

# **Youth in Agriculture - Challenges and Opportunities**

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## **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to present an overview of the challenges and opportunities for youth in agriculture and to make recommendations that will result in increased participation in agricultural activities by young people between the ages of 15 to 30 within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). This paper will provide the background information and discuss critical issues necessary to stimulate the interest and encourage the participation of youth in agriculture which is necessary to ensure the sustainability of agricultural production and realize the goal of food and nutrition security in the CARICOM region.

## **Rationale for Involving Youth in Agriculture in the Region**

AT THE THIRTIETH REGULAR MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF HEADS OF GOVERNMENT OF THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY, 2-5 JULY 2009, GEORGETOWN, GUYANA the Heads of Government having underscored the importance of agriculture for food and nutrition security and the development of our economies, reaffirmed their commitment to providing financial and other support measures for agriculture.

Further, the Heads of Government agreed to convene a Special Summit on Youth in Suriname which is to be held in January 2010 to discuss the findings and recommendations of the CARICOM Commission on Youth Development. This was mandated at the 27th Meeting of the Conference to provide a full scale analysis of the challenges and opportunities for youth in the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) and to make recommendations on how to improve their well-being.

Within the construct of the CSME, agriculture is identified as one of the four economic pillars. Its importance as a priority area on the regional development agenda is therefore unquestionable. The nexus between agricultural development and the region's ability to achieve its food and nutrition security goals are inextricably linked. In light of the importance given to these issues, they certainly demand the attention of our young people as the Community seeks to discuss the challenges and opportunities that exist in agriculture.

The increased participation by youth in agriculture in the region is necessary and vital to facilitate food and nutrition security since:

- There is compelling evidence of an ageing farmer population in the region which must be addressed to facilitate sustainability in agricultural production and by extension food availability in the region from internal production. The average age of farmers in the Caribbean is 55 years and life expectancy in the region averages about 65-70 years. Consequently, if young farmers do not replace the ageing producers the production of food within the region will be seriously compromised in the next 10-15 years.
- The regional food import bill (now estimated at Four Billion US Dollars) continues to increase while regional agricultural production and output falls. If these trends continue the availability of food in the region by 2040 will be dependent on extra regional food production making the region vulnerable to catastrophic events and other exogenous shocks that may have negative impacts on food production from extra-regional sources. The significant increases in the price of food due to external shocks such as regional conflicts and movement in oil price are issues of relevance. As a result it necessary to encourage increased food production in the region by increasing the number of producers and the level of productivity. The youth population is strategic to the success of these efforts to boost regional food production.
- The poor image of persons involved in agriculture needs to be changed and the young people are the ideal catalysts for such change given their greater propensity and willingness to adopt new ideas, concepts and technology which are all critical to changing the way agriculture is practiced and perceived.
- Increased employment particularly rural employment is required as youth unemployment is 40-60% in the region. Given the many opportunities available in food production, agriculture can play a significant role in impacting youth unemployment and by extension, unemployment generally in the region.
- Increased productivity in the agricultural sector depends on youths who comprise 20-30% of the population in the CARICOM region. The energy that youths possess and the fact that their number are significant in regard to the regional population provides tremendous opportunities for increasing agricultural productivity

- To facilitate increased agricultural production which contributes to food self sufficiency. Food is required to drive all productive activities and therefore it is imperative that the region has significant control over this strategic resource both in terms of quality and quantity.
- Provide productive alternatives for the engagement of youths to reduce crime and other social problems. The availability of real income generating options in agriculture can offer opportunities preventing and indeed rehabilitating young persons whose alternative options are not socially acceptable nor responsible.

### **Analysis of Youth Involvement in Agriculture in the Region**

The region and specifically young persons in the CARICOM region between the ages of 15 to 30 will benefit from the policies, programmes and projects that will emanate from the analysis and recommendations to increase the participation of youth in agriculture. In addition, the agricultural sector, national economies and the region will also benefit as a consequence of the increase participation of youths. A SWOT analysis (analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) it relates to youth involvement in agriculture will be done and recommendations will be made to the appropriate Organs of the Community for further action. Additionally, information on Youth in Agriculture as gleaned from research work done by IICA (2007) and UNDP (2009) on the involvement of youth in agriculture in the region will be given consideration.

