

RESEARCH ARTICLE :

Determining youth as key stakeholder in agriculture and allied sectors - a panacea to curb the exodus of farm youth

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SUMMARY : Agriculture plays a critical role in future food security of our country. With global expectations, it should play a huge role in feeding the world population, which will likely exceed nine billion by 2050. Engaging rural youth in agriculture is the only key to meet the world's food crisis. But the perceptible unenthusiastic attitude of rural youth towards agriculture is a real concern and challenge to the future of agriculture in India. Considering this point of view, a study was conducted among 160 migrant rural youths and 40 non migrant rural youth with agricultural background. The empowerment needs demanded by them to return and retain in agriculture were earthed out in order to develop a perspective model on youth as key stakeholder in agriculture and allied sector. Technological needs like training on entrepreneurial skill development (86.87%), training on effective farm management (83.75%) and social empowerment needs like creation of credit and loan scheme for youth in agriculture (96.87%), formation of farm youth self help groups (90.62%) were the vital empowerment needs essential for the migrant rural youth to actively get involved in agriculture. For non migrant rural youth, technological needs like training on post harvest technologies (100%), training on farm diversification (95.00%) and social empowerment needs like inclusion/participation in programme planning related to agriculture and rural development (100%), creation of credit and loan scheme for the youth in agriculture (92.50%) were the foremost required empowerment needs.

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Rural youth is an important and vital segment of human resources in agriculture as they are the constructors of the future rural community. Their role in development of agriculture and rural economy is imperative. But the rising number of rural youth turning

their back on agriculture is alarmingly increased. They are more interested in going to cities for acquiring necessary skills for getting jobs in companies or corporate sector. Limited access to markets, assets, finance and infrastructure in rural areas, coupled with rapid growth and opportunities in urban areas

increasingly makes cities the obvious choice in the search for a better life. But farming is critical to future food security, with global expectations that it can and should play a huge role in feeding the world population, which will likely exceed nine billion by 2050. The exodus of rural youth means fewer small-scale farmers, today and tomorrow. Considering this issue, the present study has been conducted with the following objectives.

- To determine the empowerment needs of fully and partially migrated rural youth for attracting and retaining them back in agriculture.
- To determine the empowerment needs of non migrant rural youth for retaining them in agriculture
- To develop a perspective model on 'Youth As Key Stakeholder in Agriculture and Allied Sectors' (YAKSHA)

RESOURCES AND METHODS

Selection of study area and respondents :

The research was carried out in Coimbatore and Tirupur districts of Tamil Nadu by adopting an ex post facto research design during 2012-13. Coimbatore and Tirupur districts were selected as they are the major hubs of industrial activity, specifically manufacturing, indicating the influx of labourers from around the region and even other states. Tirupur stands third and Coimbatore stands fourth in Tamil Nadu in receiving the immigrants. The population decadal growth of Tirupur increased from 25.30 per cent to 28.70 per cent in 2001-11, while for Coimbatore it has increased from 17.00 per cent to 19.10 per cent (Census, 2011). The reason behind the increased population decadal growth is the prospect of migration in search of employment in these districts. On the prospect of agriculture, Coimbatore and Tirupur holds a net sown area of 180185 ha and 194079 ha, respectively (Season and Crop report of Tamil Nadu, 2010). They relatively possessed a considerable area under agriculture when compared to the other districts that were found to have a high population decadal growth (Kancheepuram, Thiruvallur, Madurai and Sivagangai districts). Thus, the factors namely, the population decadal growth and the considerable area under agriculture ideally supported this study.

Coimbatore district has 12 blocks and Tirupur district has 13 blocks, respectively. Two blocks have been selected from each district and a total of four blocks were selected based on key information from the officials

of the State Department of Agriculture, area under agriculture and scope of studying the issue of rural youth migration. Two revenue villages from each blocks were selected purposively based on the information provided by the State Department officials. From each revenue village, 10 fully migrated rural youth and 10 partially migrated rural youth with agricultural background were selected based on key informant method. A total sample of 160 rural youth in the proportion of 80 fully migrated rural youth and 80 partially migrated rural youth were interviewed in accordance with the objective. In addition to it, 40 non migrant rural youth *i.e.* five from each revenue village who are fully involved in agriculture were also interviewed to validate the purpose.

