



Motivating and Attracting Youth in Agriculture (MAYA)

NASC, New Delhi
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Road Map

Preamble

The global population is expected to be around 8.0 billion by 2025. The ageing rural population, better opportunities outside agriculture, and declining natural resources are posing some serious concerns today as to who will feed the world tomorrow? Under such circumstances, concerns are also raised as to how will we meet the targets of sustainable development goals (SDGs)? In this context, the role of youth (both male and female) in accelerating agricultural growth cannot be underestimated. In fact, those nations have progressed much faster where youth has been motivated to get involved mainly in creative, secondary and speciality agriculture – supported well by an enabling policy environment.

India presently has the largest population of youth (356 million between 10-24 years age group) in the world (UN Report, 2014), even more than that of China (269 million). This obviously beseeches to reflect a bright future since almost half of this population (nearly 200 million) live in the rural areas, which could be motivated and attracted professionally to agriculture and allied fields. Contrary to this, unfortunately only around five per cent of the rural youth is currently getting engaged in agriculture. This is simply because they do not find agriculture a creative, profitable and above all a respectable profession which can provide better living conditions. Thus, we do see an exodus of youth from rural to urban areas in search of alternative employment/option. Moreover, a clear strategy and enabling environment to motivate and attract youth in agriculture are lacking. Youth is disinterested mainly because of poor infrastructure, less education facilities, practically no skill development opportunities, lack of incentives and rewards, and problems of land ownership, credit facilities and availability, value chain and farmer-market linkages. In addition, agriculture is currently faced with numerous daunting challenges such as overexploitation of natural resources (land, water and agrobiodiversity), decline in factor productivity, costly inputs, low income and production uncertainties due to adverse effects of climate change.

Under such a scenario, the involvement of youth in agriculture is a challenge since they are energetic, innovative, and more receptive to new ideas/adoption of advanced technologies rather than traditional agriculture. In addition, they do have the courage to take the risks, so critical for any new enterprise. Moreover, the present-day agriculture requires intelligence and hard work, besides the strong will and commitment. Hence, the future strategy should motivate the youth to become job providers and agents of change rather than to remain as job seekers.

In this context, urgent steps are needed to motivate and attract youth in agriculture, who are not only energetic and willing but innovative. This can be achieved only when required knowledge and education, technical skills, sustained encouragement and the enabling policy environment are provided. In addition, the required policies, incentives and rewards need to be put in place to attract young talents to undertake innovative farming that is not only profitable and sustainable but also respectable. Thus, the new strategy should be to reorient present-day agriculture from crop based to farming systems' mode based with emphasis on 'plough to plate' approach which is more relevant, efficient, demand-driven, productive, competitive and profitable. It must also ensure food, nutrition and environmental security for all, being important to achieve SDGs. Hence, there is an urgent need to develop a clear Road Map for motivating and attracting youth in agriculture. Also, there is a need to devise a suitable mechanism for its effective and speedy implementation, especially to accelerate growth in agriculture in South Asian countries.

With the above rationale, more than 200 participants from India and some South Asian countries (Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka) representing the national agricultural research systems (NARS), private sector, civil society organizations (non-government organizations (NGOs) and farmer organizations (FOs), progressive farmers, entrepreneurs, policy planners, Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) Centers, and development departments deliberated on this important subject in the Regional Conference on Motivating and Attracting Youth in Agriculture (MAYA) held at NASC complex, New Delhi on 30-31 August 2018. The conference was organized by the Trust for Advancement of Agricultural Sciences (TAAS) jointly with Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI), Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD), Skill Council of India (SCI), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). The main objectives of the conference were to: (i) assess the role of youth in accelerating overall agricultural growth, (ii) provide exposure to various successful entrepreneurship models, (iii) understand the role of youth in rural advisory services and for knowledge linking farmers to markets, (iv) suggest needed policy reorientation to motivate and attract youth in agriculture, and (v) explore the possibility to build a regional platform for collaboration and partnership.

The Road Map

For attaining faster the sustainable developmental goals (SDGs), all nations in South Asia need to develop and promote a sound strategy around “Role of youth for accelerated growth in agriculture” for which the following 'Road Map' offering the youth a number of opportunities for economic, social and agricultural development, was proposed at the conference:

- There is an urgency to have a '**National Mission on Youth in Agriculture**' with an aim to impart better knowledge and skill to youth on: i) sustainable, secondary and speciality agriculture, ii) efficient knowledge dissemination, including information communication technology (ICT), iii) technical backstopping for innovative farming, iv) new agri-business models, and v) entrepreneurship as well as linking farmers to markets through value chain. Under the Mission, concerted efforts are needed to build new skills of youth for innovative agriculture through both formal and informal

education. The best option for this is to impart agricultural education right from school level. In addition, the central and state agricultural universities and ICAR institutes must initiate entrepreneurship training through vocational and formal diploma programs. Also, the university curriculum needs to be revisited to address the emerging needs and aspirations of present-day youth and markets.

