



The Role of Youth in Agriculture and Economic Development

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ABSTRACT

Youth plays a very important role in the political, economic and social development of the country. In Myanmar, half of Myanmar's population is under the age of 27. Within this age group, the largest group of youth between 5 and 14 can offer a possible demographic dividend to reap the benefits for the country in the next 10-15 years. The government needs to focus on targeted investments and work opportunities for young people especially when they become of working age. Like other countries, there are many challenges and needs of youth in agriculture. In Myanmar, agriculture is often described as having low productivity, low profitability and lack of facilities for farming and agri-processing. Many youth organizations in agriculture such as YPARD Myanmar, AgriProFocus and Greenway are trying to understand and boost the youth's participation in agriculture, create platforms of sharing information for youth, and encourage the capacity development of young farmers and agro-entrepreneurs in Myanmar. Moreover, the Union Government has established the Myanmar Youths Policy to improve and elevate the role of youths in all sectors of the country. Therefore, it is time to create awareness among young people about new technologies for adoption in the field of agriculture and economic development.

Keywords: Agriculture, Development, Government, Technologies, Youth

INTRODUCTION

Youth can be defined as the group of people who are between childhood and adulthood or maturity. According to United Nation's General Assembly, "Youth are the persons falling between the ages of 15 and 24 years inclusive". It can also be said that someone who is under 35 years old is still considered within the category of youth but this description depends on the nation's policy of defining the term for youth. Under the new policy, Myanmar's youths are defined as the citizens between the ages of 15 and 35 years. The appearance, freshness, vigor and spirit are the characteristics that can be taken into account when defining youth. As youths play the important role of the country, the nation thinks of youth as future leaders and the prosperity and wealth of the nation is on their hands. According to its very nature, youths prefer adventure and they want to explore something new and also prefer challenges. Therefore, it can be said that they will be filled with tremendous and towering ambitions.

Youths try to improve their abilities and they also want to show their talents and performances. If they have no chance to show their talents for this kind of opportunities, the nation will have a great waste of human resources for development.

According to the 2014 population census, Myanmar has a total population of about 51.4 million. Youths between 15 and 19 make up 9.20% of the country's population, youths between 20 and 24 makes up 8.61% per cent, youths between 25 and 29 makes up 8.25% per cent and youths between 30 and 34 make up 7.7%. Moreover half of population is under the age of 27 and the majority is between 5 and 14 years old. They can offer a possible demographic dividend to reap the benefits for the country in the next 10-15 years. The government needs to focus on targeted investments for better quality education and skills to be ready for the work opportunities of young people especially when they become of working age.

NATION BUILDING AND THE ROLE OF YOUTH

The nation's future depends on the youth and they play an important role for the development of the country. If youths are outside of the workplace, it leads negative trend to the country's economy. For millions of young people around the world, finding a decent job is still a drawn-out uphill struggle. Almost half of the global youth labor force is still either unemployed or working yet living in poverty. Moreover, global youth unemployment rate is increasing and they need job creations by business organizations. Government also needs to support the youth with proper facilities for getting equipped with the knowledge of the modern world. They can establish nation into a better place. However, they can do nothing except government's support programs.

In Myanmar's youth history, they were key players in the liberation movements and they flout against the colonial rule or the oppressive regime. They played the important roles both in pre independence and independence periods. In every transaction, they lead the public and people believed that they could pin their hopes. Thus, the students and youth of Myanmar played a dynamic and decisive role in the country, shaping the nation's destiny. They enjoy a dignified status which the people entrusted for their fight against injustice, oppression and repression., It is necessary for young people to get a better education because only educated people can be the better citizens and finally they can drive the country with their knowledge, conceptual skill and also with a good ethic to be fair, justice and peaceful environment. However, it still needs to provide the proper facilities for development and getting equipped with the knowledge of the modern era by the nation.

As the youth is the most important role in today's time, they have never ever underplayed themselves. They should believe themselves to do new things for the nation's development. Thus, they need confidence to overcome challenges and difficulties while creating new things. Today's youth are creative and they have a lot of ideas to handle and solve difficult situations and problems. In our county, youths have the power to unite individuals in the various ethnic groups and nationalities.

