

Youth in Agriculture and Agribusiness: Breaking the Chains of Youth Unemployment in Uganda

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In Uganda, the youth comprise about 75-78% of the country's population, and at the population growth rate of 3% (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016, The National Population and Housing Census 2014 – Main Report, Kampala, Uganda), the fraction of the youth is expected to increase further.

However, the majority of youths remain unemployed or underemployed and in need of enhanced quality and gainful employment. In 2015, youth unemployment is estimated at 18.2%, with female youths at 22.4% and males at 14%. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2016) indicated that the unemployment rate among the youth who had completed tertiary education was 14.8 % while that of those who had completed secondary school was at 16.2%. Those who had completed primary education were at 14.9%, and those with no education were 17.7%. Youth unemployment remains especially dire and not only implies hopeless livelihood but also poses a great risk of social and political instabilities. Many unemployed youths have ended up becoming outlaws contracted to kill as a way of livelihood. Others have formed criminal gangs to assault pedestrians and motorists on urban streets.

A number of challenges face youths in their employment trajectories. The youth after higher education find it hard to get a first job. The biggest challenge arises from the youths' mindsets created after long-term socialization in school where training is directed towards white-collar jobs. Searching/seeking formal jobs has therefore become the main preoccupation of the youth after higher education, which, on the contrary, are very limited due to the slow growth of the economy and the increasing population. Uganda has not succeeded in establishing a strong modern formal sector, and as a result employment in the modern industrial and related service sectors has not been significant. Many other obstacles to youth employment and productivity include discrimination, marginalization, poverty and lack of skills together with low skills enhancement. Vocational and technical skill education has not been given due diligence in the country, and until the country promotes a duo-qualification framework that underscores both formal and technical education, skills attainment and enhancement will remain a sham.



Young ladies undertaking vocational skills training at Uganda Muslim Women Vision Centre

In an attempt to solve the youth unemployment challenge, the Government of Uganda has adopted the Youth Livelihood Strategy where youths are provided with loan funds in the form of seed capital to start up enterprises for self-employment. Youths in urban areas have started up ICT businesses, furniture making, metal fabrication, Boda Boda cycling (bicycle

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& motorcycle taxis), trade business and agricultural production. Agriculture, being the most critical sector in the economy, still serves as the springboard for everyone in the country including the youth. The agricultural sector alone employs 80% of the population and 69% of those are in subsistence form. Efforts by both the state and development partners have been directed towards youths engrossed in agricultural innovation, value addition to agricultural production and productivity, agribusiness and marketing.



Youths in agribusiness in Butambala District. Washing and packing ginger to have it ready for local marketing.

However, there still remain hurdles for youth productivity such as the lack of land and financial resources for high value agricultural activity, the lack of robust investment in agribusiness infrastructure, limited technology and value addition, and climate change. Notwithstanding the above challenges, it is believed that agriculture has the potential to increase youth competences and transform the economy to another level. Youths interested in agricultural value additions have thus been supported to transform through training and become champions for other youths to emulate. For improved job opportunities in agriculture, the incorporation of technical and vocational skills in agricultural innovation, agribusiness and marketing is the key for youths at all levels of education.