- Priority attention needs to be given to develop a new research agenda for ‘**Youth-Agriculture Nexus**’ which (i) delineates different contexts for youth-oriented agricultural research, (ii) identifies opportunities for young people’s engagement in agricultural research and innovation for development (ARI4D), and (iii) determines youth’s future pathway for attaining sustainable agricultural growth and income.
- Involvement of youth in ‘**Plough-to-Plate**’ initiative can help in doubling farmers’ income. Hence, their greater involvement as entrepreneurs will be the key to future growth and development. For this, networking for knowledge sharing/dissemination, participation of youth in outscaling of innovations through their validation using technology parks/innovation platforms, use of ICT, creation of agri-clinics, much needed support for mentoring/hand-holding, and awareness regarding intellectual property rights (IPRs) need to be the essential components of the proposed mission on youth.
- There is need for a paradigm shift from narrow focus on ‘**youth as a farmer**’ to ‘**youth for value chain development**’. To provide better economic opportunities for rural youth in the changing agricultural scenario, there is an obvious need to move beyond the plot/field level agriculture i.e. from production to post-production level and to link with market for better income opportunities. The combination of agricultural value chains, technology and entrepreneurship will unlock vast economic opportunities for youth in both the farm and non-farm sectors and hence youth need to be encouraged to set-up agri-service centres to offer custom-hire services for small and marginal farmers for mechanizing their farm operations to enhance production at reduced cost.
- The role of well trained and competent youth, with expertise in ICT application for e-NAM, start-up, stand-up and skill development schemes, agri-business enterprises, etc. is extremely important. Youth would thus need enabling policies for long-term investments, availability of easy and soft credit, provision of subsidy upfront to the entrepreneurs, farmer-farmer exchange visits, easy market accessibility, land law reforms for entrepreneurs, no taxation system for rural-based primary value addition involving youth, review of Agri-Clinic support system by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), reforms in marketing laws such as scrapping of Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Act, provision of ready insurance for covering risk of 'start-up' entrepreneurs, etc. would immensely encourage youth to embrace agriculture.
- The private sector has also to play a proactive role in creating much needed ‘**Agri-Youth Innovation Corpus Fund**’ as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and enhance rural employment through special projects. Such an effort would enhance rural employment opportunities through small agri-business start-ups, public-private as well as private-private entrepreneurship. They may also help through soft

loans and mentoring programs for involving rural youths as input dealers/suppliers as well as paid extension agents.

- There is an urgent need to ‘**institutionalize incentives**’ and ‘**award/reward system**’ in order to reward highly successful agricultural entrepreneurs and innovators. This will inspire as well as attract the youth to adopt agriculture as a profession for their happy living. Such an approach should be a strategic priority at the local, state, country, and the regional level to ensure youth-led inclusive growth in agriculture.
- Success stories/case studies of young agricultural entrepreneurs and innovators need to be brought out and widely disseminated. Such selective studies must be well documented and nicely published. The successful entrepreneurs be also recognized and encouraged to act as role models and help in capacity development/technical back-stopping for other youth to be equally successful. In this regard, a compendium of youth-led success stories in various sectors of agriculture from different eco-regions of the country be brought out on priority and made accessible to others.
- It is high time that the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare creates a separate ‘**Department of Youth in Agriculture**’. This will ensure collaboration and coordination with concerned departments in other Ministries such as Science and Technology, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Food Processing Industry, Rural Development, Commerce and Industry, Chemicals and Fertilizers, etc. so as to meet the aspirations of youth in agriculture. Such an institutional mechanism, with funding support through the proposed ‘**Mission on Youth in Agriculture**’ will help in motivating and attracting youth in agriculture and allied fields.
- A ‘**Regional Platform on Youth in Agriculture**’ needs to be established through facilitation role of global/regional/national fora like Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI), Trust for Advancement of Agricultural Science (TAAS), Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD), etc. for knowledge sharing, capacity development, partnership and policy advocacy. They all could play an important proactive role in providing neutral platforms to youth for their capacity development and confidence building for entrepreneurship.
- It is well understood that youth of today has a different mind-set and outlook. Unfortunately, there exists an ‘aspiration-attainment gap’. Hence, their aspirations must be addressed on priority. They like to pursue intellectually satisfying, commercially viable and socially empowering activities. All these are critical for future growth and development of any nation and would, therefore, need an enabling environment through policy and institutional support by all concerned.
