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The Role of African Youth Attitude in Agriculture: A Comprehensive Overview

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture in Africa plays a significant role in the sustainable livelihood of households in rural and semi-rural areas. African youth participation in agriculture is viewed as a challenge, as is their contribution to the economy in developing countries. In most rural communities, sustainable agriculture is crucial in food security, poverty alleviation, and job creation. With that in mind, unemployment among the youth is high, especially in sub-Saharan African countries. It is also important to note that the agricultural sector is transforming with technological advancements and changing consumer preferences. Therefore, understanding the attitude of youth towards agriculture is pivotal to the sustainability and viability of the sector. This review critically analyses perspectives on youth attitudes in the agricultural sector by thoroughly examining academic literature. The review investigates factors influencing youth perceptions of agriculture, drawing upon an extensive diagnostic analysis of academic literature, empirical studies, and reports, including socioeconomic factors, attitudes towards agricultural activities, and attitudes as barriers to agricultural education and training. This intellectual piece dwells on indicators of influence between youth attitudes towards agriculture in African countries. Existing literature widely acknowledges youth as pivotal for economic success in agriculture. However, the effective integration of youth into the sector relies on Agricultural Extension policymakers facilitating their inclusion through tailored training programs and opportunities. It is the understanding of this review that the opportunities that enable agricultural participation correlate with the availability of resources for successful contribution to sustainable agriculture.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Youth participation is vital to the growth of the agricultural sector, and this is driven by their eagerness to join the industry, which depends on their attitude. Ajzen and Cote (2008) define attitude as a mental state used to organise an individual's view of a certain situation and to direct their response. According to Nxumalo (2018), an individual's participation in a culture significantly impacts their attitude, so it is important to consider this when analysing how social structure affects an individual's overall outlook. Youth, defined as individuals between 15 and 24 by Rani and Roy (2017), represent a significant demographic whose engagement and perceptions towards agriculture profoundly influence the sector's trajectory. Many factors, including socioeconomic issues, educational experience, economic opportunities, and technological advancements, influence their attitudes towards agriculture.

An ever-increasing population is a global crisis threatening employment, especially in developing African countries. In most African countries, 60% of the population is under age 35, and most are unemployed and reside in rural communities (Geza et al., 2021). Youth unemployment is a global challenge, and it is estimated that about 10 to 12 million people from the youth population need to join the workforce annually (African Development Bank, 2019). Dercon and Gollin (2014) found that in most rural areas, agriculture is the primary source of income and drives the area's economy.

Policies from the African Union (2011) and NEPAD (2003) consider agriculture an important sector in job creation, ensuring food security and poverty reduction in African countries. However, the current policies are centred around agricultural development programs and do not sufficiently address the structural issues that limit youth participation in the agricultural sector. This review will look at diverse African perspectives on youth attitudes toward agriculture, highlighting parallelism and dissimilarities across various regions. By synthesising existing literature, empirical studies, reports, and policies, the paper aims to identify characteristics of attitude among the youth, common underlying factors that shape youth perceptions, youth attitude towards agriculture, attitude as a barrier to agriculture

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education and training, and the implication of those mentioned above on the agricultural sector thereof. The review seeks to clarify the opportunities and challenges associated with getting young people involved in agriculture through a thorough analysis of various viewpoints from different regions. Additionally, it looks for strategies that can foster favourable attitudes toward the sector and maximise their potential as leaders and innovators in the agricultural space.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF ATTITUDE AMONG THE YOUTH

Understanding the term' attitude' is vital to understanding attitude characteristics among youth. According to Mwangi (2016), attitude formation occurs when individuals acquire information and attribute certain values to objects or situations, evaluating them as favourable or unfavourable. According to Ajzen and Cote (2008), attitude represents an individual's inclination to respond with a specific level of willingness and unhelpfulness towards objects, behaviours, institutions, or activities. In this study, agricultural participation is the focal activity for assessing attitudes. Altmann (2008) asserts that the definitions of attitude across the literature agree that the characteristics of attitude include (a) a conscious and unconscious mental state, (b) a genetic disposition to behaviour or action, and (c) a meaning, belief, or feeling.

