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YOUTH PERCEPTION AND PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE IN DISTRICT FAISALABAD, PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at exploring the interest of youth, their participation and those factors which are impeding youth involvement in agriculture. This study was conducted in district Faisalabad of Punjab province. Total 432 respondents (aged between 15-29 years) were sampled from thirty-six villages of the study district. Respondents were interviewed through a face-to-face interview technique on an open-ended interview guide. Responses were analyzed through content analysis techniques. Findings of the study indicate that youth regarded the agriculture sector as non-profitable, hence they do not see them joining the agriculture sector as an occupation unless the government give it due attention. High cost of production crashed marketing system, absence of farmer-friendly policies, environmental issues and lack of support and incentives for the youth were some issues distressing their interest in agriculture. This study recommends that to enhance the youth participation in agriculture, their socio-economic and cognitive limitations should be addressed on priority. Revoking the youth clubs and cooperatives especially in rural areas could be the viable option for the encouragement of youth. Moreover, the farmers' friendly policies are required to make agriculture a lucrative occupation for the youth.

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INTRODUCTION

Pakistan has a population of over 220 million and graced with the 5th largest population of youth. It has been forecasted that the population of youth will be doubled in Pakistan in the forthcoming 40 years. At present, of the total population of Pakistan, 64% is less than 30 years old, the highest as compared to all other countries of the world. This percentage is also predicted to increase in the coming years (Butt *et al.*, 2011). In another study, Shaikh (2018) has reported that 36% of youth in Pakistan aged between 15-24 years is part of the labour force and the numbers can grow 50% by 2050. Labour Force Survey (2015) reported that 41.3

males and 16.4 females falling in the age group 10-24 years were involved in child labour in Pakistan. These young people are augmented as a driver of change and improvement in the country, however, due to inadequate opportunities are involved in child labour (UNDP, 2017).

Population in Pakistan is increasing rapidly whereas the employment opportunities are decreasing alarmingly as well. During 2007, employment opportunities declined by 0.1 million and the gap between population growth rate and employment rate started to expand. Since then, on yearly basis the employment rate is downfallen. According to Akyüz (2011) and Rahman (2012), the

employment rate in Pakistan decreased drastically as the industrial sector was facing numerous challenges. This is worth mentioning that the industrial sector and agriculture sector are two prominent sectors absorbing a majority of the labour force. The agriculture sector not only contributes 19.2% to the national GDP but also employs 38.5% of the labour force (Government of Pakistan, 2021). Apart from that, 65-70% of the population is dependent on the agriculture sector for their livelihoods. This implies that agriculture has tremendous potential to offer more employment opportunities if the sector is provided with due support. Blyton and Turnbull (2004) were of the view that the agriculture sector can ingest more manpower even rural and urban youth as compared to non-agricultural employment. For this opportunity, the agriculture sector must grow. Bongaarts and Casterline (2013) predicted that the GDP of the country should grow at 6% annually to address the unemployment issues of the ever-increasing population. Agricultural productivity enhancement is a central policy to transform agriculture and promote the level of income of farmers (Alvarez-Cuadrado and Poschke, 2011; Ngai and Pissarides, 2007).

The agriculture sector has been the largest economic driver in Pakistan since its independence in 1947. At that time agriculture was adding 60% to the national GDP and this sector was the profound source of economic revenue for the country (Government of Pakistan, 2014). However, over time growth of this sector started weakening as the share of national GDP dropped significantly. The share to GDP has dropped from 60% to 57% in 1959-50, from 31% to 29% in 1978-79, 20.8% in 2014 and 19.2% in 2020-21 (Government of Pakistan, 2021). This decline also exaggerated the decline in employment opportunities. In general, the agriculture sector in-country is facing numerous constraints, plights and distortions, including scanty access to credit, water scarcity, increased cost of inputs, impure seeds, adulterated fertilizers and most important relying on traditional technologies (Bhangar and Saima, 2008).

To improve agricultural productivity and generate more employment opportunities, youth would have to participate in agricultural activities. The combined effects of climate change, lower level of production, access to modern food chains, crashed marketing system and need to grow more food have forced produced to

comprehend new skills and increase their capacities to overcome the challenges and make the agriculture sector competitive (Sánchez-Díaz *et al.*, 2002; Pindado and Sánchez, 2017). Coinciding this background, the involvement of youth is indispensable in agriculture to break the stereotype and mainstream the agricultural productivities. However, the need for the hour is to target the socio-economic and cognitive limitations of youths (Magagula and Tsvakirai, 2019). Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the level of interest and involvement of youth in agricultural activities. This study also aimed at unveiling those factors which are hampering and lowering the interest and participation of youth in the agriculture sector.

METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitative and followed cross sectional survey research design. Survey research is regarded as good for qualitative studies. It helps researchers to explore human behaviour and therefore are frequently used in social and psychological research studies (Ponto, 2015).

District Faisalabad of the Punjab province was selected as a study area. This district is observed as one of the most populous districts in the Punjab Province. According to the 2017 census report total population of the district is 7874790 (Ali, 2010).

District Faisalabad has a total of six tehsils including Faisalabad City, Faisalabad Saddar, Chak Jhumra, Samundri, Jaranwala and Tandlian Wala (Figure 1). To explore the diverse response, it was decided to select a sample from all tehsils of the district. The target population of the study was comprised of all the youth living in rural areas of district Faisalabad within the age limit of 15 to 29 years.

From each tehsil, two rural union councils were selected randomly. From each of the selected union councils, three villages were selected randomly. From each selected village total of 12 young individuals were selected thereby making a total sample size of 432 respondents.

To collect data interview guide was prepared. The major questions included in the interview guide were (i) what comes to your mind when you hear the word agriculture? (ii) what are the reasons behind low interest in the agriculture sector? and (iii) what are the factors lowering your participation in agriculture? An interview guide was validated by the committee of

experts from the Institute of Agricultural Extension, Education and the Rural Development University of Agriculture Faisalabad, Pakistan. Data were collected through face-to-face interview techniques. Collected

data were analyzed using the content analysis technique. Content analysis is one of the important qualitative techniques currently available to analyze the collected data and interpret its meaning (Schreier, 2012).

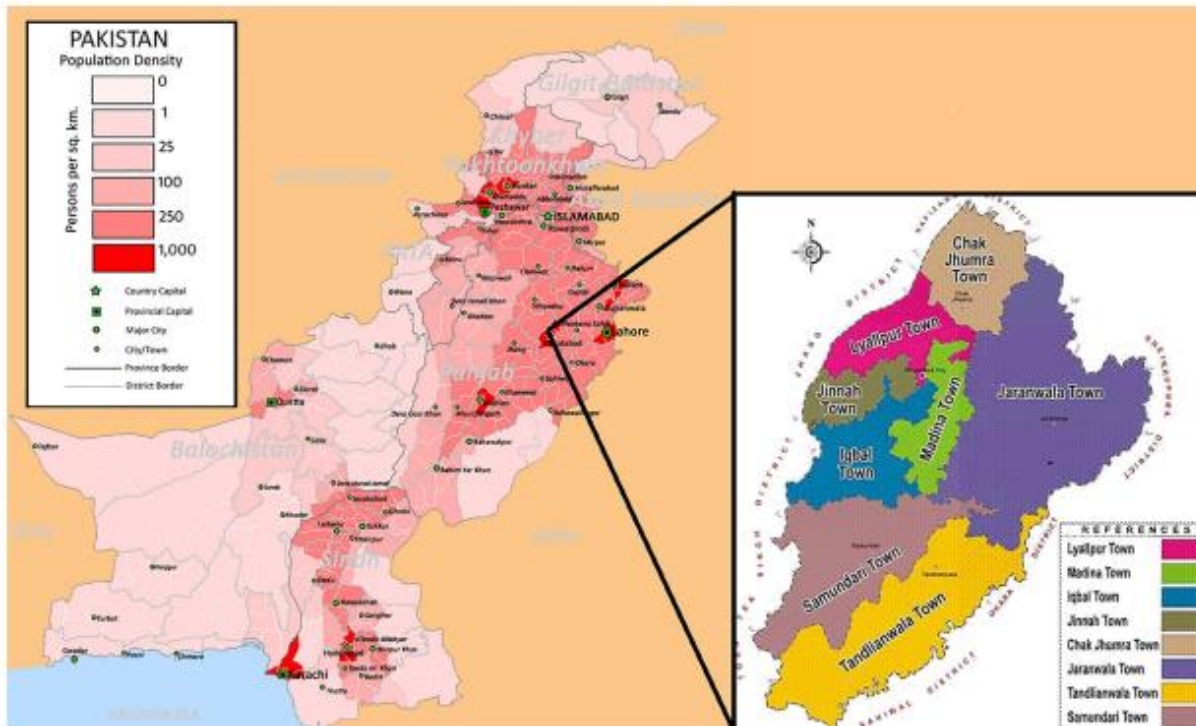


Figure 1. Geographical location of Faisalabad on Map of Pakistan.

RESULTS

In this section, results are interpreted after thorough content analysis. The results are explained questions wise i.e. (i) what comes to your mind when you hear the word agriculture? (ii) what are the reasons behind low interest in the agriculture sector? and (iii) what are the factors lowering your participation in agriculture?

