:** Many countries lack comprehensive policies that specifically target and support young agripreneurs.
- **Implementation Issues:** Even where policies exist, there are often challenges related to poor implementation, bureaucratic delays, and lack of coordination among stakeholders.

5. Market Access Challenges

Young agripreneurs often struggle to access markets effectively, which is critical for the profitability and sustainability of their ventures:

- **Market Information:** Lack of access to reliable market information, including price trends, demand forecasts, and buyer contacts.
- **Market Infrastructure:** Inadequate infrastructure such as roads, storage facilities, and transportation systems, making it difficult to get products to market.
- **Competition:** Facing stiff competition from established agribusinesses and imported goods, making it difficult to penetrate and sustain market presence.

6. Technological Barriers

While youth are generally more tech-savvy, they still face challenges in accessing and utilizing agricultural technologies:

- **Cost of Technology:** High initial costs of modern agricultural technologies can be prohibitive for young farmers.
- **Training and Support:** Lack of training and support in the effective use of new technologies and digital tools.

7. Social and Cultural Barriers

Various social and cultural factors can also impede youth engagement in agribusiness:

- **Gender Inequality:** Young women, in particular, face additional barriers due to gender discrimination and cultural norms that limit their access to resources and opportunities.
- **Migration Trends:** Rural-urban migration trends see many young people leaving agricultural areas in search of better opportunities in cities, reducing the potential pool of young agripreneurs.

8. Lack of Mentorship and Networks

Mentorship and professional networks are crucial for the success of young agripreneurs, yet these are often lacking:

- **Mentorship Programs:** Limited availability of mentorship programs that connect young agripreneurs with experienced professionals.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Insufficient platforms and forums for young farmers to network, share knowledge, and collaborate on initiatives.

**Conclusion:**

The agricultural sector, a vital component of developing economies, faces critical challenges that demand innovative solutions to ensure its sustainability, modernization, and food security. Among these challenges, the ageing agricultural workforce stands out as a pressing issue, necessitating the engagement of youth in agribusiness. Youth engagement transcends mere participation; it represents a paradigm shift towards fostering innovation, sustainability, and resilience in agriculture. The importance of youth in agriculture cannot be overstated. The demographic shift towards an older farming population underscores the urgency of attracting younger generations to ensure the sector's viability and resilience. Youth bring a revitalizing energy and innovative spirit, essential for driving productivity, efficiency, and sustainability. Their technological adeptness and fresh perspectives are crucial for adopting modern farming practices and addressing complex agricultural challenges.

Despite the clear potential, numerous obstacles hinder youth engagement in agribusiness. Negative perceptions of agriculture, limited access to essential resources, gaps in skill development, inadequate policy support, market access challenges, technological barriers, social and cultural impediments, and lack of mentorship and networks are significant barriers that need to be addressed. Overcoming these challenges requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach. Youth engagement in agribusiness is not merely an option but an imperative for the future of agriculture. By harnessing the creativity, passion, and expertise of young individuals, the agricultural sector can navigate demographic changes, resource limitations, and climatic variability. Ensuring a resilient, vibrant, and sustainable agricultural landscape requires the active involvement of the next generation. This chapter highlights the critical role of youth in transforming the agricultural sector and underscores the need for concerted efforts to cultivate a new generation of agriculturalists, thereby securing a prosperous future for all.

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