Attitude can either be positive (favourable) or negative (unfavourable). As cited in Mwangi (2016), Newstrom and Davis (2005) claim that a negative attitude results from underlying problems within the social context. However, Mwangi (2016) contends that this contribution is general and cannot be used as a baseline to inform efforts to model attitudes since attitudes vary in different contexts. Attitude is believed to be formed due to interaction with the environment; no one is born with an inherent attitude toward certain situations or objects (Makanyeza, 2014). Mwangi (2016) supports these findings by emphasising that societal factors are the primary stimulus for developing attitudes. For example, within societal norms, doctors often command greater respect and prestige than farmworkers, reflecting the differential social status associated with distinct professions. This gives young people the meaning they attach to work, predisposing them to feel and act a certain way regarding the type of occupation.

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According to Nxumalo (2018), considering the relationship between social structure, the learning process, and its effects is important because the culture in which a person participates significantly impacts the content of their attitude. Katz (1966) highlights that attitudes transcend age boundaries and serve as a mechanism for individuals to align their behaviour with the norms established by their respective social groups, underscoring the pervasive influence of social contexts on attitude formation and expression. Attitude characteristics must be understood to implement practical solutions for specific issues. This study aims to address the gap regarding youth participation in agriculture by providing information on how attitude comes to be and the different characteristics of youth attitude. Deneulin (2009) emphasises that employers prioritise workers with the appropriate attitude, skills, knowledge, and experience, underscoring the integral role of attitude in workforce selection and performance. To substantiate this, Mwangi (2016) claims that youth may have difficulty securing employment if they do not have a favourable attitude despite having the necessary skills and knowledge.

3. SOCIETAL FACTORS AFFECTING YOUTH ATTITUDE TOWARDS AGRICULTURE AS AN OCCUPATION

Mwangi (2016) defines socioeconomic factors as the aspects related to social and economic dimensions of society that impact one's thoughts and feelings about a particular thing. Mwangi (2016) believes that social norms instil an essential element of a community system and stimulate youths' attitudes toward agriculture, whether negative or positive. A complex interplay of societal factors that affect youth's perceptions, aspirations, and decision-making processes affects their attitudes toward agriculture as a viable career choice. Understanding these societal factors is essential for developing targeted strategies to engage and empower youth in the agricultural sector.

Several key societal factors impact youth attitudes toward agriculture as an occupation:

1. **Perception of Agriculture**: Societal perceptions of agriculture often influence how youth view it as a career option. In many societies, agriculture is associated with traditional, manual, labour-intensive work, which may not align with the aspirations of youth seeking modern, technologically-driven careers. The advantages and disadvantages that a particular occupation offers are significant factors in Farooq and Ullah's (2021)

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explanation of career or occupation choice. Subsequently, the choice of an occupation is a major concern in a youth's life because the outcomes of a career decision are ones they have to live with for the rest of their lives (Bubić & Iranišević, 2016). Farooq and Ullah (2021) explained that high social status and high economic returns attract youth to a profession. However, agricultural occupations do not provide these characteristics, and it is because of that that Kritzinger (2002) reported that youth regard agricultural occupations as low-status careers.

Conversely, agriculture has come a long way in terms of technology and innovation, making it a viable and rewarding career option for those passionate about sustainability and food production. In the modern age, agricultural careers encompass many professions that extend far beyond traditional farming. Technological advancements, sustainable practices, and an increased emphasis on food security have transformed the agricultural sector. This has led to a diverse range of career opportunities, including but not limited to Precision Agriculture Specialists, Agricultural Engineers, Agricultural Economist, Sustainable Agriculture Specialists, and Agri-Tech Entrepreneurs. It is, therefore, essential to educate youth about the advancements in the agricultural industry to change their perception of these careers. This will help attract more young talent to these crucial fields and ensure a sustainable future for agriculture.

