

Harnessing the Untapped Potential of Youth Agripreneurship in Creating Employment and Food Security in Africa

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Abstract: Agripreneurship has huge potential to create employment, especially for youths and women, and thereby to reduce poverty in Africa. It is among the most promising sectors in Africa and an essential driver of economic development. But this potential has yet to be tapped. Through a review of relevant literature, this paper highlights the role of agripreneurship in creating youth employment in Africa and further highlights strategies for job creation for youth in agriculture. Secondary data was gathered from databases such as Google Scholar, John Wiley, Springer, SAGE, Scopus, and Taylor and Francis. If properly integrated, youth have the capacity to drive socio-economic development in Africa. However, despite its enormous potential, more work must be done to effectively incorporate youth in agripreneurship in Africa. The findings further indicate that youth participation in agribusiness can enhance youth employment and food production in Africa. Increased efforts to integrate youth into the food system will reduce the incidence of crime and poverty on the African continent. Government and development sector players must collaborate and form coalitions to tackle the challenge of youth unemployment collectively rather than in silos. Proper strategies and integration of youth in agripreneurship will increase job creation, food security, and income for many African farmers.

Keywords:

1. Africa
2. Agripreneurship
3. Employment creation
4. Food system

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1. Introduction

With about 60% of its total population below 25, Africa is the youngest continent in the world. Africa also has a large youth population, with over 420 million people aged between 15 and 35 (Geza et al., 2022). This demographic presents a significant economic growth and development opportunity but also poses substantial challenges, such as high unemployment rates, poverty, and social unrest (Addo, 2018). This situation is made even more challenging by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused job losses and reduced economic growth in many African countries (Rogito & Rogito, 2022).

Agriculture has the potential to provide employment opportunities for young people in Africa. Agriculture is the backbone of many African economies, employing over 60% of the continent's labor force, with women and youth making up a significant portion (Geza et al., 2022). The agricultural sector has the potential to create 17 million jobs for young people by 2025, thereby also alleviating food insecurity in Africa. But this potential is yet to be tapped (Adeyanju et al., 2021).

Agripreneurship, defined as entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector, is one way to harness the potential of agriculture for youth employment and food security. Agripreneurship offers opportunities for innovation, value addition, and market linkages, which can lead to higher incomes for farmers and increased food production. However, despite its enormous potential, more work needs to be done to effectively integrate young people into the sector (Boye et al., 2022).

The agriculture sector faces challenges that limit its potential to create employment for young people (Okello, 2020). One of the significant challenges facing youth agripreneurship in Africa is limited access to finance, which is a critical factor in the success of agribusiness ventures. Many young people need more collateral to secure loans from financial institutions (Muyanga et al., 2021). Limited access to land is also a significant challenge facing young agripreneurs in Africa. Land tenure systems in many African countries are complex, and young people often lack the resources to acquire land and to access markets for their products (Adeyanju et al., 2023). Inadequate training and skills are also significant challenges facing young agripreneurs in Africa, limiting their ability to develop viable businesses and to compete in local and international markets (Ray et al., 2022).

This paper provides background on youth agripreneurship, highlighting its potential for promoting youth employment and food security in Africa. It suggests strategies for creating jobs for youths in agriculture, discussing challenges and interventions needed. Providing new ideas for stimulating momentum toward achieving Africa's Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the United Nations food system pathways, the paper calls for collaborative efforts to unlock the potential of youth agripreneurship in Africa.

2. Agripreneurship in Africa

Agripreneurship has been described as the intersection of agriculture and entrepreneurship, involving innovative business models to create value and generate income. It combines agricultural activities with entrepreneurial principles to generate economic, social, and environmental benefits (Geza et al., 2021). The concept of agripreneurship is gaining traction in Africa due to the continent's vast agricultural resources and the need for sustainable food systems, employment creation, and economic growth (Akrong & Kotu, 2022).

2.1. Overview of Youth Engagement in Agripreneurship in Africa

Agribusiness has enormous potential to address youth unemployment and food insecurity in Africa. However, more work must be done to effectively integrate youth into the sector. Most youths in Africa view agriculture as a traditional and less profitable sector. Hence, they tend to shy away from it. However, there is a growing recognition that agripreneurship can provide viable employment opportunities for African youth. Recent studies have shown that African youth engagement in agripreneurship is rising (Aremu et al., 2021).

Nigeria's government has launched various initiatives to encourage youth engagement in agripreneurship. The Youth Employment in Agriculture Program (YEAP) provides training, mentorship, and start-up capital to young people interested in agripreneurship. The programme

has successfully created employment opportunities for young people and reduced poverty levels. Ghana's government, too, has launched several initiatives to support youth farmers. The National Youth in Agriculture Programme (NYAP) provides training, financial support, and market links to young people interested in agripreneurship. NYAP has successfully created employment opportunities for young people and improved food security in the country (Adeyanju et al., 2023).

