

Dynamics and Encounters of Rural Youth Farming: Experiences and Lessons from Kabete Lari Sub-County, Kenya

¹*Abigael Asiko Kutwa, & ²Peter Gutwa Oino*

¹Farm Shop, Kenya, P.O Box 364-00100, Nairobi, Kenya

²Centre for Africa Research, Policy and Innovation, P.O Box 1861-30100, Eldoret, Kenya

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¹Farm Shop, Kenya, P.O Box 364-00100, Nairobi, Kenya

²Centre for Africa Research, Policy and Innovation, P.O Box 1861-30100, Eldoret, Kenya

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by the youth themselves, high pressure on arable land, lack of access to credit and many other productive resources necessary for rural farming. This paper focuses on the dynamics and encounters of rural youth farming in Kabete Lari sub-county. The study adopted the sustainable livelihood theoretical framework. The researchers employed a mixed research design method. A sample size of 111 rural youth farmers were selected through simple random sampling. Parent farmers were conveniently sampled for the interviews and focused group discussions. Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively using SPSS version 21.0 while qualitative data was analyzed thematically. The study found that 70% of the rural youth engaged in farming in the study area. Over 80% of the rural youth engaged in rural farming were able to meet their daily basic needs and save some money in SACCOs for future investment. More so 65% of the rural youth engaged in farming, preferred dairy farming. Despite many achievements, rural youth also faced some constraints in rural farming particularly, during post-production due to unavailability of ready markets for their products. The study concluded that youth farming was offering a wide potential for rural youth by creating employment, encouraging savings, reducing food expenses and encouraged self-reliance among themselves, however not many rural youth engaged in farming activities. The study recommends that government should sensitize, provide financial, technical support and mainstream rural youth in venturing into farming for the realization of substantive sustainable livelihoods.

1.1 Introduction

FAO, (2014) estimates global population to reach 9 billion by 2050. While the current population of young people aged 12-24 is about 1.3 billion, their population is projected to escalate to 1.5 billion in 2035, and it will increase most rapidly in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and Southeast Asia by 26% and 20% respectively between 2005 and 2035 (UNDESA, 2011). Of the 1.3 billion youth population, approximately 55% of youth, reside in rural areas, but this figure is as high as 70% in SSA and South Asia (FAO, 2014). In SSA, young people aged 15-24 comprise 36% of the entire labour force, 33% in the Near East and North Africa and 29% in South Asia (ILO, 2010).

Abstract

Globally, the rural youth are the future of food security and sustainability, yet only a few of them see a future in rural agriculture. Unfortunately, many governments and interventionists have not taken rural youth in farming seriously as they are considered uninterested stakeholders, since majority especially those educated opt for white collar jobs in urban areas. In Kenya, despite concerted efforts by various stakeholders to involve rural youth in agricultural activities, less has been achieved due to lack of interest

Further, Africa has the youngest population in the world and each year 10-12 million of its young people seek to enter the continent's workforce without success (Sanginga, 2015).

In any given society, the youth constitute the most important sector. Apart from being a major source of manpower for socio-economic development of the society, the youths serve as conduits for the diffusion of culture and the perpetration of a people's recognizable identity. Throughout the world, agriculture contributes 70% of food security and 40% of job creation especially for rural dwellers (White 2012). In order to achieve sustainable food security, the rural youth should be considered as the future of

food security. Though, only a few rural youth see a future for themselves in rural agriculture (FAO, 2014). According to Njenga et al. (2012) the youth find agriculture unattractive due to the time and input investment as the traditional staples are slow to mature, risky and often yield low Agriculture output.

Insufficient innovations for rural youth have led to reliance on traditional and arduous labour based production techniques and concentration on a narrow range of agricultural commodities—mainly staple crops (Irungu et al. 2015). The flow of information on agricultural production and marketing to youth has also been hampered by under-utilization of information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Njenga et al. 2012). In many rural areas, agricultural knowledge and farming know-how are passed on from parents to children. However, a survey carried out in the Pacific indicates that rural youth feel that such advice should be provided in a more coordinated and effective way, rather than on an informal basis (PAFPNet, 2010).

As Kurlsky (1976) observed, rural youths are a young category with peculiarities which differentiate them from their urban counterparts. They are usually a social and economic disadvantaged clutch, whose weak capability doesn't allow them to realize their aspirations in the social strata. However, because of their outstanding level of contribution to family labour, they also constitute a moving force in the development of their communities.

