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Youth Participation in Agricultural Cooperatives, Post Covid-19 Strategies: A Case of Machakos Coffee Co-operative Societies, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Kenya is a country that is mainly dependent on the agriculture sector for livelihood. Smallholder farmers through Coffee Cooperative Societies play a central role in socio-economic development, particularly in agricultural production, processing, and marketing. The vibrant and dynamic cooperative movement enhances food security, wealth creation, and poverty eradication. FAO report indicates that youths in Kenya are a critical component of the productive population and their input can be harnessed to enhance economic development. However, Kenyan youth has not actively embraced agriculture, due to the involvement of manual labour and poor returns. This study sought to establish factors affecting youth participation in coffee cooperative societies in Machakos County, Kenya. Eighty (80) youth from the eight (8) coffee cooperative societies working under Sustainability Kenya Limited Networks -AGRIFI Project in Machakos County were involved in the study. Focus group discussion (FGD) was adopted to gather in-depth data. Older men's domineering culture, lack of succession planning, resource allocation challenges, and a negative attitude that associates agriculture with the elderly, the poor, the illiterate, and rural folks, were identified as the main factors impeding active participation of the youth in coffee cooperative societies. The study observes that covid-19 has shaken the whole world, setting in motion unavoidable waves of change, with a wide range of uncertain trajectories in the future. The whole world has moved drastically toward online channels to cope with pandemic challenges. The study strongly recommends deliberate attempts to incorporate technology into agriculture as a strategy of motivating the youth to engage in agriculture and associated cooperatives, thereby increasing agricultural production. Young people easily embrace new ideas, experiment with new practices, and are often devoid of technophobia. They are a potential vital force for innovation in cooperative societies and can contribute immensely to the well-being of farmers, families, and to the local communities.

Keywords: youth, agriculture, cooperatives, participation, strategies

INTRODUCTION

Research Problem

More than 70% of the population in Sub-Saharan region is dependent on Agriculture sector for livelihood. Kenya is an agricultural country (Self Help Africa, 2021). Small holder farmers through organized farmer organizations and associations such as Coffee Cooperative Societies and Village women and youth groups, play a central role in the socio-economic development particularly in agricultural production, processing and marketing. In Kenya, the vibrant and

dynamic cooperative movement enhances food security, wealth & employment creation and poverty eradication, and hence improved livelihoods of smallholder farmers (Baka, 2013). According to State Department of Co-operatives (SDC) and Cooperative Alliance of Kenya (CAK), the cooperative sector faces challenges associated with poor governance & leadership practices and financial mismanagement leading to inefficiencies and ineffectiveness in coffee production & management and marketing (AgriFi Kenya Report, 2018). Baseline study as reported by the AGRIFI project conceptualization team indicates that youth and women have been left behind in key decision-making process and coffee value chains, whereas they offer a great opportunity to change the sector all together. Women can perform between 20% - 25% more than their counterpart male given the same resources and opportunities as men (FAO, 2015). It is against this backdrop that the study sought to establish the factors which may influence participation of youths in agricultural cooperative development activities, taking into consideration the aftermath effects of Covid-19 hence recommend appropriate intervention strategies to be applied by cooperative boards and governments in strengthening and involving youths in the mainstream decision making tables.

Objective of the Study

The study objective was to establish factors that influence participation of youths in agricultural cooperatives hence recommend appropriate intervention strategies to strengthen youth participation, taking into consideration, the post covid-19 challenges.

METHODS

Research Design

Descriptive research design was adopted in this study. According to Salaria (2012), descriptive design analyses the present phenomena in terms of conditions, practices beliefs, processes, relationships or trends invariably. Descriptive survey design is confined to the natural settings and attempt to interpret phenomenon in terms of the meaning that people bring (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Population and Sampling Technique

O'Gorman and MacIntosh (2014) refer to a population as any group of institutions, people, or objects that share observable characteristics. The population involved eighty (80) youths from eight (8) coffee cooperative societies working under Sustainability Kenya Limited Networks - AGRIFI Project in Machakos County Kenya. All the 80 youths participated in the study, constituting a census process.

