THE CHALLENGE OF SUPPORTING RURAL YOUTH FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND RURAL LIVELIHOOD: A CASE OF UGANDA.

Paul Kibwika¹, A. R. Semana²

¹Lecturer, Department of Agricultural Extension/Education
Faculty of Agriculture, Makerere University
P.O. Box 7062
Kampala, UGANDA
Phone: 256-41-534779/534826
Fax: 256-41-531641
E-mail: pkibwika@africaonline.co.ug

²Senior Lecturer and Head
Department of Agricultural Extension/Education
Faculty of Agriculture, Makerere University
P.O. Box 7062
Kampala, UGANDA
Phone: 256-41-534779/534826
Fax: 256-41-531641
E-mail: arsemana@hotmail.com

Abstract

The youth are the strength of any nation the world over. However, many developing countries like Uganda are yet to recognize the potential of the youth particularly in rural development where the majority of the population live. A survey of 200 youth and 34 key informants in two districts of Uganda revealed a divergence in understanding of who the youth are between the implementers of rural development programs and policy. The initiative to support young men and women to live a meaningful life in the rural areas originates more from the private or Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) than the public sector. In addition, the nature of existing rural youth clubs does not empower the young to exploit their potential to the fullest as the leadership of most youth clubs are dominated by the adult youth (above 18 years). Although the young men and women below 18 years are regarded as children and are expected to be dependent, they contribute significantly to the family survival by way of family income and food security. However, the youth are faced with many problems, the major ones being the lack of access and control of production resources, and having to acquire education that does not prepare them for the work they are likely to do in the future.
Introduction

Uganda's economy is largely dependent on the agricultural sector which accounts for about 45% of GDP and over 90% of exports as well as providing employment for over 80% of the households. About 90% of the population is rural and derives its livelihood from agriculture. Uganda's population is estimated to be growing at a rate of 2.5% per annum with the young people under 30 years constituting about 78% of the population and 85% of the youth living in the rural areas.

The importance of rural youth in national development lies in the realization that young men and women are a major resource for development. Their innovative imaginations, considerable energies, vision, risk-taking abilities, and curiosity to try out new ideas need to be exploited for sustainable economic and social development of developing nations. Born in a village, reared in a village, they will continue in predominant numbers to live in the village (Fray, 1962). The kind of citizens the youngsters are going to be is largely conditioned by the kind of training that they have received in their youth (Chang, 1963). As Donald (1970) put it that education must prepare young people for the work they are going to do in the society in which they live. His argument that formal education needs to be one of a kind that would not divorce pupils from the land but one that equips them to return to it as more able farmers than their parents is very relevant for Uganda.

In Uganda, governmental recognition of the role of young people in stimulating national development soon after independence resulted in two strong youth organizations, the National Union of Youth Organizations (NUYO) and the Young Farmers of Uganda (YFU) program. However, both these programs collapsed during the period of civil strife (1971-85). The regime that took power in 1986 attempted through several government and non-government efforts to revive the youth activities, but to-date, the youth are yet to be brought into the mainstream of the development process. Semana and Kibwika (2000) emphasized that the usefulness of rural youth in agricultural development calls for the revival of rural youth programs with a new orientation to reverse the current rural-urban migration and impart positive attitudes and values in youth to like agriculture and do it as a business.

Purpose of the Paper

This paper attempts to describe who the youth are as perceived by the different partners in rural development, the nature of existing rural youth clubs, the contribution of the youngsters towards family survival, and their constraints/limitations for full and gainful involvement in agriculture. We believe in the relevance of this work, which describes the current rural youth status, as a basis for recognition of youth as a resource for sustainable rural development, especially in communities that rely on agriculture as the main source of livelihood.

Methods and Data Sources

Data were collected through a baseline survey conducted in two districts and four sub-counties of Uganda. The two districts of Pallisa and Rakai were purposively selected as they had been earmarked to be the pilot districts for a national youth program under the
Agricultural Sector Support Program funded by the Danish Aid (DANIDA). The two sub-counties in each district were selected based on their contrast in level of youth organization as recommended by the District Based Services Departments. The contrast of the two sub-counties in each district was that one was regarded to be highly organized in terms of youth clubs while the other was regarded to have a very low level of youth organization.