The youth seems to have a positive influence on their fellow young people. They are able to persuade and teach them the positive things in life. However, youths have a potential to become important people who can serve with their abilities to create a better world. This is despite the fact that some youths are also destroying their own future. Poor education system, problems in their families, low socio-economic conditions and lack of suitable job opportunities are leading them to a bad way of life. The government, in addition to private institutions like organizations, corporates and other firms should assist the youth. The government needs to focus on a good education system for the nation's and youth.

AGRICULTURE, NATURAL RESOURCES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN MYANMAR

Myanmar is an agricultural country and almost 70% of the population lives in the rural areas with their livelihood depending on the agriculture sector. The country has 18.2 million hectares of arable land, of which only 13.3 million ha (73%) are currently considered cultivable land. . In the cultivated land, only 2.1 million ha (16%) are irrigated, in the main monsoon season, while 11.2 million ha (84%) are rainfed. For inclusive economic growth, agricultural development is the most significant opportunity. Rice is the main crop; other crops cultivated include pulses, oil seeds, maize, cotton, rubber, sugarcane, tropical fruits, and vegetables. Myanmar is well positioned to access agricultural export markets, thanks to its strategic geographic location with respect to China and India and its participation in regional groupings such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). As Myanmar has a comparative advantage in crop production within Southeast Asian Region, it has opportunities to export rice to the regional market and also a potential for other crops such as beans, pulses, and oil seeds. The performance of the agriculture sector and its potential for country's growth has been enhanced by recent progressive agricultural policy reforms:

- i. land law reforms;
- ii. abolition of the rice production quota, allowing farmers to choose which crops to cultivate;
- iii. liberalization of domestic and international marketing of rice in 2003, and of industrial crops in 2004;
- iv. removal of the export tax on key agricultural commodities;
- v. a law allowing the establishment of microfinance institutions;
- vi. use of crops as loan collateral; and
- vii. passage of a plant pest quarantine law in 1990, a pesticide law in 1993, and a fertilizer law in 2000.

Although there are progressive agricultural policy reforms, it still needs to adopt a better coherent and comprehensive approach to agriculture and rural development, and to make agriculture more commercially oriented. Since 2011, the Union government has been adopting a value-chain approach to agriculture which will facilitate the job creation and income growth needed to achieve both rural development and sustainable inclusive growth.

In order to improve the well-being of most of Myanmar's population, the government regards agricultural development as one of the driving forces of the economy and the foundation for the broad-based development and inclusive growth. However, implementation has not always fitted with the requirements and priorities of the sector. The challenge is to identify the principal needs for growth, allocate adequate resources, and strengthen key institutions in the sector. It will also be necessary to adopt policies that promote the involvement of the private sector in rural and agricultural development in areas such as marketing, processing, storage, and supply of inputs.

ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Agriculture is the production of food and goods through farming and forestry. Agriculture was the key development that led to the rise of human civilization; with the husbandry of domesticated animals and plants (i.e. crops) creating food surpluses that enabled the development of more densely populated and stratified societies. If the youth are involved in the ongoing growth process, they need to engage with their basic personal and social needs to be safe, feel cared for, be valued, be useful, be spiritually grounded, and to build skills and

competencies that allow them to function and contribute in their daily lives. Agriculture needs to address these complex problems by focusing resources on youth development needs. High school agriculture, and related agricultural literacy programs, guidance counselors, science teachers, parents, and policy-makers are initials for positive image of agriculture to communicate young people for reaching and creating a larger pool of youth.

Agricultural production is very important for our nation and it is single largest employer for the country. According to the World Bank indicator, employment in agriculture in Myanmar was reported at 49.93 % in 2017. With a world population that is growing exponentially, it is estimated that we will need to produce 70% percent more food to keep up with the growing demand. Feeding the world will definitely be a daunting task, with the world population projected to swell to over 9 billion people in the next 30 years.

The agricultural education system in Myanmar includes three universities, all under different Ministries and focused on different segments of the agricultural sector. The Yezin Agricultural University (YAU) and the University of Veterinary Science (UVS) are under the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation (MOALI). YAU covers crop sciences and offers some courses in animal science and fisheries. UVS covers veterinary sciences and fisheries. The University of Forestry (UOF) under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MONREC) specializes in issues of land management, environment and forestry. These universities are the principal agricultural agencies of higher education in Myanmar. The goals of the universities are to educate students to attain high standard in agricultural sciences, and generate well qualified agriculturists for the country. The missions are to provide education and develop human resources for increased production through green growth, to provide career and business opportunities for the graduates who are well qualified and to contribute the nation through research and education. In addition to these degree-conferring institutions, seven State Agricultural Institutes (SAI) under the MOALI offer the agricultural education diploma program for high school graduates.