As White, Tafere & Woldehanna (2012) observe, lack of interest of the youth in agriculture has two main aspects. One is that the youth tend to harbour 'occupational aspirations' beyond the farm, because non-agricultural careers promise to be less back-breaking, more stable and more remunerative (Tafere and Woldehanna, 2012). Furthermore, in some countries, formal schooling as practiced teaches young people not to pursue farming as a career (Juma, 2007). According to White (2012) this forms part of a more general downgrading of rural life, which (Bryceson 1996) observed as an assault on rural cultures that go beyond education through global consumerism.

In the contemporary context, Mathivha (2012) finds that the common perception is that due to the rural youth's investment in primary and secondary education, many of the rural youth remaining in the countryside are more educated than their parents' generation and are often less satisfied with a strictly agricultural life. They see agricultural sector as unattractive because of this assumption, which tends to ignore other professional and entrepreneurial opportunities across the value chain. Additionally, FAO, (2014) notes that the rural youth face many obstacles in trying to earn a livelihood. For example, rural youth are unable to pursue agriculture for lack of access to, or control over, productive assets, especially land (Deshingkar, 2009). Proctor & Lucchesi (2012) found, in densely populated countries such as Ethiopia, Uganda and Rwanda, land is highly fragmented and laws countries prohibit any further division of land. In actual fact, this means that the eldest son is the sole family heir and the final decision maker on land usage (IFAD, 2010).

We argue that rural youth's access to knowledge and information is crucial for addressing the main challenges they face in agriculture. In order for rural youth to shape rural innovations and agricultural policies affecting them directly, they need to receive appropriate information and education. Notwithstanding, their potential to spur rural agriculture, rural youth in developing countries make up a very large and vulnerable group that is seriously affected by the current international economic crisis. Most rural youth are either employed and/or not in the labour force. In Kenya for instance, Okello (2014) finds that rural youth are increasingly disinterested in smallholder farming and tend to travel to urban centers and increasingly, across international borders in search of employment.

According to FAO (2011), increased land degradation has further limited the arable land available for young people. Prakash-Mani (2013) notes despite the encounters rural youth in smallholder farming are facing, they should be given priority in rural agriculture. Economic opportunities exist, but formal jobs and waged employment are still largely elusive (AEO, 2012). In the past decades, development programs have

tended to focus on employment growth in the formal sector, training young people for specific jobs that may not necessarily exist, mainly owing to the private sector's limited capacity to absorb all potential job seekers (Filmer & Fox, 2014), this is done at the expense of youth engagement in rural agriculture. The veracity is that only a few of Africa's young people currently find wage employment in the formal sector and the vast majority partake a blend of casual employment and agriculture-related activities (Wallace, 2017).

On financial terms, while they are important and have become increasingly available to poor farmers, there is still much to be achieved to improve the availability of financial services to rural youth in agricultural and rural enterprises (Dalla, 2012). In both developed and developing countries, most Financial Service Providers, provide insufficient savings or insurance services for youth, focusing more on credit, despite the fact that savings remain extremely important to youth for building up assets for investments and insurance (FAO, 2012). Rural youth often rely on informal sources, particularly from family and friends for financial access (Dalla, 2012).

Despite increased public commitments to evidence-based rural youth policy in African agriculture, too often, the imperative to address them quickly through policy and programmes, become separated from evidence and understanding. When this happens, policy advocates, policymakers and development planners rely heavily on common knowledge and narratives to develop and argue policy alternatives. While this may be virtuous or expedient politics, it is unlikely to result in effective policy and development outcomes, particularly when the problems being addressed are associated with complex phenomena such as poverty, livelihoods, agrarian transitions, social justice or sustainability.

Regrettably, this is the position we find ourselves in today in relation to the youth and agriculture problem in Africa. The World Development Report (WDR) (2007) on youth reports that youth policies often fail. Youth policies in developing countries have frequently been criticized for being biased towards non-poor youth living in

rural areas. Given the paucity of youth support services in many countries, they tend to be captured by non-poor youth (Bryceson, 2008). But youth face many encounters in trying to earn a livelihood from agriculture. Pressure on arable land is high making it difficult to start new farms by the youth interested in primary agricultural commodity production. White (2012) points out that youth participation in agriculture is paramount in producing more food, feed and fiber to support its growing needs.