What comes to your mind when you hear the word agriculture?

Most of the respondents were in favour of the agriculture sector and all had positive inclinations towards the agriculture sector. None of the respondents undermined the importance of agriculture, as this is the prime source feeding a mammoth population. However, in agriculture as a profession, respondents were divided in their thinking. Most of the respondents viewed agriculture as an unsuccessful profession. Some had a thought that the agriculture sector does not have much potential now to support the livelihoods of families, thus

it's much needed to go for off-farm options to generate income.

One of the respondents reported:

For me agriculture as a profession is unattractive and I am observing a dark face of agriculture in the country. Over the years I am witnessing that farm families are struggling in meeting their livelihoods through the agriculture sector. Most of them are living hand to mouth. This occupation has become a hard and onerous occupation with a very minor income.

Another respondent argued that;

I do have an affiliation with agriculture and my entire family is associated with farming. I am seeing that agriculture has become risky pertinent to mounting challenges like climatic changes. The income from the agriculture sector has become risky-infect the chances of losses are bright. This risk is the major driver lowering my level of interest in agriculture, unless the policies

well in favour of farmers are not implemented just like are done in the developed countries.

Most of the respondents perceived agriculture as less lucrative and riskier and perhaps the perplexing situation in a recent decade or two had turned agriculture more complex when farmers have to meet with climate change, inadequate market access and compromised quality of inputs. But still, some respondents had great anticipations with this sector, if it becomes successful in getting the attention of policymakers in Pakistan. One of the respondents summarized at the end that;

I am the son of a farmer and have a great inclination towards the agriculture sector. I would love to live and work in agriculture and consider agriculture a profitable business. At the same time, I do want to see undue support to this sector from policymakers.

Reasons for low interest in agriculture

During a discussion with the respondents, it was perceived that the interest of young individuals in the agriculture sector was found declining for many reasons such as unemployment, inflation, low productivity and unfriendly policies of the government. Respondents had a firm belief in the importance of agriculture. Many respondents reported preferring rural life as they perceived it more secure and nourished. The access to pure food in the rural areas was found fascinating. Some of the respondents viewed agriculture as a profound source of income too. Apart from these entailing benefits, a majority of the youth had subdued their level of interest in agriculture.

One of the respondents argued:

I do not agree that agriculture is a profitable business. We, (farmers) are not getting recognition in society. It seems we are involved in the agriculture sector as unpaid labour and most of us are still trapped in the poverty cycle-despite of tiring efforts in the field.

Most of the respondents had thoughts of not getting recognition while adopting agriculture as a profession. The major reason for their derecognition was the low returns in the agriculture sector. The agriculture sector has become perplexed, and challenges are mounting like shrinking land size, water scarcity, increasing population and limited resources.

One of the respondents reported:

The overall image of agriculture has drastically dropped. As result, even the agricultural graduates were not ready to participate in farming. Because they know that the agriculture sector is not getting the due support and necessary policies from the concerned quarters.

Another respondent informed that;

Income generation opportunities in agriculture have become scarce. We have traditional farming, traditional approach and consequently, the income generation has become sluggish. However, over time the cost of production has increased manifold.

How the involvement of youth in agriculture can be increased?

This is much important to increase the participation of youth in agriculture to transform the agriculture sector from a traditional venture to a modern venture. Respondents agreed and had a vision that agriculture can be retained as a profitable venture. However, a lot of work and focus is direly needed. In the context of improving agriculture and persuading the young generation to participate in the agriculture sector, the government needs agriculture-led policies.

Some of the respondents summarized that;

To improve the agriculture sector, the government should take the responsibility of turning it into a youth-led venture. The challenges like credit availability, water availability, quality seed, pure pesticides and subsidies should be prioritized and solved to facilitate the farmers.

One of the respondents said;

I am willing to perform farming but who will guarantee me that I will get the inputs on subsidized rates, and I will get the right price of my produce in the market. As for as my experience is concerned, so far, I never get the right price of my produce in the market and it's all because of poor marketing strategies set by the agriculture department.