Statistical tools used :

Percentage analysis :

Percentage analysis was used in descriptive analysis for making simple comparisons for calculating percentages. The frequency of the particular cell was multiplied by 100 and divided by the total number of respondents pertaining to particular cell. Percentages were corrected to two decimal places.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The results obtained from the present study as well as discussions have been summarized under following heads :

Empowerment needs of migrant rural youth to return back and retain in agriculture :

Having understood the fact that lucrative factors in the urban areas influence the migration of the rural youth, it is also certain that proper developmental initiatives in the native rural areas may facilitate their retention or remigration. These developmental initiatives may predominantly include the need for technology, infrastructure, capacity building and other growth perspectives. Table 1 presents the empowerment needs required by the rural youth that would encourage their participation and retention in agriculture.

From the above table, it is explicable that 'training on entrepreneurial skill development' (86.87%) was the foremost preferred technological need required by the rural youth. The capacity building activities related to entrepreneurial skill development would probably create a positive image of farming as a dynamic agribusiness

by which youth can become entrepreneurs. Thus agribusiness might hold the solution for rural youth exodus and unemployment in rural areas.

The next preferred technological need was 'training on effective farm management' which was conveyed by 83.75 per cent of the rural youth. This would probably educate the youth on the art of effective use of farm resources and the process by which resources and situations should be manipulated with the available information in order to achieve the optimal functioning of the farming systems.

'Training on farm diversification' was the other technological need that was reported to be required by 83.12 per cent of the rural youth. This would provide knowledge and guide the youth to make suitable changes in the farming techniques for achieving maximum productivity in farming by judicious utilization of agricultural crops and other enterprises suited to a particular agro-climatic conditions, thereby minimizing risk and uncertainty in agriculture.

The technological need on access of information related to agricultural marketing was preferred by 80.00 per cent of the rural youth. This would help them to gain information about potential marketing linkages through market news and market intelligence. It would also facilitate in confident decision making for determining market opportunity and moving their produces to the market to fetch higher price.

Nearly 70.00 per cent of the rural youth preferred the technological need on post harvest technologies. This would enlighten them on the usage of optimum harvest factors, reduction of losses in handling, packaging, transportation and storage with modern infrastructure machinery, processing into a wide variety of products and home scale preservation with low cost technology. This would also lead to establishment of agricultural based rural industries.

Precisely, three-fourth (66.25%) of the rural youth preferred to get hands on training on contemporary agricultural technologies. This would strengthen their insight on various modern agricultural practices like maintenance of soil fertility through the specific provision of nutrients when they are depleted, machine power and technology, use of improved genetics for crops and livestock to enhance yields, use of modern genetic and other techniques to protect plants and livestock from competing diseases, insects, drought, salinity and other threats.

Finally, technological need on farm mechanisation was preferred by 60.62 per cent of the rural youth. This would enhance their expertise on improved farm implements and machinery used for different farm operations and timeliness of operations. It would also serve as the best solution to increase the productivity of land and labour along with reduction in loss of produce and drudgery of farmer.

Table 1 : Empowerment needs of migrant rural youth

Sr. No.	Empowerment needs	FM (n=80)		PM (n=80)		Total (n=160)		
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	Rank
Technological needs								
1.	Training on contemporary agricultural technologies	62	77.50	44	55.00	106	66.25	VI
2.	Training on entrepreneurial skill development	59	73.75	80	100	139	86.87	I
3.	Training on effective farm management	69	86.25	65	81.25	134	83.75	II
4.	Training on post harvest technologies	48	60.00	67	83.75	115	71.87	V
5.	Training on farm mechanisation	39	48.75	58	72.50	97	60.62	VII
6.	Training on farm diversification	80	100	53	66.25	133	83.12	III
7.	Training on access of information related to agricultural marketing	53	66.25	75	93.75	128	80.00	IV
Social empowerment needs								
1.	Access to productive agricultural resources	56	70.00	43	53.75	99	61.87	IV
2.	Agro - Industrial modernization	41	51.25	54	67.50	95	59.37	V
3.	Formation of farm youth self help groups	72	90.00	73	91.25	145	90.62	II
4.	Creation of credit and loan scheme for youth in agriculture	75	93.75	80	100	155	96.87	I
5.	Inclusion/Participation in programme planning related to agriculture and rural development	63	78.75	71	88.75	134	83.75	III