MIGRATION OF YOUTH

While agriculture is the mainstay of the domestic economy and the major employer, it is not an attractive sector for the youth and few see themselves working in because it is perceived as very hard work with low returns. There are few job opportunities in the rural areas. As early as 15 years old, young girls and boys migrate to towns and overseas in order to find better job opportunities. The 2014 census is a rich data source for exploring the dynamics and consequences of the migration of youth. Almost one in five (19 %) of youth aged 15-24 have moved from the township where they were born and this number is gradually increased in the following years.

In order to improve skills of the youth, government ministries with NGO provide vocational training such as weaving and sowing, basic handicraft and food processing, basic electric and welding, furniture and lacquer-ware technology. Although government implements training, youth go back to their villages and their previous activities as they lack access to finance, and entrepreneurial skills to develop a business. Some may find jobs in small shops and garment factories in townships and cities. But there is no monitoring system to understand what happen to youth after the training. Currently, youth in the rural areas are preoccupied in farm work, road construction, rice mills, fish processing and potato chips and bean paste cottage industries. But the lack of better job opportunities, lack of interest in agriculture and low wages are key factors for youth to migrate to urban areas and neighboring countries. Majority of youth migrants works in shops (boys usually in tea shops), restaurants and hotels, the garment industry, domestic work and construction. Their wages are incredibly

low (about \$3 per day) as they have low or lack of skills. Migration to neighboring countries may occur from the age of 15.

ATTRACTING YOUTH TO AGRICULTURE SECTOR

The youths' participation in the agriculture sector is becoming a prominent issue as they have become disenchanted with agriculture worldwide. In developing countries, agriculture is likely to provide the main source of income and it is vital that young people are connected to farming. However, rapid urbanization has led to a decline in rural populations. Nowadays, young people desire to migrate abroad for better job opportunities and they have no attention to return to their their firms. Youth's perspective is that they prefer creation and innovation. In order to meet youth's desire and country's benefit of contributing towards the development of population in the rural areas, the government needs to find solutions to make farming attractive and find decent jobs for them in the agriculture sector and improve their entrepreneurial skills to develop rural non-farm activities. The anticipated agricultural transformation and modernization could be keys to shifting the youth's negative perception of participation in firm activities. Since 2011, FAO has developed and successfully implemented an innovative public-private partnership model for youth employment in agriculture, which could be useful to support rural youth employment in Myanmar. This model combines various components:

- Tailor-made and market-oriented vocational training activities (technical and entrepreneurial skills) that are adapted to rural youth's levels of understanding and the constraints they face (such as the Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools approach);
- Linkages with public actors such as the Department of Agriculture to facilitate access to land and inputs, and private actors such as farmers' organizations, cooperatives and microfinance institutions to access credit and provide guidance to youth in the selection of higher-value agricultural products and market opportunities; and
- Inclusion of youth in programmed design, as well as relevant national policy and strategy processes.

The sustainability of agriculture and food production relies on young people remaining in the rural areas and engaging in agriculture. There are so many challenges and needs for active involvement of youth in agriculture. It cannot persuade the youth due to its low productivity, low profitability and lack of facilities for farming and agri-processing in Myanmar. The lack of engagement of youth in agriculture has resulted in an ageing agricultural system where there will be fewer experienced people to take over agricultural activities and thus, reduce transfer of knowledge from the older to the younger generation. The majority of rural youth aspire to migrate to urban areas in search of better livelihoods. Increased structural investments into improving the livelihoods of these rural populations are necessary to reduce outmigration. In both cases, for existing and future generations to stay in the rural areas, increased access to basic education and vocational training geared toward sustainable agriculture must become a priority.

