

Inclination towards Agriculture among Rural Youth in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Globally, agriculture has been admitted as one of the important sectors and the similar setting can be found in Malaysia. Government has never stopped in placing their effort to further improve this sector and it can be proven through the establishment of number of high impact agriculture projects. As the sector has well developed, nonetheless, the ageing agriculture community in Malaysia has raised concerns among the related parties and such issue has driven this paper to its main objective which is to explore the inclination of the younger generation particularly the youth towards involvement in agriculture. This paper is exploratory in nature where data were gained through literature and document analyses. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that most of the youth have a positive perception about agriculture but only few of them are involved directly in this field.

KEYWORDS: Inclination, rural youth, agriculture, agriculture development, youth development

1. INTRODUCTION

During the Eight Malaysian Plan, agriculture sector in Malaysia has recorded an encouraging growth. At this period, the export of agriculture products has expanded throughout the world due to a better price of export volume on agriculture industrial commodities. Furthermore, agriculture sector continuously provides raw materials demanded by domestic agro-based industry and also to fulfill nation's food demand. Meanwhile, agriculture also has become the third engine growth which also leads to economic contribution during Ninth Malaysian Plan. The emphasis will be on new agriculture which involve large scale commercial farming, wider application of modern technology, production of high quality and value-added products, unlocking the potential in biotechnology, increased convergence with information and communications technology (ICT), and the participation of entrepreneurial farmers and skilled workforce. To further strengthen the sector in this modern age, agriculture sector does need back up from the younger generation particularly the youth. However, they still have a negative perception towards agriculture as according to them this sector is a second class job and just a temporary work while waiting for a better job (Gidakou, 1999).

2. AGRICULTURE AND ITS BENEFITS FOR RURAL YOUTHS

According to Md. Salleh and HayrolAzril (2009) and Ezhar et al. (2007) the average age of farmers in Malaysia exceeds 46 years old. Most of the farmers are 55 years and above and only 26% of farmers are included in the group age of 18 to 40 years old. To date, 42% of Malaysian citizens are youth and the rate of unemployment among them is 4% (Malaysia Institute for Youth Development Research Centre, 2010). Agriculture can act as the problem solver for the unemployment issue. Nonetheless, albeit its ability to overcome such issues, it seems that youth are not preferring agriculture and according to number of local studies it is due to their negative attitudes towards agriculture (Jeffrey et al., 2010; Bahaman et al., 2010; Norsida, 2008). A study done by World Development Report (2007) proved that youths are not interested to join agriculture because they thought that this field is not an attractive area to work. On the other hand, Norsida (2007) found in her study that although Malaysian youth have a negative acceptance towards agriculture, they still believed this sector can earn extra income accompanied by continuous efforts and hard work.

Meanwhile, the involvement of youths in agriculture is not only making a new career opportunity but also can increase food supply. Hence, it may reduce the gap of food production and its demand in the community (National Directorate of Employment, 2003). Since unemployment has been one of the controversial issues in developing countries, the rural youths tend to migrate from their village to cities. In Nigeria, most of the young people are not used their full potentials which is same happened in Malaysia. Thus, the agricultural sector might provide them a platform to reduce the unemployment rate.

In addition, involvement of youths in agriculture also may overcome poverty. This sector also can be the main source in assisting the government to provide employment opportunities among youth in Malaysia. Based on the previous research, it has been found there are a lot of benefits by involving this sector. People may actively joined farmers' community or associations and also have different economic activities which would get better income besides having a desire to develop their own community (Sarah et al., 2010).

Most of the part in the world, agriculture activities and rural people cannot be separated because this activity can increase their income and provide bigger employment opportunities (Omelehin et al., 2007; Uddin and Takeya, 2006). Furthermore, a study done by Lenihan et al. (2009) and Celliar (1999) rural community have better level of acceptance and attitude towards agriculture activities because of the locations, economic base and land uses.

According to Sarah et al. (2010) among the considerable factors that impinge youth involvement in agriculture is family traditions because they inherited it from their family, attractive financial returns due to the net income which is not less than N10 000.00 per month, and of course for the subsistence for their family.