2. **Educational Opportunities**: The study by Magagula and Tsavakirai (2020) showed that exposure to agricultural education programs could positively influence youth attitudes towards agriculture. The findings showed that providing secondary school agricultural education coupled with significant financial support can increase interest and participation in agricultural activities among the youth. This further affirms a need to improve awareness of the economic opportunities available in the agriculture sector. On the other hand, critics might argue that educational resources remain unevenly distributed, with rural areas often lacking access to quality training and infrastructure (Yami et al., 2019). Furthermore, they emphasise that systematic issues, such as inadequate funding, insufficient integration of local knowledge, and limited access to cutting-edge technology, continue to hamper the full realisation of educational opportunities in African agriculture. Therefore, access to high-quality education and vocational training programs considerably impact youth attitudes towards agriculture. The lack of educational

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possibilities in rural areas or the absence of agricultural curricula in schools can discourage young people from viewing agriculture as a feasible career choice.

3. **Economic Opportunities**: The perceived economic viability of agriculture compared to other industries influences young people's perspectives. Economic concerns such as low profitability, volatile markets, and restricted access to financial resources may dissuade young people from pursuing agriculture as a career path. Different authors across various pieces of literature present contrasting opinions on the economic opportunities that influence youth participation in agricultural activities in the African context. Proponents argue that initiatives like Kenya's Youth Enterprise Development Fund and Nigeria's Farmcrowdy have significantly promoted youth involvement by providing essential financing, mentorship, and market access (AGRA, 2018; African Development Bank, 2017). They also highlight Rwanda's Youth in Agribusiness Project as a successful model for bridging the skills gap and fostering agricultural enterprise among youth (Gatzinsi, Mossman, Francoise &Roberte, 2019).

   Conversely, other authors emphasise persistent barriers, such as limited access to land in Malawi, inadequate market infrastructure in Uganda, and financial exclusion in Tanzania, which continue to hinder young people's engagement in agriculture (Kafle, Benfica & Paliwal, 2018; Beegle, Omata & Bloom, 2017; Bandiera et al., 2017). The studies contend that, despite some progress, systemic issues like traditional land tenure systems and a lack of reliable transportation and credit facilities must be addressed to fully realise the potential of Africa's youth in the agricultural sector. The absence of concrete strategies and programs tailored for youth poses a significant barrier to their agricultural engagement (William & Maina Fr, 2012). This hinders the industry's potential growth and sustainability in many countries.

4. **Rural-Urban Divide**: Urbanisation tendencies frequently result in a gap between urban youth and agriculture. Many young people see metropolitan living as more desirable due to superior infrastructure, facilities, and job prospects, reducing their interest in agriculture (Mabiso & Benfica, 2019). The rural-urban divide in Africa critically influences youth participation in agriculture, presenting challenges and opportunities that shape their engagements in the sector. In rural areas, limited access to modern

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technologies, poor infrastructure, and inadequate educational facilities deter youth from agriculture, and this can be seen in Ethiopia, where young farmers struggle with productivity due to insufficient high-quality inputs and market access (de Brauw, Muller & Woldehanna, 2018). In contrast, urban areas offer better educational resources and innovative agricultural practices, such as Nairobi's vertical farming and rooftop gardens, which attract urban youth to agriculture. However, the youth's immigration from rural to urban areas in search of better opportunities exacerbates the ageing farming population in rural regions and thus threatens agricultural sustainability. Ghana's Youth in Agriculture Programme (YIAP) is seen as bridging this gap by supporting urban agri-tech initiatives to make agriculture more appealing and viable for youth across rural and urban settings (Baah, 2015). These efforts underscore the need for targeted policies to address the unique challenges and harness the opportunities within this demographic shift.