Data were gathered from a total of 200 youth (100 from each district) and 34 key informants representing district-based development agencies (NGOs), government departments, local leaders, and leaders of some youth clubs. Information from the key informants was gathered through informal discussions and recorded in notebooks. On the other hand, fifty youth were sampled from each of the four sub-counties using a systematic sampling procedure (Mark, 1996: p. 118) from lists of youth prepared by parish youth council representatives in each sub-county. The sampled youth were interviewed using semi-structured interview schedules administered by trained interviewers. Data gathered through interviews were analyzed using the SPSS PC computer software and descriptive statistics are used to interpret the data. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the youth sample along three variables of gender, current education status (whether in school or out of school), and membership in youth clubs.

Table 1: Youth sample composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Sub-county</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Current Education Status</th>
<th>Membership to Youth Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>In-school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pallisa</td>
<td>Buseta</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agule</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rakai</td>
<td>Kakuuto</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lwanda</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>110</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

Who are the Youth?

In an attempt to address issues of equity and empowerment of communities, policy and development initiatives have tended to target the marginalized social categories such as the women and youth. Whereas there seems to be no misunderstanding of whom the women are, the term “youth” is interpreted differently by different organizations and institutions, depending on their interests. In Uganda, policy defines the youth to be the young people in the age bracket of 18 and 30 years (Youth Council Statute, 1993). However, all the key informants consulted, including those from government departments, were not satisfied with this definition of youth. It is argued that the 18-30 years includes people who are already entrenched in adult responsibilities and leaves out the young people below the age of 18 years who are more vulnerable and are in critical need for guidance and support to get into adulthood with some hope.
According to the government policy, all those young people below the age of 18 years are regarded as children who are expected to be dependants and are not targeted by any government program other than the formal education. However, this study revealed that in both districts, many “children” had acquired adult responsibilities such as having to live independently, having children, and managing families. This was more apparent, especially in Rakai district, where the effects of the AIDS scourge has resulted in many children as young as 12 years being heads of households and having no one on which to depend. Whereas the government departments are bound to direct their services to youth as defined by the policy, the Non-government Organizations (NGOs) serving the youth offer their services to young people as low as 12 years of age. This is an attempt to face the practical challenge of helping and preparing young people to meet their current and future needs. Indeed, some NGOs providing life skills like the Rural Development Services (RUDESER) in Rakai target young people below the age of 18 years. At 18 years, the youth are regarded to have turned adults and are facilitated to integrate into the community as independent adults.

In general, while policy defined youth based on voting age, the development agencies viewed youth from the perspective of when young people begin to play a role in community development and family livelihood. This difference in understanding of the target group (youth) resulted in different strategies for support of youth activities between the government and NGOs. Whereas the NGOs supported development programs for the youth like imparting skills that would enable them earn a living, the government did not have development programs specifically targeting the youth. Since in view of government the youth are adults, they are expected to served by the general community programs which most often do not reach them.

**Nature of Existing Youth Clubs**

Because policy defines youth as a person between the age of 18 and 30 years, the existing youth clubs are dominated by people above 18 years old. Even in this case, the existing youth clubs are not bound by this age limit as some clubs had members above 40 years. Often a group was categorized as a youth club only if the majority of its membership was comprised of people of up to 30 years old, rather than the entire membership being within the age bracket of youth. An inventory of 31 youth clubs with a total of 469 members revealed that 34% of the members were in the range of 10-20 years of age, while about 13% were above 30 years. Table 2 shows the representation of different age categories in the rural youth clubs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Category</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-15 years</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 years</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 years</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40 years</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further investigation revealed that the youth between 10-16 years who belonged to youth clubs tended to be from the same families with adult youth members and probably joined because of the influence of the adult relatives. It is also clear that even if they were members of clubs, they did not actively participate in making decisions for their clubs because they are often regarded to be too young to be entrusted with such responsibilities.

In a cultural context where the young are not expected to disagree with opinions of their elders, wide age differences between the group members is likely to suppress the young from freely expressing their opinions. The cultural environment, therefore, makes these young people a misfit in their clubs as the leadership is monopolized by the adult youth, whose needs, interests, and aspirations are different from those of younger ones (below 18 years). The status quo denies the young people below 18 years the opportunity to pursue their interests and to take positions that would develop their capacity to make rational decisions and gain leadership abilities. In addition, the existing youth clubs are largely an out of school affair. Out of the 85 in-school youth in the sample, only 20 or (23.5%) were members of youth clubs. Over 76% of the youth in school did not belong to youth clubs.

**The Youth Contribution in Rural Family Survival**

This study provided evidence that the youth play a significant role in community development and family survival. Most of the youth above 18 years are married and therefore take full responsibility for their families; however, interest was in finding out the contribution of those young people below 18 years to their family survival. The youth 10-18 years who are often expected to be dependent on their parents/guardians were found to be contributing significantly to their family survival in terms of food security and family income. The respondents in this research estimated the contribution of this category of youth as demonstrated by the graph below:
Graph 1: Contribution of Youth (10-18) to Rural Family Income and Food Security.

