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Thinking Policy Together

Supporting Youth Involvement in Climate Smart Agriculture

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Introduction

Youth participation in agriculture has been declining over the years in Kenya. Youth labour force in agriculture in 1995 was 60.72%. Twenty-five years later, it has declined to 28.47% in 2020.[1] Despite agriculture being central to addressing youth unemployment, the youth are increasingly turning away from agriculture to seek for what they believe to be profitable and business-focused careers. This decline in youth participation is a major concern because the youth can be a resource in agriculture by replacing the aging farmers in the sector.[2] Some of the factors that have contributed to the decline in their participation in agriculture include minimal to no access to data and information on climate-smart agriculture (CSA), negative attitude towards agriculture, limited access to land, inadequate climate-smart technological capacity and knowledge to apply technology appropriately in CSA, and financial constraints. Poor coordination among institutions mandated with implementation of policies and programmes in agriculture are other impediments for participation of the youth in climate-smart agriculture. Therefore, tapping the youth potential is critical for climate-smart agriculture, which is a transformative approach to agricultural production. The youth are a potential driving force of climate-smart agriculture due to their innovativeness and energy.

The central role of agriculture in developing countries is well known. The sector is the leading contributor to Gross Domestic Product in Kenya. It contributed 20.9%, 22.6%, and 22.4% to GDP in 2019, 2020 and 2021, respectively. On average, the sector contributed 21.4% to GDP between 2017 and 2021. The transition of agriculture from subsistence to climate-smart will leverage on transformation through innovative, commercially oriented and modern agricultural practices. It is in this regard that the youth remain a key catalyst of this transformation.[3]

Youth in Climate-Smart Agriculture

The youth face various constraints in their involvement in climate-smart agriculture. While some of the issues are addressed in various government policies, there are still gaps that need attention to fully exploit the opportunity for youth involvement in climate-smart agriculture.

(i) Access to knowledge, education, and information

The youth have limited access to knowledge, education and information on CSA practices, which has led to declining participation in agriculture. This decline in youth participation has been linked to the educational reforms implemented by the Ministry of Education. In 2002, the Ministry of Education initiated reforms to rationalize the school curricula. These reforms affected agriculture which was as an examinable subject then. Due to the reforms, agriculture became unexaminable in primary schools and optional in secondary schools. These changes saw declines in student enrolment in agriculture courses at various levels of education. Studies have shown that the number of students choosing agriculture courses from 24,221 in 2017 to 18,165 in 2018, a decline of 25%.[4]

Several interventions have been put in place to reverse the decline in youth participation in agriculture. These include the development of the Agriculture Policy 2021 and the Kenya Youth Development Policy 2019. The Agriculture Policy 2021 provides mechanisms to encourage education in agriculture. It also provides for the development of communication strategies in agriculture to improve information sharing, public education and responses to emergencies. However, the policy does not provide an elaborate implementation plan on the educational mechanisms it proposes.

Appropriate education holds an intrinsic value in the fight against climate change through CSA practices. The Kenya Youth Development Policy 2019 aims to transform agriculture and increase access to appropriate agricultural education and training. It also seeks to promote the establishment of educational centres for sharing educational resources and to promote e-learning at all levels. Even though the policy aims to support the youth to engage and to be at the forefront of agricultural growth and transformation through education, educational networks are not fully established. In addition, some of the e-learning centres in some areas have no Internet access and coverage.

(ii) Attitude towards agriculture

The youth have often perceived agriculture as an enterprise of last resort and a non-professional undertaking. The perception of farm work by the youth as a punishment has contributed to decline in their involvement in agriculture. These perceptions have led to the youths dropping agricultural courses, which have been branded as "archaic" with lower qualifying grades. The negative media reports of unpaid farmers, and devastating post-harvest losses, such as rotting cereals and fruits tend to reinforce the negative perception of agriculture among the youth.

The society has also had a strong influence on the attitude and perception of youths towards agriculture. The society discourages performing students from enrolling in agricultural courses, while students performing poorly are advised to go for farming. This creates the perception that agriculture is for students who perform poorly and agriculture offers them a career of last resort. In addressing the societal factors, the Kenya Youth Development Policy 2019 seeks to develop a positive attitude and perception towards agricultural work and agri-prenuership through integration of ICT to assist in establishment of innovative and modern farming methods. It proposes the rebranding of agriculture as an unexplored frontier for growth in business opportunities and development of innovative financial packages that provide incentives for youth entrepreneurs in the sector. However, the policy has not achieved full participation by the youth, because it has limited solutions beyond financing to address the issue of attitude in agriculture.

(iii) Access to land

Limited access to land among the youth is a major impediment to their participation in climate-smart agriculture. About 59% of the youth interviewed by Heifer International in Kenya indicated that access to land was an impediment to pursuing agriculture.[5] The main factor limiting access to land is the price of land. Land prices in Kenya tend to be too high, especially for the financially constrained youth. In some communities, land is a communal resource, which is passed down from one generation to the next. The Kenya Youth Development Policy 2019 seeks to support access and ownership of land for agribusiness.