*Multiple responses

With respect to social empowerment needs, 'creation of credit and loan scheme for youth in agriculture', was the top most empowerment need required by 96.87 per cent of rural youth. The building of institutions based on the principle of cooperatives would go a long way in addressing the problem of waning credit and loan availability for economic activities in the primary sector.

Formation of farm youth self help groups was the next empowerment need required by 90.62 per cent of the rural youth. Self Help Groups are the key strategy to achieve financial inclusion on a significant scale. The formation of cooperative and local youth organizations in farming would make youth become an integral part of an economic activity thus paving a way out to the constraint of lack of finance.

Inclusion/participation in programme planning related to agriculture and rural development was the subsequent empowerment need expressed by 83.75 per cent of the rural youth. Organizational efforts like SHGs, youth clubs, cooperative societies etc., would create space for the rural youth to debate on issues and participate directly or indirectly in local and national priority setting, budget formation, and delivery of basic thus integrating farm youth into development.

This was followed by the other social empowerment need namely 'access to productive agricultural resources' for more than 60.00 per cent of the respondents. Access to productive agricultural resources like water for irrigation and livestock production, etc and access to

productive common property resources like poromboke lands, lands committed to nonagricultural use and grazing land along with would enhance self-esteem and confidence level of rural youth with very small land holdings. Thus control over productive assets would create a sense of belonging and owing which intun would enhance their strong participation in agriculture.

The finally preferred social empowerment need was 'agro - industrial modernization' which was reported by 59.37 per cent of the rural youth. The establishment of industries, factories and agro-businesses in the rural areas would serve as a means through which the primary produce can be processed into semi or finished goods. The creation of advanced storage facilities in rural areas would also help the farm youth to sell their produce at a more competitive price to the available industries and even for export.

The findings are quite similar to the study conducted by Nnadi *et al.* (2012).

Empowerment needs of non migrant rural youth to remain retained in agriculture :

The empowerment needs required by the rural youth involved in agriculture were collected based on a closed question format. The responses were subjected to percentage analysis and the multiple responses were ranked accordingly. The findings are tabulated in Table 2.

It could be construed from the above table that training on post harvest technologies (100%) was the

Table 2 : Empowerment needs of non migrant rural youth (n=40)

Sr. No.	Empowerment needs	No.	%	Rank
Technological needs				
1.	Training on contemporary agricultural technologies	31	77.50	V
2.	Training on entrepreneurial skill development	37	92.50	III
3.	Training on effective farm management	30	75.00	VI
4.	Training on post harvest technologies	40	100	I
5.	Training on farm mechanisation	19	47.50	VII
6.	Training on farm diversification	38	95.00	II
7.	Training on access of information related to agricultural marketing	35	87.50	IV
Social empowerment needs				
1.	Access to productive agricultural resources	17	42.50	V
2.	Agro - Industrial modernization	21	52.50	IV
3.	Formation of farm youth self help groups	23	57.50	III
4.	Creation of credit and loan scheme for youth in agriculture	37	92.50	II
5.	Inclusion/Participation in programme planning related to agriculture and rural development	40	100	I

*Multiple responses

prime technological need required by the rural youth involved in agriculture. This would help the farm youth to enhance the quality of the farm produce and make it readily marketable. On the macro level, it would also generate employment, reduce poverty and stimulate growth of other related economic sectors.

Training on farm diversification was the subsequent technological need preferred by 95.00 per cent of the rural youth involved in agriculture. This would stabilize and enhance the farm income, increase employment opportunities and conserve the natural resources in the rural areas.