3. FINDINGS FROM PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Based on Table 1 below, only about 11.8% of employment involve in agriculture sector. Hence, this data proved that Malaysia still need more people to get involved in agriculture as this field is the main contributor in nation food demands.

Table 1: Total of agriculture employment 2010 in Malaysia

	2010
(i) Total Labor force ('000)	12, 216.8
(ii) Total Employment ('000)	11, 773.3
(iii) Unemployment rate (%)	3.6
(iv) Employment in agriculture ('000)	1, 389.7

Source: Economic Planning Unit and Ministry of Human Resources, Malaysia

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents Opinion on Youth Information on Agriculture

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Positive Image:	
Jobs that promise good profit if run properly	92.2
Good sector and the potential for growth	81.6
Jobs should be led by the youth for the future development of agriculture sector	77.6
Employment in agriculture is a noble job and be blessed and be courteous to the land	76.5
Position of most agricultural areas outside the city does not prevent those who want to go into agriculture	76.4
Areas that can be involved if given more disclosure about	75.4
Work that can give great satisfaction and experience	68.1
Negative Image:	
Many areas of the risks involved	33.1
High-status jobs that are not glamorous and looked down	20.8
Jobs that are not fun and tiring	16.3
Slow return of profits from agriculture and low-income	16.1
Work of the last option	13.7
Work fit for those who live in villages and ravaged only	10.3
Field work that has not been encouraged by family and friends to venture	10.3
Will be missed and you feel left out if only that were involved in agriculture compared with other partners	9.1
Areas that are not professional and not suitable for high approval obtained	8.5
Jobs that do not promise a good return	7.8
A job that had inherited the tradition of the family	7.4

Source: Man (2008)

From the findings, it can be concluded that there are several positive and negative images towards agriculture. As depicted in Table 2, among the push factors of youths toward agriculture are as follows: jobs that promise good profit if run properly (92.2%), good sector and the potential for growth (81.6%), and jobs should be led by the youth for the future development of agriculture sector (77.6%). On the other hand, the pull factors that discourage youths from being involved in agriculture are as follows: many areas of the risks involved (33.1%), high-status jobs that are not glamorous and looked down (20.8 %), and jobs that are not fun and tiring (16.3%). The above findings indicate that youths has a good view about agriculture if it can be handled in the right way with a good desire. However, they still believed that agriculture is not a professional and attractive area to work and it is not an easy job to handle as it needs skills in handling the farm. Findings by Man (2008), has informed us on two things. First, such local findings have opposed what have been identified by most of international studies (Gidakou, 1999 and Wanene, 2011), whose claimed that majority of rural have negative perception towards agriculture. Most of the youth found have expressed their positive feelings towards agriculture as a booster for their socio-economic level. Second, albeit youth in Malaysia have perceived agriculture positively, nevertheless, problems such as high risks and unattractive have obstructed their maximum involvement in agriculture.

4. CONCLUSION

Currently, Malaysian government has introduced many High Impact Agriculture Program (HIP) such as Agropolitan Project, Zone Industry Aquaculture (ZIA) and Sustainable Food Production Park (TKPM). These programs aim to increase farmers' income, reduce poverty problems, and provide employment opportunities and increase their quality of life (Hayrol et al., 2010). In developing countries such as Malaysia, there must be more emphasis on agriculture to ensure the unemployment problem is decreasing (Hayrol et al., 2010; Jeffrey et al., 2009). Nowadays the majority of those involved in agriculture constitutes of older generation. Hence, this sector need younger person to substitute the older generation in order to enhance and strengthen the agricultural sector in Malaysia (Salleh et al., 2009; Ezhar et al., 2008).

Based on the reviews, some recommendations can be implementing to ensure the young generations are able to involve in agriculture consistently. The recommendations would be encouraging the youths to be involved in any agricultural associations to discover their interest in agriculture. Besides, credit facilities should be made available by both government and non-governmental agencies to youths at lowest possible interest rate or else, Financial institutions should render assistance to youth to improve their capital base and improve their economic empowerment. Hence, for those who acquire skills may start their own agricultural activity. On the other hand, training should be provided by the responsible agencies such as DOA (Department of Agriculture) for those youths who are interested in this field.

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