5. **Social Stigma**: Societal views and preconceptions about agriculture, such as the impression that farming is low-status employment, can discourage young people from pursuing jobs in the industry. Social stigma may also deter young people from considering agriculture a viable alternative for personal and professional fulfilment. Similar to specific areas in South Africa, heterogeneity is also observed in Nigeria, where agriculture is often seen as a fallback for those unable to secure urban employment, discouraging educated youth from entering the sector (African Development Bank, 2017). Conversely, in Kenya, efforts to modernise agriculture through initiatives like agribusiness incubators and agri-tech startups have begun to shift these perceptions, presenting farming as a viable and innovative career choice (AGRA, 2018). However, these positive changes are not uniformly felt, as in Uganda, where traditional views still dominate, and youth are reluctant to promote the sector. Addressing this social stigma requires educational campaigns and policies highlighting agriculture profitability, innovation, and importance, aiming to reframe farming activities as a prestigious and desirable profession for the younger generation.

6. **Role Models and Mentorship**: Positive role models and mentorship opportunities can inspire youth to consider agriculture a rewarding and fulfilling profession. Exposure to successful young farmers, agricultural entrepreneurs, and innovators can challenge stereotypes and motivate youth to pursue careers in agriculture.

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4. YOUTH ATTITUDE TOWARDS AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES

According to FAO (2014), the prevalence of ageing farmers in sub-Saharan African countries is a pressing issue, particularly given the predominance of youth in the region's population, posing significant challenges to future food security. There is a consensus among researchers that the youth are the driving force behind economic success, which relies upon implementing policies that promote inclusion and provide youth with opportunities (Brooks, Zorya, Gautam, & Goyal, 2013; Njeru, 2017). Sub-Saharan African countries are faced with high youth unemployment rates, which consequently results in high poverty rates. It is reported that approximately 20.1% of sub-Saharan youth who are employed only earn USD 1.25 per day (Njeru, 2017). This implies that most people only work because they need to meet their needs and not by choice. The youth must be encouraged to participate in agricultural activities to achieve sustainable development goal 8, which strives to provide decent work and economic growth by 2030 (Njeru, 2017).

World Bank (2013) reports that a lack of national efforts to make agriculture attractive to young people is one of the key reasons behind their illusive participation in the sector. Social and cultural norms also play a detrimental role. In India, girls do not see men working in agriculture as viable suitors, so most shy away from considering agriculture as a career prospect (Noorani, 2015). Agena (2011) found that in Uganda, agriculture in schools is mainly used to administer punishment. This further jeopardises the chances of attracting more youth to agricultural activities. Available literature (Njeru, 2017; Cheteni, 2016; Ayinde, Olarewaju, & Aribifo, 2016) suggests that young males usually dominate farming occupations while women only occupy the position of farmers' wives and have a negative attitude toward agriculture. However, UNESCO (2012) argues that agricultural training programs do not accommodate the needs of women due to young motherhood and limited schooling levels.

According to Njeru's (2017) research in Kenya, youth comprise 80% of the population. The study showed that even though there is worldwide recognition of agriculture's potential, there is a huge decline in youth involvement in the sector. The absence of incentives is a key reason for the disinterest in agriculture among youth (Noorani, 2015). The findings of Njeru (2017) showed that 18.1% of youth felt that being in agriculture did not make them good role models, and 10.1% thought it was for illiterate members of society. This is compatible with

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the studies of Brooks, Zorya, Gautam and Goyal (2013), which showed that in East African countries, agriculture is seen as a poor man's job and is used as a form of punishment for prisoners and students who are not doing well in school. In a study by Ayinde, Olarewaju, and Aribifo (2016), perceptions of youth on agricultural programs were assessed, and they found that youth unemployment, capital provision, availability of inputs, and availability of information are some of the major factors that influence the youth to participate in agricultural programs. Inadequate infrastructural support and minimal materials were among the reasons why the youth were reluctant to partake in the programs. Therefore, governments must invest in proper and adequate infrastructure for these programs to attract more youth (Ayinde *et al*., 2016).