As shown by the graph, the majority of the respondents estimated the youth (10-18 years) contribution to both family income and food security to be between 25-50%. This is through their involvement in activities that either generate income or lead to production of food for their families. In a few instances, their contribution is even rated above 75%, particularly in cases where this age group takes nearly full responsibility of the family welfare, such as in “child headed” families or where these youth live with the very elderly people. This situation is a clear indication of the increasingly important role in community welfare. It also poses a challenge of enhancing their capacity to make greater contribution to sustainable rural development.

Because of their quick response to new technologies, the youth, for example in Pallisa district, were reported to have taken the lead in adoption of new mosaic-resistant cassava varieties, which has greatly contributed to food security in the entire district and even beyond. Their quick response has earned some families reasonable income from the sale of the new cassava varieties. The young people’s conscience and aspirations for better living can be stimulus to the general improvement of standards of living in communities. This is demonstrated by a youth club (of mainly school children) in Pallisa district who out of their own initiative and resources constructed a protected well (water source) for the community. They used money generated from their agricultural projects to buy the necessary materials such as cement, pipes, and their labor to do the job. Such initiative by the youth has enabled the community to have access to safer water than before.
**Constraints of Rural Youth**

Because rural livelihood depends mainly on agriculture, most of the rural youth activities involve farming. However, the youth lack the basic production knowledge and skills in agriculture. Probably one of the major problems youth face is the education that does not provide them with life skills for rural livelihoods. Although most of the youth drop out of school after primary education and return to the communities where agriculture is the main source of livelihood, their education does not add much to the indigenous production practices. Primary schools and many secondary schools do not offer agriculture as a subject, and even where it is offered, it is too theoretical that it cannot make a difference in practice.

While there are general problems of lack of markets, capital, inputs, extension, the youth face a peculiar problem of lack of access and control of the basic production resources like land. Because of this, many youth do not have the freedom to decide in what agricultural enterprises they wished to engage, and sometimes, they do not have direct control over the benefits of their efforts. As one of the youth lamented:

> *The parents/guardians may decide for you what crop to grow and where to grow it. Even after harvest, they may market the produce and receive all the proceeds and then decide what to give back to you either in form of books, clothing, or otherwise*.

This, and many other problems arising from lack of access and control of the production resources, discourage the youth from investing their energies in activities where they cannot realize full benefits.

The youth also lack access to capital to invest in improved agricultural technologies, such as improved seed, agricultural chemicals, and irrigation. While these are key to modernization of agriculture, the youth with the highest potential to try out these technologies have no access to them. The youth find it even more difficult to access the available rural credit facilities because they are regarded to be dependent and have no securities required to acquire the loans. Most service providers do not target youth as a social category in a society, leading to marginalization and under-utilization of a very productive force of young men and women. Even non-formal educational services, like extension, are yet to reach the youth to enable them to participate fully in rural development programs. Like women, there is a need to target deliberately the youth if sustainable rural development is to be achieved.

**Conclusion**

From a development perspective, the youth are the future for any country and the world (Gobeli, 1996; Siders, 1996; Brandfield, 1966; Fray, 1962). The potential of youth to transform rural communities needs to be recognized, especially in developing countries where the majority of citizens depend on agriculture as a source of livelihood. Although the majority of youth in Uganda live in the rural areas, the youth are not being prepared to meet real life challenges. If rural development is to be sustainable, the rural youth need to be brought in the mainstream of the development process, no matter whether the development initiatives come from the public or private sector. Rural development in the long-term depends on how the youth are prepared to cope with the challenges they are likely to face as rural citizens.
Educational Importance

This paper presents two major educational challenges. The first one is about the purpose of the formal education. Meaningful education is that which prepared its beneficiaries for the world they are likely to find themselves after school. Given the high school drop out levels of students in developing countries, the education they get needs to be that which provides the basic skills and knowledge required for survival in the communities they return to. The challenge is making education relevant to real life situations.

The second challenge is that of realizing the youth today are the men and women of tomorrow, and therefore, their involvement in development now is the hope for sustainable rural development. Through educational approaches (both formal and informal), the young generations are capable of coping with the challenges in a positive way. However, the youth as a social category is often not deliberately targeted in rural development initiatives.

References


Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the Danish Aid (DANIDA) and the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) through the DATIC Program for funding the study. The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this paper are entirely those of the authors and should not be attributed to DANIDA or NARO.