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Alluring youth bowing out of agriculture: An Indian perspective

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Abstract

India has the world's highest youth population. Although, there is an anticipation of dive in these numbers prior to the next decade from more than 34 percent to 24 percent of the total population that is 365 million amidst 2030. For the past 20 years 2035 farmers departed their ways everyday from being a main cultivator. The reduction in number of farmers at this pace will give rise to the food security challenges by the year 2035. Sadly, to the youngsters farming is not viewed as a prospective employment option due to numerous curbs faced by this sector. Factors which are responsible for the youth not to be attracted towards agriculture and the need of youth in agriculture are discussed in this article. Suggestions to allure the youth into agriculture and allied sectors are also postulated to provide them knowledge, safe space and support system by the government of India.

Keywords: Farmers, youth population, food security challenges and support system

Introduction

According to the United Nations and International Labour Organization (ILO), youth is defined as people who lie among the age group of 15 to 24 years and remarkably living in the developing countries. Whereas, in India National Youth Policy 2021^[12] operated by Government of India (GoI) suggested that youth is meant to be the people who are between the ages of 15 to 29 years (National Youth Policy, 2021)^[12]. The entire youth population escalated in India to 422 million in 2011 from 168 million in 1971 (GoI, 2017)^[6]. It was projected that by the year 2021 the youth population will reach to 464 million (Shivakumar, 2013)^[17]. For the time being, it is guesstimated that India has the world's highest youth population more than 34 percent of the total population. Although, there is an anticipation of dive in these numbers prior to the next decade to 24 percent that is 365 million amidst 2030 (National Youth Policy, 2021)^[12]. Tailed by China which consist of 269 million of youth population (MAYA, 2018)^[11]. According to the National Sample Survey revealed in 2005 that if a choice is given to five farmers to quit farming then out of five, two choose to quit. 76 percent of the farmers want to take up another vocation in place of farming and the rest 24 percent of the farmers who choose to continue the farming is merely because of the ancestral tradition (CSDS, 2014)^[3]. Nearly 15 million farmers tailed off since the year 1991 and 7.7 million since 2001. It can be deduced that for the past 20 years 2035 farmers departed their ways everyday from being a main cultivator. According to the data, farmers with farming as their primary occupation are about 95.8 million in numbers which is fewer than the 8 percent of the population. Even in the case where marginal farmers are included the percentage is still less than 10 percent of the total population (Sainath, 2013)^[15]. The reduction in number of farmers at this pace will give rise to the food security challenges by the year 2035 (Kumar *et al.*, 2019)^[7].

The average age of the Indian population is found to be 29 years whereas 55 years is the average age of farmers which indicate that young people are less likely to be involved in agriculture (Singh *et al.*, 2016)^[18]. Agricultural sector as a substantial proprietor of the country carry the responsibility of imparting the farmers a sustainable and secure livelihood. Sadly, to the youngsters farming is not viewed as a prospective employment option due to numerous curbs faced by this sector (Grubbstrom and Eriksson, 2018; May *et al.*, 2019; White, 2021)^[14, 9, 21]. People's perspective is needed to be altered to attract the youth in agriculture (Mahawar *et al.*, 2021)^[8]. Today, farmers are needed to be discerned as agri-preneurs and agriculture as an enterprise (Mitte, 2021)^[10].

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Why youth is not attracted towards agriculture

1. **Personal factors:** Farmer's personal reasons for avoiding agriculture as their livelihood were that they wanted to do any other work other than farming, they didn't want to involve their children in agriculture, they didn't want to work in difficult weather conditions, and they didn't want drudgery work (Kumar *et al.*, 2019) ^[7]. Farming is more likely to be abandoned by younger farmers, and research has shown that younger farmers are more mobile and more sensitive to wage disparities as compared to non-farmers (Sharma and Bhaduri, 2009) ^[16].
2. **Social factors:** The social factors responsible for the decline of farming as a livelihood include parental desire for their children to achieve social advancement through education; girls of the current generation don't want to marry farmers, lack of family support to continue farming, as well as lack of federal assistance. They do not consider farming as career (Kumar *et al.*, 2019) ^[7]. Young people are less interested in careers in agriculture due to the perception that agriculture is an outdated industry with low financial rewards (Paisley, 2013) ^[13].
3. **Economic factors:** Farmers who have lost their farming livelihood as a result of a void in agricultural production are: This is a profession with a considerable amount of financial risk since it is reliant on the natural world.
 - a. Cost-intensive production.
 - b. There is an insufficient supply of farm funds: The banks provide farmers with 50 percent or more of their farm loan needs (for land holdings of two or more hectares). In the case of farmers with less than a hectare of land, informal sources of funds such as money lenders account for 41 percent. Shopkeepers, relatives and co-operative societies are also important sources of financing. Farmers credit is hampered by unreliable land record information, a large proportion of short-term and long term agricultural financing is unbalanced, and there is insufficient access to crop insurance coverage (PRS India, 2017).
 - c. Farming is not a favorite pastime for small farmers, specifically, due to the risk involved. Since barely one-tenth of Indian farmers use insurance for risk management in agriculture, insurance companies should focus on strengthening their outreach to smallholder farmers (Birthal *et al.*, 2015) ^[2].
4. **Psychological factors:** Among the psychological factors identified was the fact that agriculture as a profession was viewed negatively, lack of enthusiasm in farming, lack of confidence in adopting scientific farm technology, an risk aversion (Kumar *et al.*, 2019) ^[7]. Experts believe that agricultural work is not intellectually rewarding since it does not require creativity or expression (Anonymous, 2011) ^[1].
5. **Marketing factors:** Agro-farmers were discouraged from farming due to market concerns such as inequitable returns due to an unorganized market structure, product prices being determined by the buyer rather than the producer, and middlemen dominating the market field in addition to the unfavorable government farm trade policies towards farmers (Kumar *et al.*, 2019) ^[7].
6. **Scanty labour:** Labour shortage due to industrialization, lack of skilled labour in agriculture, and negative impacts of MGNREGA on the availability of labour were factors that farmers considered when deciding whether to use agriculture as a livelihood (Kumar *et al.*, 2019) ^[7].

