



YOUTH INCLUSION IN AGRICULTURAL MARKETING CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES IN RUANGWA DISTRICT, TANZANIA

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Abstract

Promoting youth inclusion in Agricultural Marketing Co-operative Societies (AMCOS) can contribute to co-operative development. The study explores factors affecting youth inclusion in Agricultural Marketing Co-operative Societies in Ruangwa District, Tanzania. Specifically, the study explored youth access to education and training on AMCOS; and secondly, it determined social and economic related factors affecting youth inclusion in AMCOS. The study adopted exploratory research design that involved 66 respondents who were not members of the Agricultural Marketing Co-operative Societies in Ruangwa District. Purposive sampling was employed to obtain the respondents. Focus group discussion was employed to gather primary data. While content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data whereby actual statement of the key informants were reported to counter argue the quantitative data. The study found that youth access to education and training in agricultural co-operatives was a key motivation for youth to join Co-operatives. Access to land and capital was also mentioned as another motivational factor for the youth to join co-operatives. On gender perspective, deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and practices were reported among the contributing factors to low youth and women participation in co-operatives societies. The study concludes that access to education and training to youth might render into positive participation in AMCOS. The study recommends to policy makers to create enabling environment for youth to be involved in co-operatives. The study recommends the elders to improve access to capital and land among youth. Similarly, co-operative societies should conduct training to youth concerning co-operative development and for youth to establish their councils in order to promote the co-operative sectors.

1. Introduction

Worldwide, youth are estimated to be 1.2 billion aging between 15 and 24 years. The 2012 statistics however shows that in 2012, 75 million youth were unemployed. For those working, over 200 million earned less than US\$ 2 a day. According to (2012) ILO report, youth were almost three times likely to be unemployed than adults who were 75% (ILO, 2012). Promoting youth inclusion in Agricultural Marketing Co-operative Societies (AMCOS) makes good sense for the youth to appreciate the role of AMCOS, since; a personal involvement in AMCOS not only shapes the present status of any country, but they will also profoundly determine their future in terms of co-operative development. Secondly, young people are at a stage in life that is characterized by a high capacity to learn and acquire skills, positive attitudes towards participation in the co-operative society. Thirdly, investing in young people has inter-generational benefits that can create powerful agents for change. Lastly, but not least, the exclusion of youth from co-operatives generates tremendous social and economic costs to the society and may even lead to social and political unrest (Dessaegn, 2012).

In developed countries, there is a growing recognition of ensuring adequate inclusion of young people in agricultural co-operatives and their active participation in decision-making processes. But there is poor involvement of youth in agricultural co-operatives due to misperceptions and lack of information and awareness. In this, the Germany situation differs greatly from that of the Dutch in comparison. In Dutch Co-operatives; youth councils are established as one way to actively involve young people (Sloot, 2016). They function as a vehicle that can benefit Co-operatives and youth in many ways. A youth council provides the following benefits: one, creating and enhancing member commitment; second, providing youth with a voice; third, gaining the vision

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and opinions of youth on internal Co-operative affairs; and fourth, creating a breeding ground or a so-called 'nursery' for future AMCOS leaders (Sloot, 2016).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the demographic changes are alarming. In 2015, 226 million youth aged 15-24 lived in Africa, accounting for 19% of the global youth population. By 2030, it is expected that the number of youth in Africa will have increased to 42% (UNDESA, 2013). A significant proportion of rural youth are underemployed or unemployed, have marginal income, or limited career prospects which might be due to inactive participation in AMCOS (AGRA, 2015). Engaging youth in agricultural co-operative could provide a win-win solution to both these development problems, and agricultural Co-operatives have an important role to play (Hartley and Johnson, 2014).

Being co-operative members can offer youth opportunities they would not be able to access as individuals. The benefits extend to the Co-operatives as well: young women and men and can sustain agricultural Co-operatives and bring new ideas and technologies. By doing that, timely interventions directed at young people are more likely to yield a greater return for the sustainability of the co-operative development than attempts to build these capacities later in the life cycle. Targeting youth, however, requires addressing the multidimensional barriers to inclusion they face (Gasana, 2011).

In Uganda, youth inclusion is passive and declining in Agricultural Marketing Co-operative Societies (Gemma *et al.*, 2013). The challenges and prospects of youth engagement in agricultural co-operative in Uganda using the 2005-06 and 2009-10 National Panel Survey data dropped from 73.2% to 24.2% between 2005-06 and 2009-10 for the cohort aged 18-30 in AMCOS. The common perception in Uganda is that youth dislike AMCOS, and do not see it as a viable future. This stems from real concerns as youth move into other services. For instance, youth women typically have no focus in participating in Agricultural Marketing Co-operative Societies (Gemma *et al.*, 2013).