More than 90.00 per cent of the respondents conveyed training on entrepreneurial skill development to be their preferred technological need. This would facilitate the successful value-added agricultural business development of the farm youth. It would also unleash the creativity and innovation of rural youth.

This was followed by the technological need related to market information and market intelligence namely 'training on access of information related to agricultural marketing' (87.50%). This would support the marketing decision making and marketing efforts of the young farmers thus increasing their ability to use the most appropriate channels for a profit.

The technological need on contemporary agricultural technologies was preferred by more than three-fourth (77.50%) of the rural youth involved in agriculture. The fusion of modern agricultural technologies with the traditional ones would improve the farm efficiency thereby paving way for a promising farm income.

Exactly three-fourth (75.00%) of the respondents conveyed training on effective farm management to be their ideal technological need. This would guide the young farmers on effective decision making in farming business that may be related with either cost minimizing or production maximizing issues, as the farm profit depends upon the total costs incurred in the farming.

Finally, training on farm mechanisation was preferred by 47.50 per cent of the respondents. Mechanization of farms would probably improve the production efficiency and it would also act as an alternative when labour shortage and labour wages are active constraints.

Concerning the social empowerment needs, 'inclusion/participation in programme planning related to agriculture and rural development (100%) was the foremost empowerment needs required by the rural youth.

Thus a forum that promotes the participation of youth and youth organizations in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger society would encourage their retention in their home community.

Creation of credit and loan scheme for the youth in agriculture (92.50%) and formation of farm youth self help groups (57.50%) were the subsequent social empowerment needs required by the respondents since it would resolve the crisis of insufficient access to credit facilities.

A considerable number of rural youth conveyed agro - industrial modernization (52.50%) and 'access to productive agricultural resources' (42.50%) to be their required social empowerment needs.

Unless certain measures are taken to eliminate the associated constraints in agricultural sector it would be difficult to stimulate the sustainable interest of rural youth towards agriculture. Thus essential strategies should be executed to satisfy the empowerment needs of rural youth which inturn would facilitate them to explore their full potential in agricultural production.

Prescriptive model on motivating 'Youth As Key Stakeholder in Agriculture and Allied Sectors' - (YAKSHA)

This prescriptive model (Fig.1) was constructed based on the contents derived from the field experiences and major research outcomes. This holistic model on motivating youth as key stakeholders in agriculture was framed with the following components namely

- Enabling environment, family and community structures
- Youth oriented agricultural extension
- Youth education and learning
- Youth enterprise and entrepreneurship

The purpose of this model was to recommend actions and initiatives that various stakeholders could pursue to encourage the active engagement of youth in agriculture. The stakeholders incorporated in the model are as follows.

- Family and community
- Central and State Government
- State Agricultural Universities
- State Department of Agriculture
- Micro-credit institutions and nationalized banks
- Private sectors in agriculture
- Non Governmental Organisations
- Information Communication Media

