FACTORS LIMITING RURAL YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE-BASED LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES IN TEHSIL KARSOG OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

RASHMI CHAUDHARY, YASMIN JANJHUA, PIYUSH MEHTA, NIKHIL SHARMA & KRISHAN KUMAR

Department of Business Management, College of Horticulture, Dr. YS Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry, Himachal Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

There has been theoretical as well as applied evidence about declining youth participation in agriculture-based livelihood activities. The present study investigated the important factors constraining rural youth participation in agriculture-based livelihood activities. Examination of a sample of 250 youth respondents identified the poor return on investment, unpredictable prices of agricultural produce, high input costs and labor intensive nature of agriculture based livelihood activities as the important factors constraining youth involvement in agriculture-based livelihood activities in the study area. The overall results for predominantly agricultural-based activities in which youth participate indicate that youths in the study area do not significantly engage in agriculture-based livelihood activities. However, crop farming and livestock rearing are the two major activities in which they are involved. The results of the study will have some useful implication for the policymakers and it is recommended that all stakeholders must make efforts to address various constraints identified by respondents for increasing youth participation in agriculture-based livelihood activities.

KEYWORDS: Agriculture, Rural Youth, Livelihood, Constraints & Factors

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture-based livelihood activities occupy a very significant position in the economic development of the Indian economy as agriculture sector has a high employment potential. Economic stability can be attained through a vibrant agricultural sector in which youth participation is encouraged (Ojediran, 1997). The Role of agriculture in the rural economy is of importance that a synonymity between agricultural and rural development has been put across by many scholars. Development of rural youth can gear the rapid socio-economic development process in the rural areas since rural youths have the capacity to orient themselves to go along the main stream of the development process and can concentrate their efforts to abolish superstitions, disorder and misconceptions prevalent in the Indian social system (Damar, 2008). Alarmingly, agriculture remains unattractive to the youth leading to their movement from rural to urban in search of opportunities and a better life (Gangwar and Kameswari, 2016).

Youth are an important and vital segment of human resources that can shoulder the responsibility of development, including agriculture (Skuza, 2005). Youth are the carriers of new ideas and are more receptive to innovation, ready to bear risk and willing to participate in community action (Damar, 2008). Moreover, youth
contribution to agricultural development is significant to national development because of several advantages of involvement of youth in agriculture as they have the latent energy, capacity and ability to produce, propensity to learn and grasp new ideas or technologies faster and they are an excellent source of ideas and innovations (Gangwar and Kameswari, 2016). Nations, that refuse to engage the youths in development despite their unassuming ability to transform situations if given the enabling environment, will continually dwell in abject poverty (Adeogun, 2015).

Mobilization of youth for national development is the common phenomena amongst the west and developing countries (Kimaro et al, 2015). The agricultural future of most developing countries may be bleak if left in the hands of aging subsistent farmers who presently constitute the major farming population. However, despite of the fastest growing opportunities in this sector, it is alarming and quite incredible to see many rural youths opting out of farming in search of non-existed white-collar jobs in the cities, leading to unprecedented levels of rural-urban migration (Adekunle et al., 2009). Moreover, given the growing urbanization, better literacy standards, and greater skill attainment by the rural youth, the proportion of the latter in the agricultural labor force could drop substantially, thus, changing drastically the nature of farming in the country (Sharma and Bhandari, 2009). Although agriculture is perceived as the significant alternative solution to youth’s unemployment and ability to overcome economic issues, it seems that youth have negative attitudes toward agriculture. They are not interested to join agriculture because they do not view the agriculture field as an attractive area to work (Abdullah, 2012).

To reverse the situation government has taken a number of steps like farmer FIRST, National Agriculture Education Project (NAEP), Students Rural Entrepreneurship Awareness Development Yojana (READY), Attracting & Retaining Youth in Agriculture (ARYA), Attracting & Retaining Youth in Agriculture (RAWE) etc. As the name suggests these schemes and programs are for promoting agriculture among youth and to make agriculture a lucrative business.