The National Land Policy 2017 provides for a legal and administrative framework to provide access, allocation and use of land. However, the policy does not empower the National Land Committees to allocate land to needy individuals, but only to groups, and may therefore not fully address the constitutional principle of equity with respect to land.

(iv) Technological capacity in climate-smart agriculture

The cost of accessing technology (ICT) is high in rural areas, with poor network connectivity and low Internet penetration. For this reason, the youths in rural areas cannot utilize existing mobile-based technological innovations that support CSA, such as DIGIFARM by Safaricom and Mkulima Young online. These platforms were developed with the aim of enabling the youth to learn and engage in CSA practices by virtually connecting successful farmers and the youth aspiring to become farmers. DigiFarm and Mkulima Young also enable farmers to secure markets for their produce by connecting them with traders. Some of the existing policy frameworks are designed to promote innovations and technological transfer in the agricultural sector. The Kenya Youth Development Policy commits to enhance Internet connectivity to the rural areas of Kenya and facilitate the lowering of connectivity charges to enable as many youth as possible to access the Internet, which are key factors to technological access.

To advance Internet connectivity in rural areas, the National Information Communications and Technology (ICT) Policy 2019 lays a framework to improve universal access to ICT services by both public and private users at the time, place and manner they require and participate in the knowledge economy. This will greatly improve youth knowledge and involvement in CSA. However, County Governments are yet to develop the County Integrated Infrastructure Plan to ensure rational, cost-effective and sustainable use of ICT as envisioned by the policy. The proposal by the Kenya Kwanza Manifesto to create digital superhighway in the rural and other areas will be a game changer to enable youth access Internet and technology infrastructure if the plan is actualized.

(v) Access to finance

Climate-smart agriculture initiatives require medium to large scale investments by farmers for effective adoption. The Green Climate Fund is the world largest climate fund born out of the Paris Agreement of 2015 and adopted by 194 countries who are party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The Kenya Climate Change Act 2016 established a Climate Change Fund to act as a financing mechanism for climate change actions and interventions, including financing of sustainable farming. Several County Governments in Kenya have also enacted their County Climate Change Funds (CCCFs) to finance local adaptation and mitigation actions. Whereas Climate Smart Agriculture is part of the priority areas for financing, this is not happening because climate finance is disproportionally targeting the renewable energy sector, while other key sectors such as agriculture are underfunded.[6]

Climate finance is critical to addressing climate change because large-scale investments are required to significantly reduce emissions, especially in the agricultural sector. In principle, the Kenya Vision 2030 and the Kenya Youth Development Policy 2019 acknowledge this fact. The Kenya Vision 2030 seeks to enhance agricultural access to credit and financial services and therefore increase the number of producers accessing affordable financial services, including insurance schemes. However, this development programme does not provide structures for youth finance in CSA. The Kenya Youth Development Policy 2019 aims to support youth engagement to factor in the aspect of agricultural growth and transformation. It promotes access to domestic and global financial markets, which will increase investment in rural farm and non-farm activities and social economic infrastructure to offer youths attractive jobs based on rural areas. Nonetheless, implementation of the policy, especially the involvement of youth in CSA, has not been achieved.

Coordination of institutions, policies and programmes plays a key role in integrating productivity, mitigation, and adaptation. These institutions include the CGIAR Research Programme on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security - CCAFS and the World Agroforestry Centre - ICRAF, NGOs such as CARE Kenya, multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, the network of civil society organizations including the Kenya Climate Change Working Group - KCCWG, and the private sector (Kenya National Farmers' Federation - KENFF and Africa Conservation Tillage Network - ACTN). These institutions provide opportunities for research, agricultural technologies, and innovations, risk insurance, emissions reduction, conservation, education, gender, and adaptation systems. The Kenya Climate Smart Agriculture (2017-2026) seeks to support the establishment of an inclusive institutional framework for improved coordination and harmonization to realize CSA objectives. Despite these efforts, there exists loose partnerships between Government Ministries and development partners on how to better support youth engagement in agriculture. There are inadequate mechanisms for linkages and coordination between CSA agencies and stakeholders, which results into overlaps and inefficiency in implementation of programmes.

Recommendations/Policy Implications

(i) Establish youth resource centres staffed with instructors trained in CSA, ICT, and business. There is need to integrate agricultural training into national school curriculums.

(ii) Make CSA activities attractive and accessible to the youth. This means exploring and introducing more business and market-oriented approaches to agriculture for youth engagement in the sector, and making the agricultural sector a more productive and attractive profession.

(iii) Improve youth access to land for CSA practices at a low or zero cost. Alternatively, land access can be at a subsidized rate for the youth by the government. Enact laws to empower land committees to ensure equitable access to land.

(iv) Facilitate access to information on climate smart innovations and technologies among the youth in the arid and semi-arid lands through digital platforms and provide capacity building for the youth in CSA innovations.

(v) Streamline financing structures to ensure they favor youth activities in CSA, promote CSA concept as an agribusiness venture for the youth, and have a significant proportion of green climate fund directed to CSA.

(vi) Streamline all institutions involved in CSA to have a specific office or unit mandated to implement, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes, policies and strategies.

Endnotes

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