Data Collection

This paper derived information on three instruments for data collection; structured questionnaires, focus group discussions and interview. The researcher validated the data during the collection stage in the field. The main objective was to capture the views, ideas, perceptions and opinions of the youths that influence their participation in Agricultural Cooperatives. Focus group discussion was used to identify challenges and brainstorm on possible practical recommendations on relevant strategies to be adopted by cooperative societies in order to encourage youth participation in Agricultural cooperatives. A Structured questionnaire was then constructed and administered to collect data on the relative strength of each factor constituting the study variables using 5 point Lickert type scale.

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Data Analysis

In the first step, focus group discussions and interview were used to establish factors that influence youth participation is Agricultural Cooperatives. The factors were grouped, summarized and ranked. In the second stage, regression analysis was used to establish the relationship between the factors and level of participation in Agricultural Cooperatives. Both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques were used to analyze data. Quantitative and Qualitative approaches may be used within the same framework, guided by a priori, a posteriori, or iteratively (Onwuegbuzie and Combs, 2010). In this regard, quantitative data was analyzed using a regression model while qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis. The regression model was formulates as follows: $Y = \alpha + \beta 1X_1 + \beta 2X_2 + \beta 3X_3 + \beta 4X_4 + \beta 4X_4 + \beta 5X_5$, Where X_1= Older Men's Domineering Culture, X_2= Lack of Succession Planning, X_3=Resource Allocation Challenges, X_4= Inadequate Technology adoption, X_5= Negative Attitude.

RESULTS

Response Rate

Table 4.1: Response Rate

Position	Count	%
Responses	72	90.0
No Response	8	10.0
Total	80	100.0

Out of the targeted 80 respondents, 72 questionnaires were adequately filled and returned making the overall response rate to be 90 percent as shown in Table 1. The response rate could be considered adequately unbiased given that Nulty (2008) recommends a response rate of at least 65%.

Descriptive Results

Factors which featured prominently when all the issues raised during focus group discussions and interviews were summarized include older men's domineering culture, lack of succession planning, resource allocation challenges, inadequate technology adoption and negative attitude by the youths towards Agricultural activities. Descriptive findings were presented on a five-point Likert type scale with minimum and maximum mean and standard deviation being generated for ease of data interpretation. Mean scores closer to 5 points indicated a high magnitude of respondents' endorsement on the stated factors. High standard deviation indicated that the responses were highly distributed along the scale.

Table 2: Descriptive Results on Factors Affecting Youth Participation in Coffee Cooperative Societies

Variable	Very Great Extent	Great Extent	Moderate Extent	Little Extent	Very Little Extent	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Standard Deviation
Older Men's Domineering Culture	30.3	34.1	20.5	4.5	10.6	3.689	1.5	5.0	1.145
Lack of Succession Planning	22.7	36.9	22.7	7.6	10.1	3.545	1.3	5.0	1.010
Resource Allocation Challenges	37.6	29.7	23.6	6.7	2.4	3.933	1.8	5.0	0.926
Inadequate Technology Adoption	29.9	34.6	19.5	14.3	1.7	3.766	2.0	5.0	0.979
Negative Attitude	40.7	32.4	13.5	8.8	4.6	4.0123	2.2	5.0	0.8225
Average	29.0	39.4	16.9	10.4	4.3	3.789	1.76	5	0.9765

As shown in Table 2, negative attitude that associates agriculture with the elderly, the poor, the illiterate, and rural folks was cited as the most dominant factor influencing youth participation in Agricultural cooperatives (mean = 4.0123, standard deviation = 0.8225), this was followed by resource allocation challenges at a mean score of 3.933 and a standard deviation of 0.926. Other variables were rated as follows: Older men's domineering culture (mean = 3.689, standard deviation = 1.145), Lack of succession planning (mean = 3.545, standard deviation = 1.010), and Inadequate Technology Adoption at a mean of 3.766 and standard deviation of 0.979. The average mean was 3.789 with a standard deviation of 0.9765.

Inferential Results on Factors Affecting Youth Participation in Coffee Cooperative Societies Inferential statistics were achieved through Coefficient of Determination (R^2), Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and regression coefficient.