However, despite such progress in promoting youth engagement in agripreneurship in Africa, there are still challenges to be addressed. These include access to finance, access to land, inadequate infrastructure, and limited market access. Addressing these challenges will require a collaborative effort from all stakeholders, including government, private sector, civil society, and development partners (Ouko et al., 2022). Young people's participation in agribusiness is critical for addressing youth unemployment and food insecurity in Africa (Zulu et al., 2021).

Agripreneurship presents an opportunity to address these challenges by creating innovative business models that are more efficient, productive, and profitable (Som et al., 2018). Agripreneurship can also address youth unemployment in Africa, a significant challenge facing the continent. Ude (2020) states that over 60% of Africa's youth are unemployed, threatening social and economic stability. Agripreneurship allows youth to create businesses, generate income, and contribute to the economy (Turolla et al., 2022).

2.2. Potential of Agripreneurship

Africa is a continent that has been grappling with high levels of unemployment, especially among young people. Unemployment in Africa is a major challenge that requires immediate attention, and agribusiness has emerged as one of the most promising sectors to address this challenge.

Agripreneurship offers enormous employment potential due to its large labour absorption capacity, particularly among youth and women (Ray et al., 2022). The sector has the potential to create employment opportunities in various areas, including the production, processing, distribution, and marketing of agricultural products. The agriculture sector is a significant contributor to most African countries' gross domestic product (GDP). Addo (2018) states that the agriculture sector accounts for 15% to 35% of GDP in most African countries and employs more than 70% of the rural population.

A study by Ude (2020) found that most young people in Africa are not involved in agribusiness due to various factors, including limited access to finance, inadequate technical skills, and lack of information on agribusiness opportunities. The study also found that women face additional challenges, including limited access to land and lack of control over productive assets. The sector can significantly reduce youth unemployment and poverty levels on the continent. With proper strategies and integration of youth and women in agripreneurship, the sector can increase job creation, food security, and income (Magagula & Tsvakirai, 2020).

3. Challenges that hinder youth participation in agripreneurship in Africa

Agriculture has been identified as an important contributor to the economy of most African countries. However, youth participation in agriculture and agripreneurship still needs to improve despite the potential benefits that can be derived from it (Rogito & Nyakora, 2023). One of the main bottlenecks is the need for more access to land. In Africa, most of the arable land is owned by the government or large-scale farmers unwilling to lease or sell it to young agripreneurs. This creates a barrier to entry for young people who want to enter agribusiness.

Additionally, even when land is available, most young farmers need more knowledge and skills to optimize land use and productivity (Henning et al., 2022).

Lack of access to finance is one of the main challenges hindering youth participation in agripreneurship in Africa. Most African youth need more access to financial services such as loans, grants, and credit facilities. This limits their ability to invest in agriculture and agripreneurship. According to Addo (2018), most financial institutions in Africa perceive agriculture as a high-risk sector, making it hard to obtain financing – especially for youths, who are perceived as high-risk borrowers by most financial institutions. The lack of access to finance further hinders the growth and expansion of agripreneurship ventures.

Youth engagement in agripreneurship in Africa is impeded also by lack of technical skills such as crop management, pest control, and marketing. Most agricultural training institutions in Africa do not provide practical training to youth, which limits their ability to acquire the necessary technical skills (Rogito et al., 2020).

Inadequate infrastructure poses another challenge that hinders youth participation in agriculture in Africa. Most African rural areas lack basic infrastructure such as roads, water, and electricity. This limits the ability of youths to transport their produce to market and to access essential services such as irrigation. Inadequate infrastructure in rural areas has resulted in high post-harvest losses, making it difficult for young people to engage in agriculture and agripreneurship.

Negative attitudes toward agriculture constitute another challenge: most African youths view agriculture as a low-income profession, which discourages them from engaging in agriculture and agripreneurship (De Mesa et al., 2022).

Limited access to information services is also a significant bottleneck that impedes youth participation in the agricultural value chain. Most young agripreneurs need access to relevant and up-to-date information on modern farming practices, market trends, and new technologies (Zulu et al., 2021), enabling them to adopt innovative practices that enhance productivity and profitability in their agripreneurship ventures. There is a need for concerted efforts by government and development sector players. One potential solution is for the government to implement progressive policies that support youth engagement in agripreneurship (Inoubli et al., 2022).

4. Strategies for job creation and youth integration in agripreneurship in Africa

To harness the untapped potential of youth agribusiness for job creation and food security in Africa, strategies must be developed to integrate youth into the agricultural sector. One of the key strategies for job creation and youth integration in agripreneurship is promoting entrepreneurial skills (Tindiwensi et al., 2023). This involves providing training and support to youth to develop their entrepreneurial skills in the agricultural sector. According to Addo (2018), promoting entrepreneurial skills among young people can create small and medium-sized agribusinesses, providing employment opportunities for young people.

Innovative technology is another important strategy for job creation and youth integration in agriculture. This involves using technology to increase productivity and efficiency in the agricultural sector. According to Boye et al. (2022), using innovative technology can reduce the labour requirements of agriculture, making it more attractive to youth who may view agriculture as a low-income profession.