In Kenya, youth are not largely involved in agricultural activities due to the fact that selection of agriculture as a career is hampered with misunderstandings and a lack of awareness and information. Factors contributing to this include inadequate information of careers available in the agricultural sector, poor wages in the agriculture compared to other sectors, and the manual aspects of work in the sector (Muthee, 2010). Globalization and the demographic trends are adversely affecting the agriculture sector making the youth to be susceptible to food insecurity.

The vulnerability of the youth is further exacerbated by other trends witnessed such as changing weather patterns and rising food prices (Muthomi, 2017). Although youth and agriculture has gained considerable prominence as a policy issue in recent years, the construction of both the problem and policy responses are hampered by a lack of analysis that is theoretically and evidence based, conceptually sound and context sensitive; a very weak base of empirical research relating to either the nature of the problem or the potential impacts of particular policy responses (Bennel, 2010). From a scholarly perspective, it is important to ask how common rural youth policy responses and the framings, narratives and assumptions that underpin them, articulate with ongoing economic, social and political transitions and with young people's own imperatives, aspirations, strategies and activities in farming.

From an interventional context, youth are engaged in farming activities as a source of income because of the current state of many nations including high youth population, youth unemployment. Gella (2014) observed that rural

youths in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya practice smallholder farming as the last resort. For instance, in Nigeria as observed by Aphunu (2010), though the young population is identified as the major resource base for agricultural input, the youth are not interested to participate in agriculture. In Uganda, Mugisha & Nkwasiwe (2014) indicated that youth pull out from agricultural enterprises more often than the older generation. This shift is more prominent in the educated youth who migrate to the urban centres to look for jobs (Gemma, 2013). Moreover, lower percentage of youth use improved input and this leads them in subsistence farming. Youth who engage in agriculture also have poor adoption rates of appropriate agricultural inputs leading to low productivity which further constraints the youth to engage in farming (Kasolo, 2013).

As more evidence streams on youth in farming, different dynamics are being observed on youth engagement in farming that is different from the traditional methods used by old farmers. In recent times a good proportion of youths are engaging in smallholder farming as a source of livelihood despite their level of education. While this is the case the question which needs to be answered is whether smallholder farming offers the rural youths a viable source of income and livelihood (FAO, 2012).

Lipton (2005) and Wiggins (2009) discussed smallholder farming as farming operating with less assets and on land less than 2 acres. As Okoye (2009) asserts, that smallholder farming is technically more efficient than large scale farming because it is manageable especially to rural youth. The youth are expected to increase their input in agricultural activities for the world to increase its food production and become food secure (Proctor & Lucchese, 2012). Similarly, youth labour is required to enhance the income that rural farmers received from agriculture and also to enhance economic development in the rural communities (Muthomi, 2017). Rural youth are characterized by great physical strength, risk taking attitude, openness to change and creativity which are critical in advancing new technology in agriculture (Umeh et al. 2011).

Kising'u (2016) observed that youth in Kenya are a critical component of the productive population and their input can be harnessed to enhance economic development through their participation in agriculture. FAO (2006) had observed that Kenyan youth had not embraced agriculture as they perceived it as an activity for the elderly, poor, illiterate rural folks. However, the input of the youth is critically required to enable them to replace the elderly and ageing farmers (Valerie, 2009). Moreover, Gitau (2011) opined that rural youth have the ability to overcome most of the challenges facing agriculture such as genetic improvement, pest control and adoption of new technology. This is because the youth are open to new ideas and can experiment with new practices. Therefore, this study is important to unravel this.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the agricultural sector's vibrancy in providing income-generating opportunities for rural youth, encounters related to youth participation in the sector, and more significantly, options for overcoming them, are not extensively documented. Studies such as (Okello, 2014; Afande et al. 2015; and Njenga et al. 2014) have documented low participation of youth in rural farming. Yet, there have been little interventions for addressing the problem. Moreover, statistical evidence on rural youth are often lacking as data is rarely disaggregated by important variables such as age, sex, education and geographical setting. Unfortunately many governments including Kenya and agricultural interventionists have not taken rural youth in farming seriously as they are considered uninterested stakeholders, since majority of rural youth especially those educated opt for white collar jobs in urban areas. It is on this backdrop, this paper investigates the dynamics and encounters of rural youth farming in Kabete Lari sub-county, Kenya.

