

Majority of youth do not have access to land, lack capital and lack access to credit facilities

The youth need to be engaged in policy making to spur agriculture

A review of policies governing land ownership and businesses to favour the youthful generation will spur growth, especially in matters addressing food security

BY SAMMY WAWERU

Youth engagement in agriculture and entrepreneurship remains low due to policies that exclude them from actively participating in these sectors.

For instance, the lack of land ownership hampers efforts to address hunger and food security, despite the government's commitment to increasing agricultural production.

Patrick Odame, Director of the Centre for African Bio-Entrepreneurship (CABE Africa), says that unless policies are reviewed, the country will struggle to achieve food security goals since the youth, who form the majority of the population, are not involved.

Youths are also disadvantaged since they do not own land, and some crops are perennial, grown for a number of years, therefore, their fathers cannot release the parcels very easily. That is a significant constraint in growing the agricultural sector

Patrick Odame, CABE Africa

CABE is a non-governmental organisation that works to enhance the welfare of smallholder farmers, women and youth entrepreneurs in Africa by mobilising support, linking them to markets and non-market agencies, protecting their rights, and assisting them to improve their entrepreneurship skills.

"Youths are also disadvantaged since they do not own land, and some crops are perennial, grown for a number of years, therefore, their fathers cannot release the parcels very easily. That is a significant constraint in growing the agricultural sector," explains Mr Odame.

As a result, the majority lack information to utilise the small and readily available lands for production.

They are also constrained in accessing credit from financial institutions such as banks and Saccos since they lack collateral, forcing the few involved in Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) and agribusinesses to operate informally.

In an interview with Seeds of Gold at a recent youth conference convened by CABE Africa in Nairobi, Mr Odame insisted that a review of policies governing land ownership and businesses to favour the youthful generation will spur growth, especially in matters addressing food security.

"By operating informally, it means that they are not registered and cannot access loans from financial institutions since banks only recognise registered groups. There is a need for policy space to be informed on how to reach out to policymakers to address their challenges," suggested Mr Odame, pointing out that the organisation has been working with key strategic partners to improve youth welfare. CABE Africa hosts Utafiti Sera (Research to Policy) House on Youth Employment Creation (YEC) in collaboration with Partnerships



Mr Patrick Odame, Director, Centre for African Bio-Entrepreneurship, Africa, during a youth conference the organisation held in Nairobi last week. SAMMY WAWERU | NATION

for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR). The organisation launched a project themed 'Enhancing Evidence Uptake in Agribusiness and Agro-processing: Towards Building More Inclusive Policies and Practices for Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) in Kenya'.

According to Odame, the YEC program has been implemented in three phases and is now entering its fourth phase.

"Phase I focused on employment in the sugar sector, while phase II was in horticulture, and Phase III focused on agriculture and processing. It set out to generate evidence and contribute to the uptake of research

evidence to influence county and national policy agendas and facilitate actions in program design and implementation," he explains, adding that Phase IV aims at enhancing evidence uptake through co-creation with youth-led MSMEs.

At the summit, which brought together representatives from three value chains - mango (Makueni), potato (Nyandarua and West Pokot), and avocado (Kakamega) - targeting about 40 key stakeholders from the government, private sector, youth-led groups, and civil society, Fibian Cheptoo, 27, a potato farmer in West Pokot, highlighted the lack of land and capital to venture into agribusiness as some of the major challeng-

es hindering youths from taking up the cause.

"It is high time the government reviews some policies, such as the ones governing land ownership, to involve youths in agriculture. We are grappling with a lack of capital to lease land for farming, and with favourable laws in place, it will be easy for us to access credit from lending institutions," Cheptoo observed.

She grows potatoes on two leased acres. Justus Mwakavi, Makueni County Youth Coordinator, agrees with his counterpart.

The 33-year-old, tasked with coordinating youths in agricultural-related activities, reiterated the need to sensitise the youth about the numerous opportunities in agribusiness and the roles they can play in various value chains.

"However, the policies we have in place do not favour the youth, including the harsh business environment, registering and licensing businesses, access to resources, lack of information, as well as undefined business structures," explained Mwakavi.

He also called for synergy between the National and County Governments, bearing in mind that agriculture is a devolved function. As strategic stakeholders from both private and public sectors continue to engage with both levels of government, Odame urges youths to leverage innovation and technology.

"Agricultural value chains are very wide. Even if they won't be directly involved in food production, they can engage in the high end of the value chain, such as value addition and agro-processing, which calls for the adoption of modern technologies and innovation," he advises.

Past survey studies on why the number of youths engaged in agriculture is still low show that the majority do not have access to land, lack capital, lack access to credit facilities, while others view farming as an old-age job meant for retirees. Annually, about 1.5 million youths graduate from higher institutions of learning, including universities and colleges. Even though they may lack requisite job skills and knowledge, they require incubation and capacity-building programs for activities such as farming.

Government sets aside Sh1.45 billion to revamp Lake Region fish industry

BY ELIZABETH OJINA

The national government is set to revamp fisheries infrastructure in the Lake Region counties at a total cost of Sh1.45 billion.

Part of the project includes Sh400 million in funding for fishermen in the Nyanza region to venture into cage fish farming as an alternative source of income. With the dwindling wild catch in the lake, the Ministry of Blue Economy and Fisheries is providing funds for local

fishermen to have a sustainable source of income. Cabinet Secretary (CS) Salim Mvurya said an additional Sh50 million has been budgeted for modern boats and additional security along the fishing areas.

"Fishermen have been carrying out their fishing expeditions with a lot of challenges. The concept of aquaculture fishing will help fishermen strike a balance between cage fishing and wild catch," Mvurya said.

This comes as the national government is set to release

funds for the establishment of a Sh2.5 billion Nile perch multiplication and aquaculture resource centre.

"In the next three weeks, we will be finalising the financing of the project's phase, which will cost Sh1 billion and phase II at Sh1.5 billion. Kabonyo Kanyagwal will help support the fish value chain," the CS said.

Mvurya was speaking in Kisumu after a consultative meeting with MPs from the lake region. They discussed the proposed Aquaculture Business Development Programme

(ABDP) development projects in Lake Victoria. The government is also expected to complete some of the landing sites along the lake. So far, the landing sites at Mulukoba and Bumbe in Busia County have been completed.

"We are working on the landing site at Luanda Kotieno, Wich Lum, and Asembo in Siaya County. In Homa Bay, we are working on Nyadhiwa, Wakulla and Mainuga. We have concluded the one in Sori (Migori County) and are planning to do Got Kosola (in the same county)," Mvurya said.



Workers at Victory Farms load fish from a cage into a boat in Homa Bay County on January 24, 2022. FILE | NATION