As youths don't see the future prospect of agriculture and as an active profession, they are not interested to engage in agriculture. There is a lot of concern about engaging the youth in agriculture. In making agriculture more interesting, information and communication technologies (ICTs) could offer new job opportunities. Therefore, the youth are needed to train and be given the chance to access ICTs so that they can engage in agricultural value chains. By using mobile phone applications in farming activities, the youth can change their perceptions on agriculture as an exciting and innovative industry from seeing as the stereotypes of traditional farming.

MYANMAR YOUTH POLICY

Myanmar's youth, which makes up more than a third of the country's population, will lead the way towards a better future, and an official policy promoting and nurturing youth will help. The Myanmar Youths Policy was introduced in 2017, which was developed to improve and elevate the role of youth in all sectors of the country. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, the Ministry of Health and Sports, the Ministry of Education and United Nations agencies also collaborated with youth representatives to develop the draft. All the people in the country strive to boost their abilities. Myanmar's economy and education will improve. Young people will play a major role in the country's success because Myanmar's youth population makes up more than a third of the total population.

The youth policy includes the advice of youths in fleshing out strategies and programs at state and regional level discussions. The new youth policy also focuses on issues related to education, health, drug hazards, job opportunities, economics, political research, literature, arts and culture. It also promotes youth centers and free youth associations that will help the youth through development programs. The youth committee is tasked to review and amend the policy every year. The policy also prioritizes programs for disabled youth, orphans, young migrant workers, young people who are victims of war or natural disasters, transgender youth, young ethnic people, child soldiers, victims of human trafficking, drug addicts, victims of AIDS, sex workers and victims of child sex abuse.

YOUTHS' ASSOCIATIONS FOR MYANMAR AGRICULTURE SECTOR

There are many youth organizations of agriculture such as YPARD Myanmar, AgriProFocus and Greenway. They are trying to understand and boost youth's participation in agriculture, create platforms of sharing information for youth, and encourage the capacity development of young farmers and agro-entrepreneurs in Myanmar.

YPARD Myanmar

YPARD is an international movement by Young Professionals for Agricultural Development, which was launched in 2006. Later on 14 February 2014, the YPARD officially launched its new name, from the Young Professionals Platform for Agricultural Research for Development to Young Professionals for Agricultural Development. The global online and offline communication and discussion platform has a mission to serve as a global collective platform. From these discussions, young professionals can realize their full potential and contribute proactively towards innovative agricultural development. YPARD does this by organizing events, seminars, learning journeys and awareness campaigns. YPARD membership is for free and on voluntary basis. In order to realize its mission, YPARD has the following strategic objectives:

- Improve the perception of agriculture among young professionals;
- Facilitate young professionals' contribution into strategic debates in agricultural development;
- Enable young professionals to reach their full potential in agricultural development; and
- Buildg and maintain YPARD as a sustainable platform

YPARD works through regional units. The YPARD Asia and Pacific Unit was the first one launched from the initiation of YPARD. The next generation of Asian agricultural leaders, thinkers, and entrepreneurs were needed to develop to address critical agricultural development issues and provide greater access to opportunities and resources for youth in the

agriculture and food sector. YPARD Asia and Pacific grew to an umbrella network of 12 different Asian countries (Bangladesh, China, Kyrgyz Republic, India, Indonesia, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri-Lanka, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam). Myanmar joined in January 2017 and established YPARD-Myanmar with local representatives and coordinating members.

AgriProFocus

Food security is urgent and complex need for human beings. To meet the needs of a rapidly growing world population, worldwide effort on food security is required. AgriProFocus members are dedicated to meeting this challenge in a collaborative manner by working together, learning from each other and collectively pushing for change. It brings together businesses, civil society, knowledge institutes and governments working towards food security. United in diversity, the members share the conviction that business and development are not mutually exclusive. AgriProFocus supports the members in finding new, sustainable ways of doing business and exchanging perspectives from collaboration people, planet and profit. It also helps members to find the right partners and the right information around specific questions, issues and opportunities.

AgriProFocus is active in 12 countries in Africa and South-East Asia. It gives a unique opportunity to meet, share and explore opportunities for collaboration, learning and creating collective impact with diverse, relevant actors in the agrifood sector. It organizes and facilitates spaces for members to meet, work, learn and influence together, both online and offline. The diverse membership base and presence among all countries offer unique opportunities for cross-boundary exchange. The online platform with over 25,000 registered agribusiness professionals facilitates easy access to relevant information and provides members with visibility and outreach. It is a navigator in the network for finding the right business partners, relevant information and building a strong culture of collaboration.