DISCUSSION

We tried to explore the level of participation of youth in agriculture and the factors that are impeding the participation of the youth in agriculture. We identified that youth had a positive inclination towards the

agriculture sector as it has the potential to feed such a mammoth population in Pakistan. The population of Pakistan has crossed 220 million and to feed this increasing population, it is indispensable to increase the production level of farmers. It was also found that agriculture is the source of employment for millions of people. Youth unemployment is augmented as a serious problem in many countries (White, 2012) and agriculture is the key sector to resolve the issue of unemployment. In Pakistan, agriculture employs almost 39% of the labour force. Despite the significance of this sector, respondents perceived it as unsuccessful as an occupation. However, Pakistan has no formal system of training and providing mobilization to the youth (Butt et al., 2011). The income generation through agriculture has become uncertain and inadequate to run households. A similar view has been presented by Anriquez and Valdes (2006). They observed that farm size in Pakistan was declining and as result farmers were preferring off-farm income for their survival. They concluded that off-farm income sources of farmers were more important than the on-farm income. This was might be due to the non-productiveness of the farming sector. Gartaula *et al.* (2012) found that people started regarding agriculture as a dirty job, because of poor earnings from the sector. Agricultural transformation to generate income and persuade the participation of young farmers in agriculture is much needed. Agricultural transformation has a tremendous potential to foster growth and multiply the level of income (Otchia, 2014).

There are a lot of factors including policy-related and production and environmental factors hampering the participation of youth in agriculture. As for production-related factors are concerned, farmers perceived them as more serious and cause of the decline of agricultural productivity. Whereas, farmers friendly policies, if were implemented could have created ease for the farmers and jump out of a vicious circle of challenges. However, farmers especially the young ones are not getting the policies they are deemed to get to modernize the farm operations. Services to youth such as integration of Information Communication Technologies (Irungu *et al.*, 2015), provision of machinery (Sims *et al.*, 2016), ensuring land security (White, 2012) and turning the agricultural work more efficient (Ng'atigwa *et al.*, 2020). Conversely, in rural settings, farmers are encountering small land holding, large households to feed,

unemployment, limited income opportunities followed by inadequate access to resources followed by crashed marketing systems in the country. These challenges made agriculture a non-lucrative sector for the youth especially. Kamal *et al.* (2012) have found a yield gap of 53-82% in major crops. This extensive gap in yield is a notion that agriculture is not profitable as it should be. Traditional farming practices adopted by small farmers (ALi, 2010), high cost of production (Khan, 2012), inadequate awareness of modern production practices (Jehangir *et al.*, 2007), imbalanced use of inputs (Iqbal and Ahmad, 2005), intensive cultivation (Hussain *et al.*, 2003), diseases (Khan, 2012), poor economic status of growers and injudicious use of pesticides, the partial success of latest technologies (Sattar, 2012), soil salinization (Qureshi *et al.*, 2008), waterlogging (Aslam, 2016), climatic variations (Sattar, 2012), poor educational level and inadequate training options to boost farmers' knowledge were noteworthy factors suppressing farm productivity (Ali and Gupta, 2012). Sumberg *et al.* (2012) reported that inadequate resources like finance, land, negative attitude towards agriculture, poor level of technical knowledge and skills, non-working of youth groups and association, low level of involvement of youth in decision making and lack of experience sharing were the key reasons limiting the youth participation in agriculture. Lack of incentives in farming, poor access to inputs and farm implements, lack of insurance programs and limited access to credit facilities were the challenges being faced by the youth in the context of participation in the agriculture sector (Hassan *et al.*, 2016). In another study conducted by Adekunle *et al.* (2010), they found that poor returns from agriculture lack of technical knowledge, lack of access to farm inputs, poor availability of credit facility and absence of insurance facilities were the leading obstacles hampering the youth participation in agriculture. Agriculture is the single largest source of employment, livelihoods and source of food, thus with the support, it can render sustainable and highly productive alternatives especially to youth to transform it into a profitable venture (White, 2012).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We conclude that youth is the key pillar of economic development whereas it is indispensable to enhance the level of involvement of youth in agriculture-especially in Pakistan where a major chunk of the population is

dependent on agriculture for food, livelihoods and employment generation. Currently, the youth involvement is scanty, and more are emphasizing off-farm work as a more important source of income generations. This disinclination of youth is drastic for agricultural development. To feed such a mammoth population, the country needs to transform agriculture and bring a multifold increase in crops production. This is not possible unless the youth is not involved in the farm operations. The agricultural landscape has changed over time especially in the realm of climate change and other unforeseen challenges. In this regard, it is much needed to implement some serious interventions to enhance youth participation in agriculture. More important is to establish agriculture as a profitable income source and the onus is on the government to implement the economic reforms in agriculture. Furthermore, a broader approach focusing on agricultural education and training to the youth is required to improve the knowledge, skills and understanding capacity of the youth. In rural areas focus should be paid on increasing the youth access to quality services and access to inputs on subsidized rates. Youth should be persuaded for cooperative farming, and it is strongly recommended for the establishment of youth clubs and cooperatives.

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