### **Strengths of Youth involvement in Agriculture in the Region**

- The latent energy, capacity and ability to produce
- Excellent source of ideas and innovation and areas of interest in the agricultural sector
- They are main market for food consumption and knowledge of their own eating peculiarities
- Significant impact on public opinion, policy and action

### **Weakness of Youth involvement in Agriculture in the Region**

- Vulnerable to marketing and sales promotion and may produce/consume foods that are unhealthy, for example fried foods
- Large sections of the youth population untrained and modern agriculture requires trained personnel

- Limited control/input into their roles, responsibilities and functions places the youth at the disadvantage of having to wait for the interventions of adults to become integrally involved in agricultural pursuits
- Negatively influenced by the image created around agricultural pursuits as a means of livelihood. The generally gravitate to activities that are popular and perceived to be socially acceptable. The negative stigma of pursuing agriculture as a career influences youth to stay away from it.

### **Opportunities for Youth Involvement in Agriculture**

- Vibrant and expanding market for primary and secondary agricultural commodities offers tremendous opportunities for young people to earn good income from agricultural activities
- There are existing incentives and policies that target youth involvement in agriculture which encourages young persons.
- Many tertiary training opportunities exist for young persons interested in agriculture
- Throughout the region there are a number of existing agricultural agencies that youth can become involved in.
- Encouraging rhetoric on agriculture continues after the hike in the prices of agricultural commodities, the increasing food import bill and the financial crises which has created a high level of interest in the region in agriculture

### **Threats to Youth Involvement in Agriculture**

- Deviant Behavior (Crime and violence, drugs abuse)
- Risky sexual behavior and their negative consequences(STD's, HIV-AIDS, teenage pregnancies)
- Better opportunities outside of the agricultural sector
- Negative social impacts
- Sexual abuse
- Teenage pregnancies
- Lack of motivation and the feelings of despair
- Poverty and Unemployment
- Lack of education
- The negative image of agricultural pursuits

### **General Recommendations for increasing Youth Involvement in Agriculture**

**The following are some recommendations for increasing youth involvement in Agriculture:**

1. Improved access to Training and Capacity Development
  - 1.1. Improved training at the primary and secondary school level
  - 1.2. Linking School Agricultural Operations with General Curriculum
  - 1.3. More opportunities for on farm training for youth
  - 1.4. Enterprise development training particularly in value added activities such as food processing and packaging
2. Improved and easier access to resources such as:
  - 2.1. Land
  - 2.2. Capital
  - 2.3. Technology and Information
    - 2.3.1. Facilitating access to and encouraging the use of appropriate technology
    - 2.3.2. Developing a data base of agencies that can provide access to youth on information in agriculture
3. Facilitating Market Opportunities
  - 3.1. Providing targeted marketing opportunities for primary and value-added agricultural products produced by young entrepreneurs via special arrangements with schools, hotels etc.
4. Providing motivation and improving the image of agriculture
  - 4.1. Update policies and incentives
5. Facilitating networking among youth
  - 5.1. Providing incentives to encourage collaboration and group activity of youth

**Proposed Initial Interventions for increasing youth involvement in agriculture**

1. Develop within the regional agricultural policy a policy on youth involvement for food & nutrition security. This intervention will institutionalize the involvement of youth in agriculture in CARICOM
2. Facilitating a page for youth on the information and communication platform that will be soon developed with funding from CARUTA
3. Develop a ‘Youth Feed the Youth’ Programme in every Member state which coordinates the activities of young farmers to supply institutions that supply food to young people (for example linking young producers to the schools feeding programmes). This intervention provides ample market opportunity for developing entrepreneurs in agriculture.

4. Plan and Execute the First Regional Youth Award for Excellence in Agriculture in the Summer 2010 featuring Caribbean Youth in Music and Food focusing on:
  - a. Innovation primary production(crops and livestock)
  - b. Value Added
  - c. Biotechnological Developments

This intervention will assist with motivating and rewarding youths involved in agriculture which is critical to their involvement while unearthing the many innovations that are certain to surface