AgriProFocus need multi-stakeholder cooperation to innovate the agrifood system in Myanmar to promote the development of the agricultural sector. Myanmar's agricultural sector is crucial for the development of the country, as it accounts for 38% of the GDP and employs nearly 70% of the population. The potential is immense, but Myanmar also faces big challenges. Key issues include low productivity, quality and competitiveness, limited capacities of farmers and young professionals, lack of formal farmer organizations and outdated financial policies.

The global AgriProFocus network identified four overarching thematic areas in the years 2018- 2022: Inclusive agribusiness, Climate smart agribusiness, Circular economy agribusiness and Nutrition-sensitive agribusiness. In Myanmar, it will primarily focus on inclusive agribusiness in 2018. The members need to identify important opportunities to join the work on various issues, including youth in agribusiness, gender in value chains, farm-firm relationships and linking agripreneurs to formal markets and finance. A new generation and innovative ideas are needed for professionalizing and scaling up value chains. Nowadays, it organizes:

- Agrifood bootcamp to increase awareness of youth about the opportunities in agribusiness, improve linkages and exchange between Myanmar youth and Dutch and Myanmar companies and to develop skills and capacities; and
- A transformation lab, including a youth forum to advocate for specific policies for youth in agriculture.

Greenway

Greenway, also known as Greenovator, is an agri-tech team and a social enterprise which was founded by three core members in Myanmar since 2011. They all are professionals in agriculture sharing a passion and commitment to promote sustainable agricultural production, the use of natural resources and environment conservation. The values of this group are accountability, creativity and quality on their actions. Their vision is to share alternative agricultural techniques with farmers and their priority is to provide quality services to meet community needs. Based on their vision, the objectives are:

- to promote easily accessible agricultural technology for everyone;
- to create a central knowledge base for technicians', civil societies' and individuals' interest;
- to spread agricultural technology knowledge and experience to growers at all levels; and
- to share up-to-date information, knowledge and technology relating to agriculture.

The first attempt of Greenovator was the introduction of a mobile application concerning agriculture (Green Way Agri-mobile App). Greenovator has signed the MOU with Advanced Center for Agricultural Research and Education (ACARE) and YAU for the knowledge sharing and research activities. Greenovator has been honored to receive two awards; the first one was Myanmar Young Entrepreneurs Association (MYEA) for Myanmar Young Social Enterprises and secondly the ASEAN Most Innovative Business Idea by ASEAN India Youth awards. Green Way app is now going beyond agricultural knowledge and start supporting livestock sector by collaborating with World Fish and New Zealand Dairy Excellence.

CONCLUSION

The role of the youth in nation building is crucial. They are problem solvers, have a positive influence on other young people and the nation, and are extremely ambitious. They have the ability to create an identity for themselves and move the nation forward. However, they will not be able to do this without the support of their Governments and fellow youth. In young people, some lose their ways and they have no idea to make their future plans and a large number of them are without proper guidelines about their futures. It can be a huge grievance for the country when there are no suitable job opportunities. If they are given the right guidance, they will actively work with their efforts in developmental activities. As youth can bring quicker and better results, dynamic young men can play a pivotal role in the socio-economic reconstruction of the society. Furthermore, the youth should be encouraged in adult education. It will be cost effective if youth get actively involved in these development programs.

For involving youth in agricultural sector development, Universities and Colleges of Agriculture are priority for directing commitment of resources required to meet significant goals of the Agricultural Industry. To persuade youths' interest in agriculture, basic education programs need to be addressed agricultural and environmental topics. It can expand the pool of youth seeking undergraduate and graduate degrees in Universities and Colleges of Agriculture. Moreover, it can provide the requirements for agricultural industry as it moves into the next century. The agriculture sector can attract youths when they are offered education in agriculture, a voice at policy level, and in the media, and are engaged with innovations. The young generation has a chance involving the agriculture sector to grow and provide enough food to feed the world and will have an opportunity to end world hunger and alleviate malnutrition. Finally, how youth development is viewed and addressed will have a fundamental effect on the youth as well as the educational programs designed for them.

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