Table 3: Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.992a	0.985	0.982	0.13604	1.976

a Predictors: (Constant), Negative Attitude, Lack of Succession Planning, Older Men's Domineering Culture, Resource Allocation Challenges, Inadequate Technology Adoption

b Dependent Variable: Youth Participation in Coffee Cooperative Societies

Results in Table 3 show an R-Square of 0.985 with the standard error of estimate being 0.136. This implies that change of 98.5 percent of variability in youth participation in coffee cooperative societies is explained by Negative Attitude, Lack of Succession Planning, Older Men's Domineering Culture, inadequate technology adoption and Resource Allocation Challenges, particularly for Machakos Coffee Co-operative Societies. The researcher also tested for autocorrelation using Durbin Watson statistic which is always between 0 and 4 where a value of 2 means that there is no presence of autocorrelation in the residuals (prediction errors) from a regression analysis. A *rule of thumb* is that, test statistic values in the range of 1.5 to 2.5

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are relatively normal. Values outside of this range could be a cause for concern. Field (2009) suggests that values under 1 or more than 3 are a definite cause for concern. In this study, Durbin Watson statistic was 1.976 which falls within the relatively-normal range and therefore there was no autocorrelation in the residuals from regression analysis.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	33.284	4	8.321	449.6	.000b
	Residual	1.273	67	0.019		
	Total	34.557	71			

a Dependent Variable: Youth Participation in Coffee Cooperative Societies
b Predictors: (Constant), Negative Attitude, Lack of Succession Planning, Older Men's Domineering Culture, Resource Allocation Challenges, Inadequate Technology Adoption

As shown in Table 4, F-Calculated (4, 67) = 449.6 which is greater than F-Critical (4, 67) = 2.509 at 2-tail test and 95% confidence level. Results also show that p-value = 0.000 < 0.05. This further confirms that older men's domineering culture, lack of succession planning, resource allocation challenges, negative attitude, and inadequate technology adoption significantly influence youth participation in coffee cooperative societies.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	
		B	Std. Error	Beta		Sig.
1	(Constant)	0.257	0.143		-1.8	0.083
	Older Men's Domineering Culture	-0.276	0.117	-0.299	2.365	0.025
	Lack of Succession Planning	-0.313	0.094	-0.283	3.323	0.002
	Resource Allocation Challenges	-0.453	0.149	-0.393	3.037	0.005
	Inadequate Technology Adoption	-0.036	0.213	-0.032	0.168	0.038
	Negative Attitude	-0.482	0.136	-0.398	3.537	0.001

a Dependent Variable: Youth Participation in Coffee Cooperative Societies

Findings presented in Table 5 show that when all the independent variables are held at zero, youth participation in coffee cooperative societies will be positive (0.257). At the same time, an increase in older men's domineering culture, lack of succession planning, resource allocation challenges, Inadequate Technology adoption and negative attitude, each by one unit leads to a decrease in youth participation in coffee cooperative societies by 0.276, 0.313, 0.453, 0.036 and 0.482 units respectively. The p-values were also less than 0.05 (that is 0.025 for older men's domineering culture, lack of succession planning (0.002), resource allocation challenges (0.005), inadequate technology adoption (0.038) and negative attitude (0.001). This implies that older men's domineering culture, lack of succession planning, resource allocation challenges, inadequate technology adoption and negative attitude significantly influence youth

participation in coffee cooperative societies and have inverse collective relationship with youth participation in coffee cooperative society.

The model was summarized as follows: $Y = 0.257 - 0.276X_1 - 0.313X_2 - 0.453X_3 - 0.036X_4 - 0.482X_5$

Where: X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4 and X_4 represent older men's domineering culture, lack of succession planning, resource allocation challenges, inadequate technology adoption and negative attitude respectively; Y = youth participation in coffee cooperative societies.