3.0 Research Methodology

Descriptive survey design provided a road map for this study. Descriptive design involved data collection by use of interviews and administering copies of a questionnaire to youth farmers. This design has been supported by Connie (2008) who attests that it is used to obtain information

concerning the current status of a phenomenon in this case the trends of youth farming. Youths smallholder farmers the ones existing in farm shop data base formed the target for this study. According to the database 125 youths from 114 households were trained in Muguga, Nyathuna and Gitaru locations in Kabete constituency Lari sub County. A total of 111 youth were accessed by the study. The choice of this population has been guided by Kombo and Tromp (2006) on choosing existing data from a representation of your study population.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

This section presents findings of the study as obtained from the field and more focus is on dynamics and encounters of rural youth in the

study area. The researcher was first interested in the age of youth involved in farming activities.

4.1 Age of youth farmers

The researcher was interested in the age of youth farmers. The results are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 4.1 Response on Age

Age bracket	Frequency	Percentage
17 and below	3	2.7%
18-23	15	13.5%
24-29	56	50.5%
30-35	37	33.3%
Total	111	100%

Table 4.1 above clearly indicates that more than half 50.5% of the youths who engaged in farming were aged between 24-29 years, a good proportion 33.3% were aged between 30-35 a small number 13.5% were between the age of 18-23 years and a minority 2.7% were 17 and below. This results implies most of the youths who were engaging in farming aged between 24-29 years a prime age who experience the heat of unemployment and thus they take up farming as they await employment. This result has also been observed by (Njenga et al. 2012) who noted that most youths from colleges and who had just finished schools engaged in farming as they continue searching for jobs. Also observed that youth aged 30-35 engaged in farming as a career

after failing to get satisfaction from formal employment. Through interviews the researcher was also able to reveal that most youth who farmed between 30-35 years did so as their second business or career. Most were employed and they supplemented their income with proceeds from farming. One youth indicated that...." *Farming cannot give one enough and even salary is not enough. So keeping some dairy cows really helps in ensuring you have enough money to meet family needs and other expenses.*"

4.2 Youth Farm Ownership Trends

The study was interested in investigating farm ownership trends by the youths result are as discussed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Response on Land Ownership

Ownership	Frequency	Percentage
Family land	46	41.4%
Group lease land	10	9.1%

Individual Lease land	34	30.6%
Inherited land	18	16.2%
Bought land	3	2.7%
Total	111	100%

Analysis in Table 4.2 above shows that more youths 41.4% farmed on family land, 30.6% individually leased land, from the above analysis, 16.2% inherited land from their parents, 9.1% leased land as a group while a minority and 2.7% had bought land for farming. This result implies that very few youths had total access to land as very few owned land and they depended so much on the family land or land lease which can be inaccessible due to terms and condition of such land.

4.3 Youth production in crops and livestock

Table 4.3 Livestock Production

Youth livestock production Trend		
Livestock	Frequency	Percentage
Poultry	60	54.1%
Pigs	30	27.0%
Rabbits	22	19.8%
Dogs	25	22.5%
Dairy	12	10.8%
None	20	18.0%

Analysis in Table 4.3 above, slightly more than half 54.1% of the youths owned poultry, 27% owned pigs, 22.5% owned dogs, and 19.8% owned rabbits while 10.8% were engaging in dairy production. Some 18% of this youths were not involved in livestock production. An interview with youths on their livestock production dynamics revealed that, the youth engaged in livestock production they can afford and which occupies less space in the homestead. The youths were also keen in livestock that had faster returns like pigs, poultry and rabbits, because of faster maturity. Youths revealed that dairy farming was a challenge due to capital intensiveness. Those involved in dairy production revealed having spent more in the production process. However, they lamented that for those who have the capital, it is the most profitable sector and less labour intensive which can be used to ameliorate their unemployment situation in the study area.

