

## Chapter 22

# A Study on Youth Aspiration and Perception of Agriculture and Its Policy Implications

**Siti Fatimahwati Pehin Dato Musa**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1987-4595>

*Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Food security is becoming a generational problem whereby farming is increasingly synonymous with the older generation. To ensure food security through increased production, more youth participation in agriculture sector is crucial and policies need to encourage youths in the sector. How young people respond to opportunities and whether agriculture can meet their aspirations are critical in terms of food security and future employment. It is critical for policymakers to think beyond the conception of youth as just labour for agriculture production. The aspirations and the expectations of youths need to be addressed to motivate their interest in agriculture.*

### **YOUTH AND AGRICULTURE: MAKING THE CONNECTION**

Food security is “when all people, at all times, have both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet dietary needs for a productive and healthy life” (FAO, 2002, p.4). There are now concerns over the availability of sufficient food to feed the growing population with currently one billion people considered food insecure. In the simplest case, this is mainly due to two reasons. First, it is due to the increase in global population (from around 6.9 billion in 2010 to an estimated 9.3 billion in 2050) which means that the demand for food is estimated to increase by 70% by 2050 (FAO, 2009). Secondly, the food price hikes such as in 2008 and 2010 reduce access to food due to a decrease in relative purchasing power.

Food security is also becoming a generational problem whereby farming is increasingly becoming synonymous with the older generation. The average age of farmers is currently in the range of high-50s to early-60s (Leavy, 2013). Based on a survey on rural demographics in 2010, the average age of farmers in the US is 58 years and more than one third of European farmers are older than 65 (Johr, 2012). This

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trend is also apparent in the regions of East Asia and South Asia. At the extreme in Japan, by the early 1990s one third of the agriculture labour force was more than 65 years of age and in 2000, the figure increased to more than half. In some remote upland areas of Japan, the farm household has been unable to reproduce itself and the land lies abandoned (Francks et al., 1999). Young people, on the other hand, consist of approximately 20% of the total population in many developing and emerging economies. Globally, 90% of youth live in such economies with Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and South Asia accounting for more than half of the world's youth (ILO, 2013).

The solution to the problem may seem simple: encourage young people to farm and be involved in agriculture sector. It will provide employment to the youth, ensure food security through increased production, and with more youth participation in agriculture sector it will ensure farming is passed from one generation to the next. However, the common interpretation on the issue of agriculture and the youth problem is that agriculture is at risk because there is lack of youth participation and policies are needed to encourage youths to be involved to sustain the sector (Anyidoho et al., 2011).

However, policies often concentrate only on the farm sector and production side i.e. youth as farmers, and the off-farm sector other entrepreneurial activities that make up the agriculture sector are often ignored. Due to the importance of sustaining food production and the capacity of the agriculture sector to absorb the ever-growing youth population, how young people respond to opportunities and whether agriculture can meet their aspirations is critical in terms of food security and future employment (Proctor & Lucchesi, 2012).

It is critical for policymakers to think beyond the conception of youth as just labour for agriculture production. The aspirations and the expectations of youths need to be addressed to motivate their interest in agriculture. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) determined that intentions to participate in an activity could be predicted based on a person's knowledge, observations or other information held about some issues or event. Hence the decision to undertake agriculture as a course or a career is predicted by examining their beliefs about agriculture. However, meeting their aspirations is not adequate; this must be accompanied by opportunities that facilitate the achievement of the aspirations. It is important for agriculture and development policy to match these aspirations with the visions and goals of agriculture policy of the country. The following section discuss youths' aspirations and perceptions towards agriculture followed by relevant policies that can be adopted to encourage more youth participation in the agriculture sector.

## **YOUTHS ASPIRATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS AGRICULTURE**

This section discusses various empirical studies on the aspirations and perceptions of youths towards agriculture in both developed and less developed countries. There are clear contrasting structural differences of the agriculture sector in the developed and least developed countries. For example, in the US, the agriculture sector extends beyond the on-farm sector to include a range of off-farm related industries; the largest of these are food service and food manufacturing" (USDA, 2016). In 2014, 17.3 million full- and part-time jobs were related to agriculture—about 9.3 percent of total U.S. employment. Direct on-farm employment provided over 2.6 million of these jobs. Employment in the related industries supported another 14.7 million jobs. Of this number, food services and drinking places accounted for the largest share—11.4 million jobs—and food/beverage manufacturing supported 1.8 million jobs. The remaining agriculture-related industries together supported another 1.4 million jobs

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