It is disturbing to note that our youth are losing interest and confidence in agriculture and allied activities; hence they are not willingly involved in agricultural operations (Rani and Rampal, 2016). In the coming years, one of the biggest challenges for Indian agriculture would be retaining its youth in agriculture. It has become imminent to reorient agricultural practices to make them intellectually satisfying and economically rewarding for the youth (Jayapuria, 2015). Unless farming becomes both intellectually stimulating and economically rewarding, it will be difficult to attract or retain rural youth in farming (Swaminathan 2001). Researchers have found that the major constraints of participation by youth in agriculture based livelihood activities are; perceptions of greater job opportunities, poor physical infrastructure and social amenities in rural areas, general dislike of village life to be the factors for youth participation in agriculture (Akpan, 2010 and Rutta, 2012), lack of knowledge, lesser irrigational facilities, high labour cost, unavailability of improved seeds and fertilizers (Shandilya et al, 2016), industrial is action, poor income from agri-based livelihood, inadequate storage and processing facilities ((Nwaogwugwu, 2017), inadequate credit facilities, Heavy and dirty work, low return on investment, availability of employment alternatives (Khue, et al 2016 )

Himachal Pradesh is predominantly an agricultural State where Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries and Animal Husbandry provide direct employment to about 71 percent of the total population. Youth involvement in agriculture remains critical given the direct and indirect benefits of agriculture (Kwenye and Sichome, 2016). Poor participation of youth in agriculture and allied activities in the state of Himachal Pradesh has been a problem to agriculturists as well as administration. Integration of youth in agricultural activities is an important factor for overall agricultural and economic development because of their innovative attitude, physical strength and adapting to the latest technologies.
Though research has been conducted on youth involvement in agriculture, there are still knowledge gaps on factors limiting rural youth participation in agriculture-based livelihood activities. The present study is an attempt in this direction.

**OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

In general the broad objective of the investigation is to study rural youth participation in agriculture-based livelihood activities. However, more specifically the objectives of the study are:

- To identify pre-dominant agriculture-based livelihood activities rural youth participate in.
- To analyze the factors limiting youth participation in agriculture-based livelihood activities in the study area.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The present study was conducted in Karsog Tehsil of Himachal Pradesh and the population for the present study was the youths in the age group of 18-40 years. A sample of 250 youths was selected for the present study. It is fairly well-known from the available facets of the residents of Karsog that only certain segments of the population are of direct interest for the present study. As such the focus for collection of data has been on the subjectively, but the relevant segments of the population Pre-structured questionnaire developed by the researchers after reviewing previous works was used to determine the perceptions of youth respondents regarding factors constraining their participation in agriculture based livelihood activities. The questionnaire has statements graded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4= Agree and 5= Strongly Agree. Data was analyzed with the help of statistical tools like [percentage, ranking, standard deviation and mean.](#)

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

| Agricultural Activities | Involved | Not Involved | Ranking |
|-------------------------|----------|--------------|---------|
| Bee keeping             | 74 (29.6)| 176 (70.4)   | 3<sup>rd</sup> |
| Fishing                 | 25 (10)  | 225 (90)     | 9<sup>th</sup> |
| Crop farming            | 109 (43.6)| 141 (56.4)  | 1<sup>st</sup> |
| Trading agricultural inputs | 65 (26)  | 185 (74)     | 5<sup>th</sup> |
| Farm labor services     | 67 (26.8)| 183 (73.2)   | 4<sup>th</sup> |
| Livestock Rearing       | 86 (34.4)| 164 (65.6)   | 2<sup>nd</sup> |
| Transportation of agricultural products | 53 (21.2)| 197 (78.8)   | 6<sup>th</sup> |
| Processing of agricultural products | 37 (14.8)| 213 (85.2)   | 8<sup>th</sup> |
| Farm implements hiring services | 49 (19.6)| 201 (80.4)   | 7<sup>th</sup> |

*Note: Figures in parenthesis are in percentages.*

The results of the predominant agricultural based livelihood activities, youth participate in the study area (See Table 1) reveals that crop farming ranked 1<sup>st</sup> with a percentage count of 43.6 followed by livestock rearing which ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> with a percentage count of 34.4. Further, bee keeping (29.6 percentage) has been ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>, farm labor services 4<sup>th</sup> (26.8 percentage), trading agricultural inputs 5<sup>th</sup> (26 percentage) and transportation of agricultural products 6<sup>th</sup> (21.2). Furthermore, farm implements hiring services ranked 7<sup>th</sup> with 19.6 percent, while processing agricultural products has been ranked 8<sup>th</sup> with 14.8 percent. The 9<sup>th</sup> rank was recorded by fishing with a count of 10 percent. The overall results indicate
that youths in the study area do not significantly engage in agriculture based livelihood activities.