4.4 Youth crop production Dynamics

The study sought to find out type of crops grown. The data collected was analyzed and presented in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4 Crop Production

Crop grown	Frequency	Percentage
Chinese cabbage	26	23.4%
Lentils, spinach and squash	30	27%
Maize and beans	3	0.02%
Spinach and kales	52	46.8%
Strawberry and passion fruit	5	0.06%
Spring onions and spices	13	11.7%
Spinach and Managu	20	18%

According to Table 4.4 above, majority 52(46.8%) of the youth farmers planted spinach and kales, 30(27%) were farming lentils and spinach 26 (23.4%) had taken interest in Chinese cabbages and lentils, 20 (18%) were farming a combination of spinach and managu while 13.5% produced managu and amaranth. Few youth 13(11.7), 5 (0.06%) and 3(0.02%) produced spring onions and spices, strawberry and passion fruits and maize and beans respectively. The researcher was able to observe that youth crop production depended on location, availability of water and nearness to a market. For instance, the researcher observed that youth in Nyathuna area concentrated more in farming kales, spinach, managu and squash. Youth in Kahuho farmed lentils, spices, chinese cabbages, spinach and amaranth and tended to have larger plots that accommodated Chinese cabbages. Gitaru seemed to be very near to an urban center known as Wangige and youth here farmed spring onions, spices, passion fruits and strawberry. This finding shows that youth were exploring different vegetables that could be sold in an urban market. Further, the findings show that few youths produced traditional crops such as beans and maize.

permeated all sectors of the economy and the agricultural sector is not exceptional. The rates of uptake of the youth for these innovations are higher in the youthful age bracket compared to other demographic segments. However, in the rural areas the case is different. A large proportion of the youth have limited access to agricultural training, information and cutting edge technologies. Where the innovation opportunities are available, affordability remains a constraint. Further, agriculture is not an examinable subject in primary school therefore creating a lack of interest amongst students and teachers. Low exposure to practical skills and limited opportunities in internships and mentorships also contribute to lack of skills. The study was interested to find out the strategies or innovations used by the respondents in attaining profits.

4.5 Youth Farmers Innovation and Profit Maximization Strategy

The availability of innovations for youth have

Table 4.5 Response on Strategies Youths use in Innovation and Profit Maximization

Statement	Frequency	Percentage
Planning for farming activities	6	2.3%
Maintaining high quality products	50	52.3%
Retailing my products(own seller)	30	21.0%
Through mixed farming	25	24.4%
Total	111	100.0

Table 4.5 above shows that to attain huge profit most 52.3% of youth farmers concentrated on

maintaining high quality production, 18(21%) decided to retail the products themselves to avoid exploitation by middle men and fetch good

prices while some 24.4 % decided to practice mixed farming to maximize profit. Very few 2.3% used proper planning as a strategy to maximize profit. This finding implies that most youth depended on weather for their farming and never planned how to farm without relying on the climate. From the literature review it has been observed that there was little mechanization as

an innovation strategy in innovation and profit maximization.

4.6 Marketing Strategy or Networking

The respondents were asked if they had marketing strategy for their farm produce data obtained from the field was analyzed and presented in Figure 3.1.

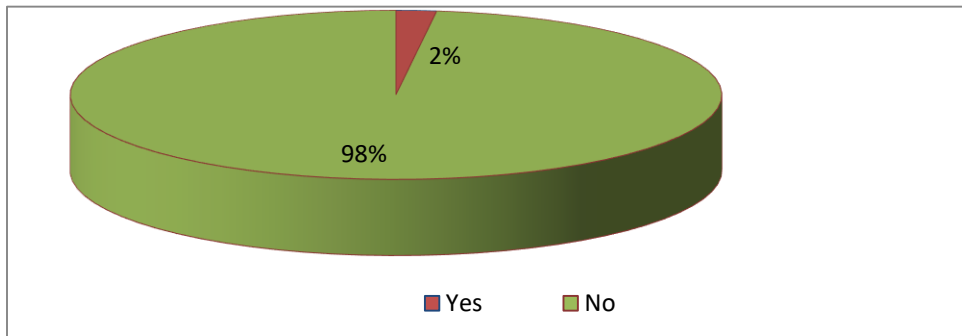


Figure 3.1: Marketing Strategy or Networks

Finding from Figure 3.1 above shows that 98% of the youth farmers disagreed into having any marketing strategy while a minority 2% agreed that they had a marketing strategy. In explaining their marketing strategies youth with marketing strategies indicated they had tenders from hotels and schools. The Majority who did not have strategies or networks to market their goods, depended on middlemen (business brokers) who bought from their farms. An interview with parents to the youths also revealed that parents considered youth farmers to be having a problem with marketing strategies or networks. From informal discussion, it was evident that this was blamed on rural youth exposure to new markets for their harvested products. This is in concurrence with Mwangi et al. (2014) who in