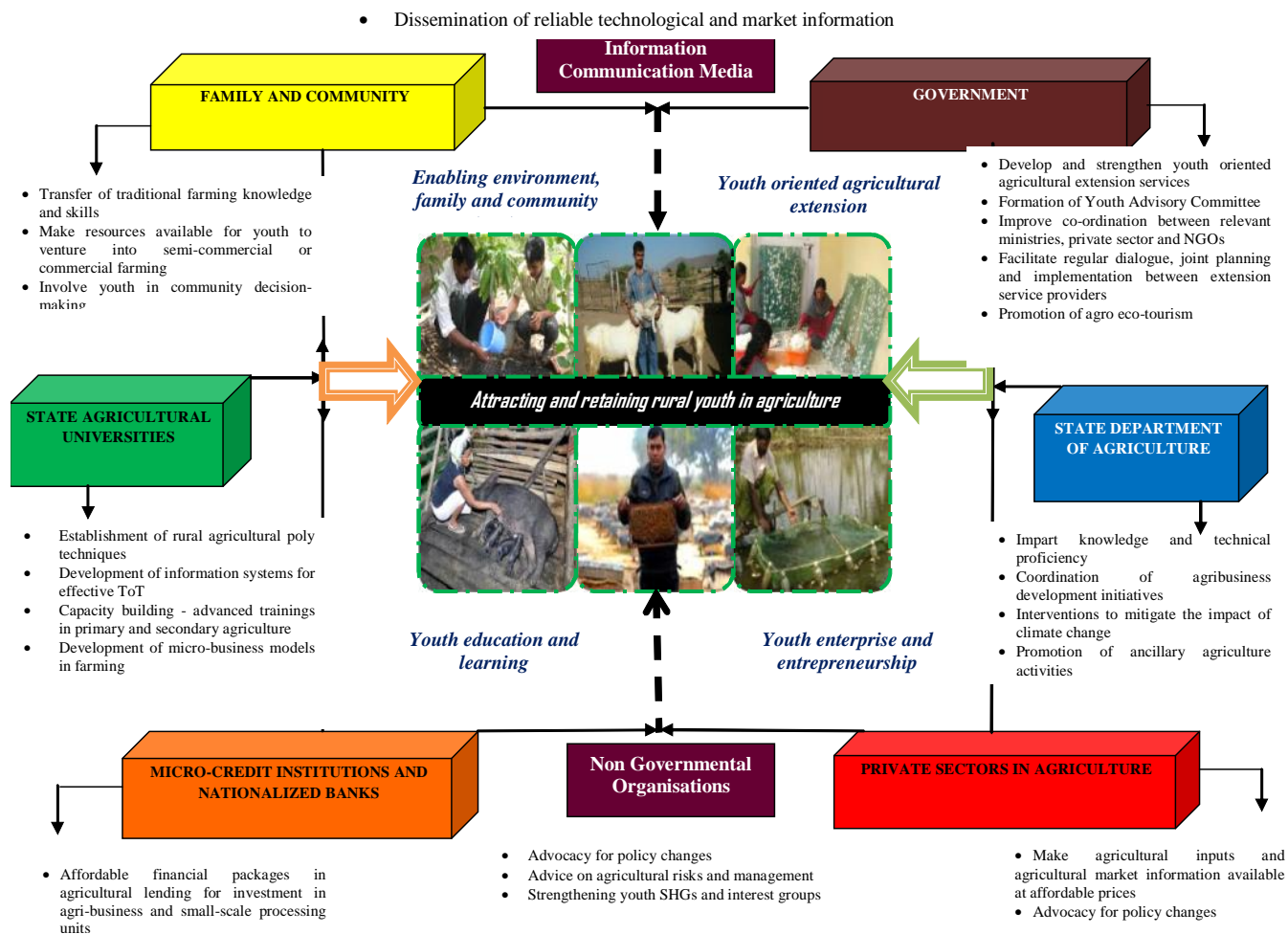


Fig. 1 : Prescriptive model on motivating 'youth as key stakeholders in agriculture and allied sectors' - YAKSHA

The recommendations of this prescriptive model suggests the need for a concerted effort at the family, community, regional and national level to mainstream the rural youth and encourage their participation in agricultural activities and enterprises. It highlights the role of various stakeholders of agriculture in articulating a new vision of agriculture that can be attractive to the rural youth. It emphasizes the need for ensuring their participation in every step of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation initiatives related to agriculture and allied sectors. It accentuates the need for providing them with the necessary skills, access to and control over resources in order to enable them to fulfill their individual, family and community needs through a career in agriculture. Thus this prescriptive would serve as an effective entry point for framing youth oriented policies to scientifically transform and revitalize the agricultural sector.

Conclusion :

This study on determining youth as key stakeholder in agriculture and allied sectors will support the policy makers, planners and development professionals have an insight into the the unfulfilled requirements of agrarian rural youth. The perspective model on ‘YAKSHA – Youth As Key Stakeholders in Agriculture and Allied Sectors’ would enlighten them to formulate special agricultural policies focusing on agrarian rural youth and thereby develop strategies to empower them, attract them and retain them in agriculture and thus ensuring a promising future for them in India.

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