Table 2: Respondents’ Perceptions of Factors Limiting Youth Participation in Agriculture-Based Livelihood Activities

| Statements                                                        | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------|
| High input cost                                                   | 4.20 | 0.756         |
| Unfavourable agricultural policies                                | 3.54 | 0.788         |
| Monkey menace and stray animals                                   | 3.92 | 0.877         |
| Small land holdings                                               | 3.68 | 1.151         |
| Labor unavailability                                              | 2.70 | 1.199         |
| Poor return on investment                                         | 4.44 | 0.760         |
| Poor marketing structure                                          | 3.72 | 0.882         |
| Labor intensive nature of agriculture based livelihood activities  | 4.02 | 0.742         |
| Crop diseases                                                     | 2.70 | 1.199         |
| Poor access to agricultural insurance                             | 2.70 | 1.165         |
| Poor access to basic information pertaining to agriculture based livelihood activities/ poor extension services | 3.10 | 1.035         |
| Poor agricultural credit facilities                                | 3.08 | 1.291         |
| People will think I am not educated                               | 3.58 | 1.052         |
| Farmers are not respected                                         | 2.60 | 1.107         |
| No future in agriculture                                          | 3.32 | 0.844         |
| Highly risky                                                      | 3.42 | 1.230         |
| Inadequate infrastructural facilities to support farming activities | 3.50 | 0.839         |
| Unpredictable prices of agricultural produce                      | 4.22 | 0.764         |

Table 2 presents the factors limiting youth participation in agri-based livelihood activities in the study area. The result reveals that as a poor return on investment has scored the highest mean value (M=4.44) and thus is the most important factor limiting youth involvement in agriculture-based livelihood activities in the study area. The results further revealed that unpredictable prices of agricultural produce (M=4.22), high input costs (M=4.20) and labor intensive nature of agriculture based livelihood activities (M=4.02) are other important factors constraining youth involvement in agriculture based livelihood activities in the study area. Perusal of the data analysis reveals that monkey menace and stray animals (M=3.92), Poor marketing structure (M=3.72) and small land holdings (M=3.68) are also some of the major factors dissuading youth participation in agriculture and allied activities. Astonishingly youths do not want to get associated with agriculture since they fear that people will think that they are not educated (M=3.58) reflecting the societal view of agriculture. Table 2 shows that respondents in the study area lack favorable agricultural policies (M=3.54) that could encourage them to actively participate in agricultural production. Inadequate infrastructural facilities to support farming activities have also scored mean value above the standard mean (M=3.50) implying lack of basic infrastructure such as; hospitals, quality water supply, schools, good roads, transportation, communication, electricity supply etc in the study area. The inadequacy of Infrastructure facilities hinders on-farm, off-farm, rural and urban linkages and discourages participation in agriculture based livelihood activities. Agriculture-based livelihood activities are risky (M=3.42) due to seasonality, perish ability and variety of agricultural produce and thus might hamper the participation of respondents in the study area. Respondents have viewed that they have poor access to basic information pertaining to agriculture based livelihood activities (M=3.10). Poor extension services can limit youth involvement in agriculture based livelihood activities since the agricultural information dissemination system is a sin-qua-non to agricultural production. Access to
credit facilities is a motivation and poor agricultural credit facilities \((M=3.08)\) is a constraint in youth participation in the study area. Overall the findings reveal that there are economic and social factors limiting youth involvement in agricultural production in Himachal Pradesh. Economic factor includes inadequate credit facilities, low income from agric, unpredictable agricultural price and production inputs while social factors include people perception about farming.

**CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Despite government’s commitment and past interventions, agriculture sector has been unable to realize its full potential due to inadequate supportive infrastructure such as poor storage facilities, poor road network, inadequate supply of electricity; inadequate budgetary provisions; environmental degradation due to erosion; natural disasters such as flooding; weak producer organizations; lack of collateral and access to credit facilities; absence of a saving culture; ineffective marketing information; and lack of adequate and quality breeds of livestock and improved varieties of crops. Other major hindrances are inadequate research–extension linkages; illegal, weak monitoring, control and surveillance systems (Adebayo, 1999).

It is suggested that easy availability of loan for farm activities, training in plant protection measures, increased number of visit of agricultural and horticulture development officers to villages for giving the latest information about agricultural innovations, subsidy on seeds, fertilizers and pesticides etc, irrigation facility, properly and timely supply of inputs like improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides etc. thorough co-operative societies can encourage youth participation in agriculture-based livelihood activities. Extension services should be strengthened and the technology developed at the research station need to be delivered to the farmers.

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