In Tanzania, an Agricultural Marketing Co-operative Society is a rural area-oriented sector mostly practiced by the elders whose average age is above 50 years (Hartley, 2014). This might be because the Tanzanian youth are moving from rural to urban areas in large numbers in search for office jobs. The urban areas, however, cannot generate enough jobs to cater for the need of the growing population which has led to high levels of youth unemployment (UNDP, 2011). Ruangwa District is blessed with fertile soil, adequate rainfall and medium size flowing streams, used for agricultural activities. It has a population of 29,875 youth but those who were participating in Agricultural Co-operatives were almost 4, 274 (District Co-operative Report, 2020). The government of Tanzania has invested funds to support agricultural development through youth inclusion. Despite the substantial investment by the government, as well as by the development partners, young people in Ruangwa District have not embraced the opportunities to engage in AMCOS; instead, they engage in selling their small inherited land to join the famous motor cycle business commonly known as "boda-boda". With this background, this paper aimed at assessing the factors affecting youth inclusion in Agricultural Marketing Co-operative Societies (AMCOS) in Ruangwa District. The paper had the following specific objectives: first, examine youth access to knowledge and training on agricultural co-operatives; second, determine the social and economic related factors for youth inclusion in the co-operative sector.

2. Methodology

The paper adopted an exploratory research design. The study was conducted in Ruangwa District represented by three wards namely Nkowe, Nandagala and Likunja. The choice of the area was because there were many youth who were about 29, 875 in a selected ward but only 4274 youth participating in agricultural co-operatives compared to other districts in Lindi Region (District Co-operative Report, 2020). The remaining population was reluctant to participate in AMCOS. Data were collected using Focus Group Discussion (FGD) whereby eight (8) focus group discussions were conducted. For this explorative study, purposive sampling was used to obtain the respondents whereby young women and men between the ages of 18 to 35 were selected. A sample of 66 youth took part, of which 33 were women and 33 were men and 11 respondents were selected from three wards. Data were analysed thematically whereby actual words discussed during FGD were reported.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Youth access to education and training on agricultural co-operative

During discussions with respondents from Nkowe ward, access to knowledge and training was mentioned as a key motivation for youth to become members of co-operatives. Peer-to-peer learning was highly valued especially; intergenerational exchange was appreciated. It was found out that youth were unable to access training opportunities because they were not often organized into groups, nor were they members of Agricultural Marketing Co-operative Societies (AMCOS) where they can have a place to exchange and have knowledge on different issues on agricultural co-operatives. Donors and NGOs tend to work with farmers who are either in groups or co-operatives societies (Runna, 2012). This makes management and monitoring of their agricultural programmes easier (Runa, 2012). By joining co-operative societies, young farmers can access education and training which would not easily be accessible to them as individual farmers. Co-operatives would, as well, opportune them to access knowledge from external sources. They would also gain access to the generational exchange of knowledge as well as peer-to-peer learning which can be very effective and influential. With access to knowledge and training young farmers can be role models to each other (inside and outside of the co-operative societies). On the issue of sharing their knowledge, one female farmer said:

"..... A passion for farming is not enough; you need to have the opportunity to learn from others." Nkowe ward. 12/8/2021.

However, both gender requested mostly technical skills training concerning agricultural co-operative societies. Though respondents perceived value of the education and training differed between young women and men. Women felt that training allowed them to meet new people or make them more employable in their sector. However, they said that household responsibilities constrained their mobility, making it harder to attend education and training provided by co-operatives societies. On the other hand, 30% of young men were more interested in farming technology to improve the quality and quantity of their agricultural produce.

3.2 Social and economic factors determining youth inclusion in AMCOS

3.2.1 Youth access to land

Access to land is also mentioned as a motivation for the youth to join AMCOS so that they can engage in agricultural activities and other economic opportunities. During discussions, the youth suggested that elders should provide them with the possibility to lease land for agriculture-based activities. The finding is in line with that of FAO *et al.*, (2014) which reported that co-operatives in Burkina Faso have lobbied village chiefs to convince them to give land to young women in their communities. This is among the co-operative study with successful examples of supporting youth in access to land. The benefit of engaging youth in co-operatives by providing access to land would increase membership, the volume of produce, and the sustainability of the Co-operative societies in the area.

3.2.2 Gender perspective

In Ruangwa district, like other places, gender discrimination was among the constraints for youth inclusion in co-operative societies due to deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and practices which affect mainly female youth. Due to higher social status and expectations, there is gender discrimination whereby male youth dominate public spaces, including formal groups like co-operatives. By perpetuating the practice automatically, it leads female youth not to access financial services which make them hard to meet AMCOS membership conditions. A key constraint, mentioned by female youth interviewed, was the heavy burden of household responsibilities that they faced often making it harder to join AMCOS. During FGD, female youth expressed that whilst the co-operative societies had been encouraging a selling culture of their produce, they still felt the risk to pay the capital share (a prerequisite for co-operative membership), due to their household responsibilities.