Like many other African countries, there is an increase in unemployment in South Africa, and agriculture is seen as the solution to poverty reduction and job creation (Maina & Maina, 2012). The New Growth Path (NGP), launched in 2011, aims to incorporate agriculture to create employment among the youth population (Cheteni, 2016). Across the literature, it is believed that getting the youth involved in agriculture presents an opportunity to grow the sector (FAO, 2014; DAFF, 2013; Cheteni, 2016). To assess factors influencing youth participation in agriculture in the Eastern Cape province, South Africa, Cheteni (2016) found that 48% of the survey respondents showed no interest in agriculture. These results showed that the youth in this region perceived agriculture as a bad career choice. The youth reported that they shy away from pursuing agricultural projects because of the intensive capital required. Cheteni (2016) asserted that when agricultural programs and resources made available are increased, more youth are interested in participating in the activities.

5. ATTITUDE AS A BARRIER TO AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (AET)

Abdul, Uddin, Sahabuddin Rahman, and Rahaman (2016) stated that education is a basic need and important for the growth and development of people in developing and developed countries. Training is defined as communication aimed at developing skills, increasing competence in a defined population, and focusing on what needs to be known. The difference between education and training is how they are presented and their overall aim. Education aims to gain knowledge, while training provides a specific skill (Kidane & Worth, 2013).

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However, despite their differences, training and education provide learning opportunities by adding knowledge and altering behaviour through teaching and experience. Kidane and Worth (2013) found that AET in sub-Saharan Africa is slow to adapt to emerging needs and fails to meet the demands that come with the new agricultural activities of the modern world.

One challenge that affects rural youth in Africa is early school leaving. The World Bank (2018) highlighted low secondary school attendance and completion rates across various African countries. Conversely, in Malawi, Nigeria, and Uganda, school attendance rates are higher, with 80% for children and more than 70%for younger youth. Early school leavers often struggle to access credit and financial services, thus further limiting their abilities to invest in new technologies and innovations. Moreover, they are usually excluded from agricultural extension services and are less likely to adopt technological innovations due to limited technical skills, a significant disadvantage in tech-driven agricultural environments like Kenya.

Contrary to the above, evidence from Mabiso and Benfica (2019) suggests that learning outside school is an alternative entry point for improving youth outcomes and employability prospects. The findings of the Bandiera *et al*. (2017) study, which highlighted multifaceted training interventions in Uganda that take place outside of the conventional school system and concentrate on both life skills and vocational training, support this. The results showed that there was an increase in the likelihood of adolescent girls engaging in income-generating activities and a 34% decrease in teenage pregnancy. It is also important to note that Bandiera *et al*. (2017) asserted that the positive impacts of these training interventions directly correlate to the length of the programs, such that the longer the program runs, the higher the chances of positive impacts being realised.

It was found that African countries adopted Western AET systems instead of making their own that would respond to their local demand (Spielman, Ekboir & Davis, 2008). These adopted systems do not align with the current needs in these countries, and therefore, there is ineffective sustainable development, and as such, poverty eradication will not be realised. The AET systems in sub-Saharan countries are outdated, underfunded, and not aligned with the realities of the modern world (Kidane & Worth, 2013). Therefore, adjustments need to be made to align the realities of socioeconomic development and AET. Kidane and Worth

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(2013) argue that, based on the rapid rise in demand for trained human capital in agricultural sciences, there is a need for programs that develop the necessary skills for locals, especially the youth.

Post-1994 in South Africa, an AET strategy was developed to provide and maintain education and training to support environmental and economic sustainability in the country's agricultural sector (Department of Agriculture, 2006). Nevertheless, Kidane and Worth (2013) identified limitations to the strategy, including a lack of coordination, poor and inconsistent quality control, a negative career image, and a shortage of skills. This is in alignment with the study of Spielman *et al*. (2008), which indicated that most African countries do not have quality agricultural education and training systems. Kidane and Worth (2013) suggest that the South African AET curriculum and that of other sub-Saharan African countries need extensive assessments in furtherance of an appropriate curriculum well suited for these countries' agricultural needs.