their study in Machakos established the same trend. Observation made at Farm shop however, revealed that for those rural youths who have been taken through various entrepreneurship trainings, have embarked on online selling trend, especially those signed up with Soko fresh goods where they advertised their products. Nevertheless, this was common among youth near urban centers and those who owned smart phones.

4.6 Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The researcher sought to understand if youths utilized Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in their farming ventures. The results obtained are presented in Figure 3.2:

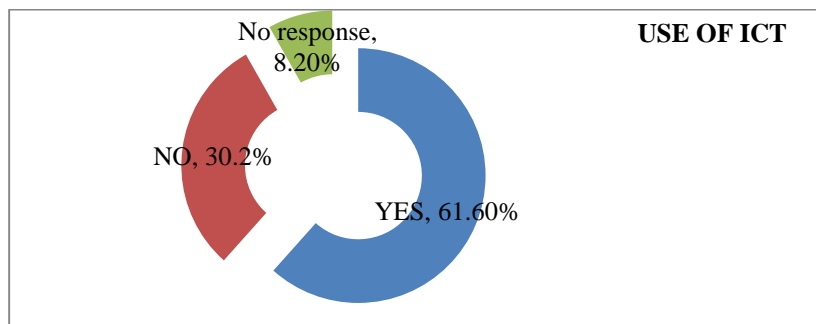


Figure 3.2: Use of ICT

Figure 3.2 above indicates that majority 61.6% of youth farmers were using ICT few 30.2%, were not, a minority 8.2% did not respond to this question. The source observed that the growth of technology and accessibility of youths to internet enabled phones for example, encouraged them into using ICT in their farming for farming calendars, marketing and seeking information although the uptake was still low. This finding differs with Njenga et al. (2012) who reported that only a few youth in Machakos were using ICT for agricultural purposes.

4.7 Skills Acquisition

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 8 vision of full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for youth, is a major a major challenge unless demand for adequate skills and productivity is attained. The study sought to know how the respondents acquired their skills to enhance their farming activities. The data collected was analyzed and presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.6 Acquisition of Farming Skills

Response	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Agricultural officers	10	9%
School	11	9.9%
My parents	65	58.6%
Other farmers	25	22.5%
Total	111	100.0

As indicated in Table 4.6, majority 55(58.6%) youth farmers acquired farming skills from their parents while some 35(22.5%) got skills from other farmers. Few 11(9.9%) youth revealed that they got farming skills from school while a minority 10(9%) got their farming skills from agricultural officers. An interview with parent farmers on skill acquisition revealed that parents work with their children in the farms where they are able to acquire skills. This finding clearly shows that there are little agricultural skills among the youth as suggested by FAO (2014) and IFAD (2010), the results further shows that there are minimal agricultural skills learnt from schools. From the key informants, it was observed further that there were low participation of agricultural extension officers in the general farming activities in the study area.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings of the study therefore, the study concludes that level of education did not affect youth farming as more educated youths aged 24-29 were practicing smallholder farming. Youth farmer’s dynamics also found to prefer livestock farming to crop production due to limited land space and ease in management. Youths involved in crop production produced high value crops such as vegetables and spices which matured within short period and fetched good profits. The study therefore, concludes that youth farming is deviating from traditional farming practices due to engagement in high value crops.

This paper therefore, recommends that the need for the government to enhance agricultural policies, institutional and budgetary support for the youths in smallholder farming. Such policies should focus on agribusiness, value chain and agro-entrepreneurship by the youth. Tailor made

financing, knowledge support and insurance for youths in farming should also be initiated. For youths to realize better profits from smallholder farming in pre-urban and rural areas they need to form producer and marketing associations with proper farm management skills that will enable them harvest more and make more profits.

Youths also need more training such as record keeping, effective planning and budgeting. Formation of these groups will allow youths affect market opportunities, have access to inputs and minimize risk and challenges they face as youth smallholder farmers. Furthermore, they need training on change in perception.

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