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Research Article

Empowering Youth in Agriculture for a Sustainable and Prosperous India

R. Kamaraj^{1*}, K. Karpagambigai², K. Aswini³, N. Geetha⁴, S. Vimali⁵, D. Jeevarathinam⁶ and L. Vijayakumar⁷

¹⁻²Associate Professor, School of Commerce Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr Sagunthala R and D Institute of Science and Technology (Deemed to be University), Avadi, Chennai, India

³Associate Professor, School of Commerce Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr Sagunthala R and D Institute of Science and Technology (Deemed to be University) Avadi, Chennai, India

⁴Assistant Professor, Department of Economics Valliammal College for Women, Chennai, India

^{5,7}Assistant Professor School of Commerce, Veltech Rangarajan Dr Sagunthala R and D Institute of Science and Technology (Deemed to be University), Avadi, Chennai, India

⁶Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, School of Commerce Vel Tech Rangarajan Dr Sagunthala R&D Institute of Science and Technology (Deemed to be University), Avadi, Chennai, India

*Corresponding Author

Dr. R. Kamaraj

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Abstract: India currently boasts the largest population of youth worldwide. Just approximately 5% of rural youngsters are currently employed in agriculture, and if given the option, 2/5 of farmers would give up their livelihood. A worrying 45 percent of young people from rural areas go to cities. One of the most effective ways to draw and keep young people in farming is to make agriculture more sustainable by providing them with viable economic options. This would assist in resolving the young unemployment and migration crisis. Young people must be employed in the agricultural sector in order to increase agro-produce and economy. Because of the higher capacity of adapting to change of idea, concept, and/or techniques—crucial for the transformation of how agribusiness is conducted—young people can be the ideal catalyst to change negative perception of those working in agriculture, especially in villages. This work explores the reasons why people choose not to pursue agriculture as a source of income as well as tactics for enticing and keeping young people in the industry.

Keywords: Agri-Business, Sustainable Development, Retaining Youth, Capacity Building of Youth, Migration

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INTRODUCTION

In the new draft of National Youth Policy announced by Government of India (GoI) in 2022, one of the major aim for youth is to “Encourage the youth to revive the rural economy” for the sustainable development of India [1]. 2014 National Youth Policy of GoI says that youths are individuals having age in the range 15-29 [2]. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations classified youth as those between the ages of 15 and 24 for the purposes of cross-country comparison and analysis. According to the 2011 Census, India's young populace has reached up to 422 million (mn) as compared to 168 mn in 1971 [3]. According to a 2014 UN report, India currently has the largest young populace in the world (356 mn persons having age in the range 10-24), overtaking China (269 mn) [4]. By 2021, the number of young people is expected to reach 464 mn [5]. Two out of every five farmers, according to the National Sample Survey from 2005, would give up farming if they had the option. According to more current data, 76 percent of people would

choose to work in another occupation over farming. The only reason that 24% people are still interested in farming was due to family traditions [6]. The number of farmers has decreased by over 7.7 mn since 2001 and by almost 15 mn since 1991, according to the most current census data. Throughout the past 20 years, 2035 agrarians have lost their status as "Main Cultivators" every day on average. 95.8 mn people have agriculture as main source of the income, according to the census, which is not even 8% of total populace. Even after including 22.8 mn marginal farmers, less than 10% of the population is still present. Instead, if all farmers and agricultural workers were included, there will be about 263 mn people, or 22% of the world's populace [7]. India's population is predicted to be roughly 50% urban by 2035, creating a concern for the nation's food security. As compared to average age, 29 years of Indian populace, farmers are, on average, 55 years old, suggesting that there are fewer young people working in agriculture [8].

Reasons for Youth's Denial of Agri-business as Profession

Personal Reasons: Farmers' main obstacles to avoiding agriculture as a source of income were their desire to engage in any employment other than farming, their reluctance to involve their children in the industry, their desire to avoid working in adverse weather conditions, and their dislike of drudgery-oriented work [9]. Research from other nations has revealed that young farmers have greater professional flexibility and are much thoughtful to salary differences of agriculture and non-agriculture based jobs, and that they are more likely to abandon farming than older farmers [10].

Social Reasons

The desire of parents for their child for achieving a higher socio-political status with the help of educational system, young women's denial want to start family with a farmer, family not supporting to continue agri-business, and lower social acceptance of farming as a career were the social factors that led people to avoid agriculture as a source of income [9]. Today's youth is not attracted towards agri-business because they perceive it as an obsolete profession having minimal monetary returns [11].

