



Transformative Growth: Empowering the Youth with Agricultural Extension

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Abstract

Rural youth constitute a substantial portion of the population in developing nations, grappling with elevated rates of unemployment. While engaging youth in agricultural pursuits is frequently proposed as a solution, its realization remains challenging. In numerous developing countries, rural youth actively seek employment in urban areas due to considerable hurdles in securing farming-related or alternative employment, as well as accessing land, information, finance, and other essential services within their communities. The paramount role of the agricultural sector in the economy, coupled with the substantial potential for heightened productivity, presents primary opportunities for the initiation of farms or small agricultural ventures for young individuals in developing countries. Agricultural extension is intricately linked to the farming community and the entire farming family, necessitating that extension programs address the diverse needs and interests of various family members.

Nurturing Futures: Aligning Agricultural Extension with Rural Youth Development

A significant portion of the population in numerous countries is under 18 years old, with the majority residing in rural areas. The youth demographic holds considerable weight in rural populations, representing the future of farming families. It is crucial that agricultural extension initiatives proactively prepare these young individuals for the future, as an alternative could result in a significant exodus of youth from rural areas and towns. To address this, extension agents should make dedicated efforts to engage and retain the interest of young people in their expansion



work. This involves visiting schools to discuss agricultural expansion and organizing visits to agricultural projects, allowing young people to witness the ongoing developments.

In the context of rural youth, encompassing both boys and girls, aged between 12 and 18, there is an ongoing focus on specialized expansion efforts in many countries. Initiatives like the Youth Voluntary Service in India, Village Polytechnic in Kenya, and Jamaica Youth Corps exemplify endeavors designed to "catch them while they are still young," expressing genuine concern for the future of young people and striving to establish their roots in rural areas.

However, working with rural youth poses unique challenges for agricultural extension workers. Before embarking on youth-oriented extension activities, agents must comprehend these challenges and assess the potential for self-improvement among young individuals. Extensive global experience with youth has unveiled common problems, shaping the foundation for effective and tailored extension interventions.

Motivation:

As the younger generation witnesses the neglect and stagnation prevalent in rural areas, their enthusiasm diminishes, and they frequently perceive limited prospects for their own futures.

Training: Despite formal education, many youths lack the essential skills required for life in rural settings. Often ill-prepared, they struggle to meet the demands of rural development.

Incorporation: Feeling isolated, young people find it challenging to engage in local rural development activities. Their lack of representation leaves them voiceless and excluded from decision-making processes.

Opportunities: Scarce initiatives target young people, and projects that aim to integrate them into rural development activities are rare. While agents may not immediately resolve all these issues, prioritizing youth extension activities in their programs is crucial. Agents should establish and maintain contact with the youth in their areas, offering ideas for engaging activities promptly. These activities may take the form of youth clubs with specialized projects designed for their benefit.

Rural Youth Club:



Traditionally, clubs have served as an extension to engage young individuals in rural development by proposing projects for their benefit. Among the most widespread are the 4H clubs (Hands, Health, Head, and Heart), originating in the United States and now spanning many countries. These clubs serve as a crucial initial step in bringing young people together, offering a platform for them to express ideas and address issues, forming a foundation for future endeavors. Through these clubs, youth become acquainted with working alongside extension services, establishing relationships that will develop as they build their own farming families and require ongoing extension assistance.

When an extension agent contemplates establishing a youth club in their area, careful consideration should be given to the project, bearing in mind that these clubs have three primary objectives:

1. **Educational:** The club serves as a platform for both formal and informal socialization and training, focusing on developing specific skills, leadership qualities, and a general understanding of rural development challenges.
2. **Economic:** Clubs can instruct youth in various aspects of agricultural practice, agricultural management, or home economics. Additionally, they may undertake specific income-generating projects for the youth.
3. **Recreational:** Encouraging a balance, the club should incorporate recreational activities and social events such as sports, day trips, and dancing. This ensures that young people enjoy the club and view it as an integral part of their leisure time.

Before forming a club, the agent should consult with local residents, securing parental support, finding a suitable meeting place, and allocating resources for its functioning. The agent's work with the club mirrors their work with farmers' groups, addressing similar issues.

Engaging Rural Youth in Projects:

Project work, whether conducted through clubs or with rural youth at large, serves as a practical avenue for youth to acquire hands-on skills rather than merely engaging in discussions or lectures. The agent should actively promote project activities with young people, allocating a



portion of the local budget for such endeavors. These projects can be initiated on an individual or club basis, with a recommendation to start with modest ambitions. For guidance on project work approaches, planning, and implementation steps, the agent may refer to other sections of this guide.

A constructive way to commence project work is by organizing trips for young people to visit farms or other agricultural projects, providing them with a firsthand view of specific activities. Local farmers often welcome collaboration with enthusiastic club members. Additionally, the agent can arrange interactions with or presentations by other locals to elucidate specific projects. It is crucial for the agent to display enthusiasm for project work, encouraging youth involvement in discussions and decision-making. Projects are not only aimed at providing additional income or food supplies but should also equip young people with skills and knowledge valuable for education and the future. Ensuring project success is paramount, as failure can swiftly lead to disillusionment. Therefore, the extension agent should focus on guiding youth work, actively preparing and shaping the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, extension services play a pivotal role in connecting rural youth with agricultural opportunities. Recognizing the youth as potential agricultural entrepreneurs is essential, necessitating collaborative efforts to create favorable opportunities. The current focus on established and commercial farmers often sidelines women and youth, demanding redirection. Treating youth as legitimate clients enables the development of participatory extension programs, granting them input on priorities.

Exemplified by successful models like Youth in Agriculture, these programs illustrate how young individuals can create remunerative opportunities in agriculture, achieving financial gains, independence, and pursuing specific positions. To effectively target youth, extension services must systematically monitor and report on the number of youth served.

Crucially, for extension agents to work seamlessly with rural youth, genuine understanding and alignment with their ideas are imperative. Young agents may be better suited



for youth extension work, fostering identification and trust. Establishing this connection is pivotal for the success of extension initiatives, requiring collaboration and trust from young people in rural areas.

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