7. **Circumstantial factors:** In addition to insufficient storage facilities, insufficient irrigation facilities, and electricity scarcity, agricultural land holders suffer from land fragmentation. Farming mechanization is hindered by irregular-sized land parcels. Majority of the farmers in India are with small land holdings and on top of that landholdings being steadily splintering (GOI, 2014) ^[5].
8. **The upcoming generation:** The new generation does not want to get involved into agricultural sector as they prefer to settle down in urban areas after completing their higher education with no interest in farming. Lack of urban amenities dispirits them to settle down in rural areas (Kumar *et al.*, 2019) ^[7].

Why Should The Youth Step Into Agriculture?

- a. **Poverty Reduction:** In an agro-based economy like India, there can be no better way of reducing poverty than building a strong agricultural sector. The youth and those who have the access to education and infrastructure should venture into the sector and revive it from its troubled times.
- b. **Produce Young Entrepreneurs:** When tapped in the correct way, agriculture can prove to be a goldmine for entrepreneurs. The largely ignored sector needs young and educated brainpower that can put developmental research into practice to incentivize productive investment in small farm businesses. Young entrepreneurs would also bring with them advanced knowledge of production, thereby striving to get closer to the frontiers of technological advancement.
- c. **Application of Innovations:** A big problem with the system of Indian agriculture is that it is still heavily dependent on the climate. Young entrepreneurs who are expected to be more integrated with foreign techniques of production as compared to their aged counterparts would be keener to undertake innovation activities to reduce this over-dependence on climate. Though undertaking innovation can incur fixed cost, the benefits are more long-term in nature as they would increase the returns in future. Youth should step into the sector and work towards keeping it abreast with the latest methods that could help improves the sector. It can be achieved by :-
 1. **Converting agri-farmers to "agripreneurs":** Development departments should institutionalise youth-specific schemes facilitating unhindered access to financial services. Role of civil society bodies in organising the aspiring young men and women is equally important.
 2. **Value adding processing:** Value addition to agricultural produce by primary processing (cleaning, grading, packing whole or packing ready to cook normal or freeze-dried cuts) is known to cause an additional surge in income and employment.
- d. **Allied sectors:** With urbanization agriculture land is shrinking day by day allied sectors allied sectors like fisheries, bee keeping, animal husbandry can be beneficial for future farmers.

Suggestions to allure and engage youth in agriculture

1. **Revivify the rural economy:** By framing the agriculture sector in such a way that it will provide feasible and sustainable income generating opportunities. And by framing means providing the farmers with facilities of

customizable and real-time support. They can also be provided with the additional income generating support by the government via working in agriculture and alongside agricultural sector.

2. Youth entrepreneurship strengthening: In the avenue of this, integration of entrepreneurship education in the school curriculum should be involved. Financial support should also be provided to the youth for the startups.
3. Analyzing the youth related schemes and disseminating the knowledge among youth can also help to achieve the goal.
4. For the holistic development of the youth, an integrative value based education system should be in practice where along with academics skill development should be in concern.
5. By providing the youth knowledge, safe space and support system in agriculture and allied sectors.

Conclusion

Agricultural sector as a substantial proprietor of the country carry the responsibility of imparting the farmers a sustainable and secure livelihood. Sadly, to the youngsters farming is not viewed as a prospective employment option due to numerous curbs faced by this sector. People's perspective is needed to be altered to attract the youth in agriculture. Today, farmers are needed to be discerned as agripreneurs and agriculture as an enterprise. For the young people there are ample of possibilities to be scouted because they possess creativity and the power to transform agriculture via innovations. Presently, it is required to devise relevant policies and strategies for alluring and keep youth in Indian agricultural sector. Currently several public and private endeavors are paving the way to animate and anchorage the youth in agriculture. Sufficient public investment in agriculture, improved policies and their subsistent regulation along with corroborating the youth participation in India's agriculture revival will lead to the nation's development. To allure the youth various steps should be taken by the government to avail them with knowledge, a better and safe space and support system in agriculture and allied sector.

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