Collaboration and partnership among different stakeholders in the agricultural sector constitute another important strategy for job creation and youth integration in agripreneurship (Aremu et al., 2021). This involves bringing together government, private sector, and other

stakeholders to create an enabling environment for youth participation in agriculture and agribusiness. According to Turolla et al. (2022), collaboration can help address some of the challenges, such as lack of access to finance and inadequate infrastructure. Market access is another important strategy for job creation and youth integration into agriculture. This involves creating market links for youth agripreneurs to sell their produce at competitive prices (Alabi et al., 2019).

5. The potential of youth engagement in agribusiness for job creation and food security in Africa

The agricultural sector is predominantly made up of small-scale farmers who operate near the subsistence level and lack the resources and knowledge to improve their productivity. Youth engagement in agripreneurship presents an opportunity to increase agricultural productivity and to create employment opportunities. Young people have the potential to drive innovation and introduce new technologies and practices that can improve agricultural productivity, increase yields, and reduce post-harvest losses making it a critical sector for addressing youth unemployment in Africa (Rogito & Rogito, 2022).

The participation of young people in agriculture can also contribute to food security in Africa. Africa currently imports a significant proportion of its food, although the continent has the potential to become self-sufficient in food by increasing production (Henning et al., 2022). Young people can leverage their knowledge and skills to introduce new crops and farming practices that can increase yields and improve the nutritional value of food. This can contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2: an end to hunger and access to nutritious food for all. Africa's Agenda 2063 also emphasizes this goal (Akrong & Kotu, 2022).

Role of government and development sector players in supporting youth agriculture.

Youth can drive socio-economic development in Africa through agripreneurship. However, the potential of youth engagement in agripreneurship has not been fully exploited. This is partly due to lack of support from government and development sector players (Magbondé et al., 2023) which have a significant role to play in creating and sustaining an enabling environment for the agribusiness of young people. Government policies and initiatives can enhance the development of agripreneurship in several ways, including providing financial support, access to land, and information services. Financial support could be in the form of start-up capital or low-interest loans, enabling young people to start or expand their businesses (Rogito et al., 2020). Access to land and information services such as market information and weather forecasts are also crucial in improving the productivity and profitability of youth agriculture (Ouko et al., 2022).

Development sector players, including NGOs, international organizations, and private sector actors, can support youth agripreneurship through various initiatives. These initiatives include capacity building programs, technical assistance, and mentorship programs. Capacity building programmes can equip young people with the skills and knowledge to succeed in agripreneurship. Technical assistance and mentorship programs can provide them with guidance and support to start and growing their businesses (Rogito & Nyamota, 2022).

Several initiatives have been implemented to support young farmers in Africa. For instance, the African Development Bank (AfDB) launched the ENABLE Youth Program in 2016 to support youth engagement in agribusiness (Ude, 2020). The program provides financing, technical assistance, and mentorship to young agripreneurs in African countries. Similarly, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has several initiatives to support young entrepreneurs in Africa, including the Rural Youth Agribusiness Promotion Programme and the

Youth Employment in Agriculture Programme. The government and development sector players stimulate youth agripreneurship toward job creation and food security in Africa (Geza et al., 2022). Access to financial support, land, and information services as well as capacity building, and mentoring programs can help create an enabling environment for young agripreneurship (Okello et al., 2020).

6. Conclusion

Youths have the potential to drive socio-economic development in Africa through agripreneurship. However, despite the enormous potential, little work that has been done to integrate them into agripreneurship in Africa. Agripreneurship offers significant employment potential for African youth, especially in the agricultural sector. Youth participation in agriculture can create jobs, increase food production, and reduce poverty levels on the African continent. However, there is a need for heightened efforts to incorporate youths into the food system to fully achieve these benefits. To harness this potential, governments, development sector players, and all food system players should make concerted efforts (Rogito & Makabe, 2023). By working together, they can overcome the bottlenecks hindering youth engagement in agripreneurship and enable youths to drive socio-economic development in Africa.

7. Recommendations

To harness the untapped potential of youth agripreneurship toward the creation of employment and food security in Africa, the following recommendations are offered:

- Government and development sector players should collaborate and form coalitions to tackle the challenge of youth unemployment together. They should also work toward addressing the key bottlenecks hindering youth engagement in the agricultural value chain, such as access to land, finance, and information services.
- There is a need for capacity building and training programs to enable youths to participate effectively in agripreneurship. Governments and development sector players should provide financial support and start-up capital to enable youths to establish and operate agripreneurship ventures.
- Progressive policies should be developed to support youth engagement in agripreneurship. Such policies should provide incentives for youth involvement in agripreneurship, such as tax exemptions and subsidies for youth-led agripreneurship ventures.
- Coordinated efforts from all food system players towards youth agripreneurship should be encouraged. This will enable youths to access markets and input suppliers and also facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experiences among youth agripreneurs.

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