Throughout the literature, researchers agree that attitude forms a barrier to AET (Kidane & Worth, 2013; Van Crowder, Lindley, Bruening & Doron, 1998; Mafunzwaini, Thahane & Worth, 2003). Table 1 demonstrates a study conducted by the Department of Agriculture (2006), which found that AET has a poor image among many young people, especially black people; it is perceived to be only for white people (even by school-going learners). In the KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape, and Western Cape provinces of South Africa, attitude is a barrier to accessing AET. In the study, the Department of Agriculture (2006) found that 27 out of 36 respondents indicated a negative attitude towards AET in the three provinces. However, the findings of the Department of Agriculture (2006) are not a true reflection of the country's reality, as they do not include all provinces. The current study aims to bridge this gap by contributing information on youth participation in agriculture in the Free State province.

The table below gives an insight into the reasons behind the attitude and perception people have of Agriculture Education and Training in various provinces. These reasons largely inform the youth's decisions on whether to partake in AET.

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TABLE 1*:* Summary of Comments Regarding Negative Attitudes and Perceptions in Agriculture and as Social and Cultural Barriers to AET

Province	Responses from participants
Western Cape	• Agriculture is regarded as a low-level, low-paying job, and dirty job for the uneducated. • Agriculture is for White people only. • It is a low-paying profession and not exciting. • Agriculture is for men and uneducated individuals. Additional responses regarding school-going learners • Seen as a dirty job and associated with hard labour.
Northern Cape	• Black people see farming as oppressive and would not want their children to do agriculture. • Some people associate agriculture with dirty work, • Officials do not show a passion to serve, • Officials do not give young farmers assistance/support and confidence.
KwaZulu-Natal	• AET has a poor image among many people, especially Black people. • It is perceived as only for White/rich White people (even by school-going learners), • Perceived as a low-paying job, it is a dirty job. • One does not need AET to work in agriculture *(mentioned twice),* • Agriculture is not seen as an academic subject, • Agriculture/AET is for the low social class or rich White people. • People love agriculture, but they are afraid to work, • Men are not interested. • One is limited by poverty. Agriculture requires resources. • AET is for men only, Additional attitudes held by school-going Learners • Agriculture is rural-based, • Not a high-profile job,

(Source: Department of Agriculture, 2006)

In their study, research conducted by Metelerkamp, Driem, and Biggs (2019) revealed dissatisfaction among youth in KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, and the Western Cape provinces of South Africa regarding the perceived inadequacies in the quality, relevance, and affordability

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of the current education system, highlighting critical challenges for agricultural education and training initiatives. This study suggests that the agriculture curricula in learning institutions must focus on the skills the youth requires to establish careers as farmers on small- to medium-sized farms and not the demands of the commercial farming sector, like in Western countries. This suggestion is similar to the one Kidane and Worth (2013) made. Agriculture needs to be included in schools' curricula from the primary level, and schools need to create a positive environment that changes students' perceptions of agriculture by providing them with career prospects and its importance to everyday human life. Metelerkamp, Driem, and Biggs (2019) further suggest a structural transition within the food system to allow more involvement from youth.

6. SUMMARY

Research shows that an individual's culture and environment are crucial in shaping their attitude development toward specific activities or subjects. Factors such as cultural norms, economic factors, and educational background influence the formation of attitudes among the youth population. These factors influence how individuals perceive and engage in activities like agriculture based on their observations of the world around them. The literature clearly shows that youth exhibit a spectrum of attitudes towards agriculture, encompassing negative and positive perspectives. A considerable number of youth are reported to have a negative attitude towards agricultural activities due to a lack of information, poor infrastructure, high input costs, and limited access to land and credit. In addition, the literature showed that governments in sub-Saharan countries do not have agricultural policies that accommodate or incentivise the youth to join and remain in the agricultural sector. It is recommended that the government implement targeted programs such as agricultural information campaigns, input subsidies, and financial support to enhance youth access to agriculture. They must also consider enhancing agricultural education in schools and offering career guidance.

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