3.2.3 Youth mistrust

The study highlighted a considerable degree of mistrust among youth towards agricultural co-operative societies due to corruption and discrimination. The respondents said that mistrust among youth towards their peers (other youth), inhibited their ability to join Co-operative societies since the Co-operative ethical values include no corruption and discrimination whereby male youth believed favouritism was involved when people were selected to take on decision-making roles within the co-operative societies which demoralize others to participate in AMCOS.

3.2.4 Youth perception

Another social factor refraining youth inclusion in co-operative societies is perception. In Tanzania, the term 'co-operative' had such a negative connotation which makes some Co-operatives not even use the term (Heifer Tanzania, 2017). For example, some co-operatives use the term 'hubs' instead of co-operatives, as this term appears to be more appealing to youth. An interesting finding was the different perspectives of board members

and managers compared to youth farmers. During the discussion, youth questioned about the honesty of board members and managers in the available co-operatives in the district and felt that they are not taken seriously. One of the members from Likunja Cashewnuts co-operative society said that; *“If you do not train the youth on the fundamentals of a Co-operative issue, they join and go for quick wins. They will tell the board that they should sell off some assets for quick wins. So, it is important to include youth from a young age so that they will have a better understanding of how the Co-operative works”*. Likunja ward 17/8/2021.

3.2.5 Access to capital

Access to capital was among the economic factors affecting youth inclusion in co-operative societies. The study found that engagement of youth farmers in co-operative societies was constrained by their capacity to start up their agribusiness whereby lack of capital to buy agricultural inputs, farm management and looking for better markets for their produce discouraged the youth to participate in AMCOS. In this explorative study, the emphasis was for co-operatives societies to offer some opportunities for youth to access loans at a lower interest rate. However, according to the youth interviewed, these loans might often not be enough to start up their own business; at best, the amounts are enough to purchase inputs. In short, youth perceive access to capital as benefits of co-operative society's membership, when in fact their engagement in Co-operative societies is constrained by the lack of accessibility to capital.

4. Conclusion

Agricultural Marketing Co-operative Societies are organizations that should offer to the youth opportunities that they would not be able to access as individuals. Also, access to education and training is seen as a key benefit and the main reason for youth to disregard co-operative societies. If they can access education and training through AMCOS without a sense of stigmatization the possibility of youth to effectively engage in co-operative societies is high. In particular, peer-to-peer learning and intergenerational exchange are of great value to youth members. Co-operative societies have many benefits to increasing youth membership and ensuring they actively participate. Despite the benefits provided by co-operative societies the youth interviewed concluded that raising awareness among board members and other co-operative societies members, access to land, access to capital, youth trustfulness and reduction of the co-operative connotation to the benefits of youth inclusion could increase the likelihood that youth will be provided with leadership opportunities to build their self-confidence and mobilize themselves in groups.

5. Recommendations

To address some of the constraints (e.g. access to education and training, land, capital etc.) that limit youth inclusion in AMCOS in general, the involvement and commitment of range of stakeholders (e.g. policy-makers, youth themselves, co-operative societies, and knowledge and research institutions). The policymakers should recognize the heterogeneity and potential of youth and the specific socio-cultural and political contexts that impact their opportunities to access capital and improve access to land. Agricultural Marketing Co-operative Societies should promote youth engagement in agricultural Co-operatives through the provision of education and training on co-operative development. This form of exposure could raise awareness of how a co-operatives function and the benefits of being a member from an early age. Also, AMCOS should facilitate a peer-to-peer or mentoring system where (groups of) older farmers and youth farmers learn from each other. In order to stimulate and attract youth to join AMCOS, youth themselves should sensitise older members to advise the youth farmers (in some cases also their children) on the importance of being members of the AMCOS at individual and family levels. On the other hand, youth should establish savings groups linked to the AMCOS, where each member regularly deposits a sum of money which can then be borrowed. Also, youth should facilitate (informal) exchange visits between youth farmers who are co-operative members and non-member farmers to increase awareness about co-operative membership.

Research institutes should carry out further research on youth inclusion in co-operatives societies through social and gender relations by building an evidence base on the following questions: Does the input of youth lead to more information and Communication Technology use in Co-operatives? Is there evidence that youth farmers are early adopters of new technologies and may influence the speed of technology adoption? Carry out comparative analysis on different organizational structures (e.g. Co-operatives, networks, associations, groups) and how they contribute to youth inclusion. Identify business opportunities for youth, considering their constraints and assets and develop cost-effective models for supporting youth entrepreneurs, conduct research on best practices of agricultural co-operatives societies in supporting youth to gain access to land and financial services.

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