DISCUSSION

According to Njeru et al. (2015), approximately 64% of unemployed persons in Kenya are actually young people, and Agriculture is the backbone of Kenya's economy contributing over 30% of GDP. In spite this fact, youth participation in agriculture has been very low and this is partly attributed to, among other factors, the poor perception of the youth on agriculture. These observations are consistent with the findings of this study which has established that youth's negative attitude that associates Agriculture with the elderly, the poor, the illiterate, and rural folks is the most elastic at 0.482 units followed by resource allocation challenges at 0.453. These results were further confirmed by the descriptive results which placed negative attitude as the most influential at the highest mean score of 4.0123 out of a possible 5 points on a licket-type scale and the lowest standard deviation of 0.8225 compared to all other factors used the study. In Kenya, Agricultural curricula were dropped from basic education despite the glaring gaps in the much needed knowledge and skills in the country's economic backbone. During the focus group discussions, it emerged that young people especially from urban areas perceive agriculture and related co-operatives as less worthwhile and as a last resort for academic failures, while their urban counterparts view agriculture as some a 'dirty engagement' These findings are consistent with those of Gitau (2011) who made more or less similar observations in his study on challenges and issues faced by African youth in Agriculture. Older men's domineering culture also came up as a deterrent to youth participation in Agricultural cooperatives. Youths scarcely have an active role, neither sit in the central decision making table with the older men. Decision-making is often dominated by, and often perceived as the domain of older men. Consequently, policies tend not to factor in concerns by the youths. On resource allocation challenges, it was observed that young people rarely own resources such as land and capital that are required as ingredients to either engage in agricultural ventures or actively participate in any Agricultural cooperative society. Generally, it was noted that most young people tend to associate themselves with technology and modernization. High level technology adoption came up as another conspicuous influencing factor. Very few youths would be willing to register as a member of analog cooperative society. They tend to be attracted to digital processes including online application, registration, payment and basically all transactions and operations. Most Agricultural societies are relatively manual in their operations as was observed in Machakos County Kenya. These findings are consistent with those of Food and Agriculture Organization (2011) as documented in the report entitled the State of Food and Agriculture: women in agriculture. It emerged from the group discussions and the interviews conducted, that most board members, who are often advanced in age rarely make deliberate or conscious efforts to plan for and manage succession. Ngeywo et al. (2016) notes that succession management is a concept aimed at avoiding risks that may occur along the lifeline of work force and productivity in business. Due to Natural Attrition and other

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environmental dynamics, there are growing concerns about sustainability of cooperative organizations in terms of preparedness of young ones in taking the roles of older generation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Agricultural sector, and by extension the Agricultural Cooperatives have been identified as the central and pivotal economic pillar that can adequately address unemployment in Kenya, more specifically among the youths who are the most vulnerable when it comes to economic challenges. For the youths to fully embrace Agriculture and actively participate in Agricultural Cooperatives, considering the challenges posed by Covid-19, the study recommends the following strategies:

There is need to digitalize and automate Agricultural operations so as to anchor augmented agricultural value chain. Embracing technology and harnessing emerging technological changes in the current dynamic world will play a big role in not only copying with Covid-19 challenges but also enhance youth participation in Agricultural value chains and related cooperative societies.

There is need to adequately address social, infrastructural and cultural challenges that deter youths from owning land and capital, participating in decision making and leadership structures. This will build confidence in youths and ensure seamless succession and take over from the older generation.

Strengthening youth participation in agriculture and related cooperative societies calls for making agriculture more appealing and attractive to the young people. This should be accomplished by adopting well-managed agro-business value chains and changing the retrogressive cultural attitudes that discourage youths and lower their interest in agriculture. Agriculture ought to be branded as a professional and profitable business enterprise that can boost living standards among the youths.

CONCLUSION

This review provided a better understanding of the youth's perception towards agriculture and further suggested some of the interventions that the Government can apply to make agriculture more attractive to the youth. Application of these interventions would transform agriculture to an economically rewarding venture and ensure food and nutritional security, poverty reduction and self-reliance, among the youth and the general community. To achieve this, there is need to create youth-in-agriculture policies and integrate them with other policies on youth matters such. This study provided an in-depth understanding of the perception from the youths towards agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives in the context of Covid-19 pandemic. The study established five main factors that play key role in determining the level of youth participation in Agricultural Cooperatives and Agricultural activities in general. The study further suggests some of the strategies that Cooperative leaders and Governments may apply to make agriculture more appealing to the younger generation. The strategies include technology adoption, changing retrogressive attitude, enhancing resource allocation to the youths, strengthening succession management and encouraging youths to take part in decision making and leadership of the Cooperative boards.

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