How Can Uganda Keep Its Youths In The Farms?

The country with the youngest population in the world, Uganda, has seen its youths migrate to towns leaving behind ageing farmers and declining traditional agricultural systems. This coupled with the lack of adaptation to climate change have worsened the food security situation in the country. To reverse this trend, agriculture should become attractive to young entrepreneurs.

Youth unemployment in Uganda is the second highest in the world at 83% and towns are believed to offer the white collar jobs many young people are looking for. But job markets are extremely competitive, and young people from rural areas frequently lack the training and networks to compete for the limited number of decent jobs available. Many of them end up roaming the streets endlessly searching for non-existent jobs and turn to playing cards and gambling. Even university graduates often work as night guards and street vendors for lack of a better choice. As a result, most of the food consumed in Uganda is being produced by the elderly who continue using archaic traditional methods, leading to low productivity and food insecurity.

Boosting the agricultural sector to drive prices down, generating income and employment through investment and value-addition, adapting to the new challenges posed by climate change and increasing production to better feed the country requires the kind of boldness and openness to change that characterizes the youth.

Why have so many young people shun farming?

Traditional farming methods have a negative image and do not appeal to young people who consider it a poor man’s business that requires hard dirty work and barely provides a decent living. This is also reflected in the education system where agriculture is never the first choice and where teachers often use agricultural activities to punish undisciplined children. Moreover, agriculture in Uganda is mostly non-commercial, done by poor subsistence farmers far from the youth’s ideal of the successful businessman. When they nevertheless consider business opportunities in agriculture, too many bottlenecks remain for them to take the plunge.
Climate change is one of the major reasons for the apparent escalation of rural poverty and the rise in food prices. Erratic rainfalls and extreme weather events have increased farmers’ risks, inflicting them crop losses worth US$ 65 million annually and destroying rural infrastructure. As a result, the growing calendar has become unreliable and distorted the agro-marketing systems. For instance, markets are cut off, which facilitates exploitation by middle men who pay farmers badly.

Difficult access to credit and land are also major disincentives for aspiring agro-entrepreneurs who often limit themselves to elementary crop trading. Indeed, venturing into value addition requires scientific research and large capital investments that are inaccessible to them. Other bottlenecks include cumbersome procedures to set up a rural enterprise, lack or poor storage facilities, inefficient processing and distribution systems, and lack of modern rural infrastructure.

**Telling them about profitable rural businesses**

Yet, rural areas can offer attractive livelihood opportunities for young people, particularly those with an entrepreneurial spirit. There are currently many formally employed, educated and business-savvy people who are abandoning their lucrative jobs to venture into farming. Indeed, Uganda has a huge untapped potential for value addition in agricultural commodities and vibrant, high-yielding agri-business to attract young entrepreneurs.

In fact, rural employment opportunities are not limited to traditional farming and young people should be made aware that opportunities exist for profitable non-farm businesses and commercial farming. Successful agro-entrepreneurs could be role models for the youth. Interestingly, some argue that the current high agricultural commodity prices could spur resources and investment into rural areas, thus creating opportunities for young farmers and agro-entrepreneurs to access funds and establish profitable agribusinesses.

**What should the government do?**

The government has tried many measures to revive rural economies and attract young entrepreneurs. Among other interventions, it introduced better yielding crops, started reforms in agricultural education, improved access to micro-finance and services delivery including extension, granted tax waivers, reduced tariffs on farm inputs, and launched a Shs 25 billion Youth Entrepreneurship Venture Capital Fund as well as the “Prosperity for All” programme. The Plan for the Modernization of Agriculture (PMA) emphasizes the role of the private sector in agriculture and provides for a greater role of local governments in reviving their local rural economies.

![Some African agro-businesses have taken advantage of rural value chains, successfully attracting technology and business-savvy young people.](image-url)

However, in order to ensure that these commendable efforts do not miss their target, the following actions should be considered:

1. **Finance**: The government should channel the Youth Entrepreneurship Venture Capital Fund through local governments. In fact, the fund is currently managed from Kampala by DFCU bank, which disadvantages the rural youth in remote districts.

2. **Rural value chains**: There is a need to create ‘green rural cities’ through an integrated system in which agricultural production triggers agro-industries and services to become economically viable and persuade young people to stay in rural areas.

3. **Support services**: The government should not drop out of essential support services like extension, research and innovation, credit, agro-processing and marketing before making sure that the private sector is ready to take over.

4. **Education**: It is essential that the government reforms agricultural education to make it business-oriented and geared towards changing the mindset of the youth. This would motivate and encourage them to explore untapped opportunities in the agriculture sector.

**USEFUL RESOURCES**

Kiyaga-Nsubuga, J. *Addressing the Rural Development Problem in Uganda*
This paper discusses the potential for adaptation of the Japanese “One Village One Product” concept to Uganda’s poverty reduction and local development efforts.


**Plan for the Modernization of Agriculture (PMA) Secretariat**
Mukwasi House (3rd Floor), Plot 39-A Lumumba Avenue
P.O. Box 5675, Kampala, Uganda
Email: pma@pma.go.ug; Tel: +256-414-252-263