Economic Reasons

The economic reasons for avoiding agri-business by land owners as source of income are:

- Because it's a profession dependent on nature, it entails a substantial financial risk
- High cost of production
- Inadequate cash for farming: For big farmers (2 hectares or more), banking system is the dominant crediting agency while for small farmers (<1 hectare), informal sources like moneylenders account for 41 percent of credit. Other significant sources of agricultural financing include shopkeepers, family members, friends, and cooperative societies. The most significant difficulties for agricultural credit are the lack of access to crop insurance coverage and uncertainty over land records [12]
- Unfriendly method of crop insurance [13]

Psycho-Emotional Reasons

The main reasons are negative impressions of agri-business as career, a decline in agricultural passion, a lack of confidence in using advanced farming techniques, and a risk-averting mindset [9]. Highly educated professionals claim that since farming does not require creativity or expression, it is not intellectually satisfying [14].

Market Related Reasons

Due to market-related issues like unequal returns resulting from an unorganized market structure, product costs that are determined by consumers rather than producers, middlemen dominating the market and government's hostile agricultural policies, agricultural landowners have been discouraged from farming [9].

Lack of Workers

The main issue that farmers faces that led them to give up farming as a source of income is the shortages of work-force brought on by industrialization, the shortage of skilled work-force, and detrimental effects of MANREGA on the labor market [9].

Situational Reasons

Inadequate storage facilities for agricultural products, insufficient irrigation systems, and a lack of electricity were the situational variables that agricultural landowners had to deal with. Land fragmentation into different sizes has

an adverse effect on farming mechanisation. Agriculture in India is dominated by small holdings; of the 139 mn total land holdings, two-thirds have a size of less than or equal to one hectare. Moreover, landholdings have been gradually becoming more dispersed [15].

Next-gen Reasons

The educated new generation wants to stay in metropolitan regions and have negligible affection towards agri-business. The absence of urban amenities (such as education, communication, etc.) deters the next generation from settling in rural areas for family farming [9]. Young college graduates of lower middle class farming families in Meerut, India, don't want to go back to countryside [16].

Approaches for Retention of Youth in Agri-Business

- New concepts and techniques are easily adopted by the youth and thus, agricultural extension services can effectively increase young engagement in agriculture transformation [17]. Various effective extension tactics that can be implemented include increasing NGO's involvement, counselling and advising youth from villages, raising cognizance in youth, encouraging entrepreneurship, and promoting smart agriculture. A dedicated national programme might be created to persuade kids to participate in more agriculturally related events [18]. Compared to 40% for crop farming, only 5 percent of farmers have access to information on livestock (Planning Commission, 2012). Surprisingly, the livestock resources are more equitably distributed than land, with marginal farmers holding two-thirds of small ruminants and more than half of the cattle population [19]
- It is also possible to effectively use mass media and ICTs to stimulate youth's interest in agriculture. Social media can be very effective at inspiring and informing aspiring farmers [20]
- Lack of agricultural expertise and insufficient funding frequently cause low rates of youth involvement in agriculture. Working through collective structures like farmer organizations, cooperatives etc. can make it easier for people to get finance from various financial institutions [19]
- "Agriculture, including Agricultural education and research, protection against pests, and control of plant diseases" are included in the Indian Constitution. It is listed under States. The state government is liable and accountable under the state constitution. The central government is therefore exempt from accountability and responsibility. The Central Government also has a duty to safeguard interstate welfares and agri-business matters pertaining to farming inputs. The FAO, the UN, and other organizations are among those to which the Central Government is expected to reply. The Indian Constitution's concurrent subject/list, or the third list in the seventh schedule, is thought to be suited for covering agriculture, including soil and water conservation. Its participation will improve the ability of both the Central and State Governments to assist Indian people and residents. In order to preserve and advance the welfares of agricultural families and to draw and keep them in the agricultural sector, this will necessitate both governments making an effort and developing policies to do so [21]
- A major step in refocusing attention of youth towards agriculture would be to encourage youth during developing phase to set precedence for agricultural education. Those who want to pursue agriculture as a career can gain self-confidence and skills from the extensive network of agricultural universities and colleges. Most of the students go into the financial industry instead [22]. Farm graduates who open agri-clinics and agri-business centers (ACABC) in communities can start out as rural entrepreneurs. Existing ACABC programmes should be expanded to accommodate more agricultural graduates in rural areas who want to launch new businesses [20]
- Building capacity in youth: Youths need chances for education and skill development to equip themselves for active engagement in decision-making processes. The current system of extension will also focus on other issues including encouraging young farmers to launch high-tech businesses and microenterprises and the improvement of soft skills like leadership, business, and communication
- Efforts to link youth in planning and policy making: Youth can be included in the examination of potential policy options as well as the identification and review of present policies to achieve this
- Agricultural business should be taught in agricultural institutions, with a focus on success stories, use of applicable techniques, and significance of federation of youth in state's agri-business
- Highest priority should be given to transformation of agriculture through modern means and the same should be taught through Community College and Farmer's Field School. Rural youngsters need greater opportunities to work in agriculture if agriculture is to undergo transformation
- Promotion of agro- eco tourism: The farming industry and the tourism industry work in harmony to promote leisure through active participation in farm activities and to increase understanding of agricultural heritage. organic foods,

farm stays, guest ranches, ponds for fishing and recreation, plantations with cows, pigs, and chickens, wool processing demonstrations, rural festival celebrations, handicrafts, folk dancing, and a variety of rides including bullock carts, tractors, and horses are all available. By utilizing resources more effectively, farmers can increase their income, and tourists can pay affordable prices to experience rural life and nature

- Waste lands can be given to young farmers in order to create an agricultural field role model targeted at keeping youth in agricultural domains. There should be proper recognition of youth who follow best agricultural practices, by bestowing awards at the district level, state level and national level. The awards can be presented to deserving youths
- Young farmers should be given advice on how to use integrated farm systems, mixed farm systems, organic farm, and precision farm for optimal resource usage and sustained productivity. Rural youth would be inspired to participate in activities related to the production of seeds in the role of a producer or a coordinator. Additionally, setting up of industries, educational institutions, corporate branches, and recreational facilities in villages may help in reducing the rate of migration of youth from rural to urban areas [23]
- Conduct of regional exchange programs: The participation of youth in trade shows, exhibitions, competitions related to farming techniques, narrating success stories of youth involved in agriculture should be encouraged. Several other related activities include young farmer's gatherings, exchange of views & techniques between farmer organizations, cooperation & international solidarity between youth farmers [24]
- Partnership with various actors: Collaboration involving a range of stakeholders involved be it from government, corporate sector, banks, academic sectors is necessary to draw young people into agriculture. Some of the strategies that should be used include building relationships with proper training facilities for conduct of refresher courses, partnering with consumer groups on food safety and organic foods, and gaining help from the local community for programmes related to purchase of food items [24]
- Rural landowners have suggested the following as ways to encourage young people to enter farming [9]: government should arrange for pensions to seasoned farmers in later years of age; implement job based agricultural education; give farm families a special hiring preference; and make channel irrigation water available as and when needed
- Budget allocation that is appropriate for the government: Agriculture in India employs more than half the country's workers and generates 17.5% of GDP [12]. The livestock contributes 4.5% to GDP and 25.8% of the nation's overall agricultural GDP [25]. The economy's contribution from agriculture and related industries decreased from 18.2% in 2012–13 to 16.4% in 2017–18. Nonetheless, the percentage of the cattle industry climbed from 22.6 to 25.7 percent between 2013–14 and 2015–16 [26]. The budget for agriculture makes up 5.2% of the overall budget. The Ministry's budget for 2018–19 is divided as follows: 81% goes to Agriculture, Co-operative, and Farmers Welfare; 13.5% goes to the Department of Agricultural Research and Education; and 5% goes to the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairy, and Fisheries [27]. In accordance with expenses recorded in 2013–14, 0.54 percent of India's agriculture GDP is spent on research and education (R&E), and 0.16% is spent on extension and training, based on a study by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER). The World Bank's recommended amount of 2% of GDP is not met by this. For A.H. and dairy development, just 10% of the agriculture R&E funding was allotted [28]

CONCLUSION

The agriculture sector, which employs the majority of people in the nation, is in charge of giving farmers stable and sustainable means of subsistence. However, due to the numerous obstacles this industry faces, farming is no longer seen as a promising career path for young people in the nation. A reputable brand image must be created in order to change people's perceptions of this industry in order to draw and keep young people in agriculture. Nowadays, farming must be seen as a business and the farmer as an agri-preneur. Young people need to explore a wide range of opportunities because they have the imagination and creativity needed to transform agriculture. To give Indian agriculture a new status in the hands of young, motivated farmers, it is currently necessary to develop proper policies and strategies for attracting and keeping youth in agricultural industry. There are already a lot of public and private initiatives paving the way, primarily aimed at educating and mobilizing young for agriculture. The young of the country may be effectively utilized for the advancement of the country with substantial investment by public in agricultural domain.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

All authors have equally contributed.

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