

The Role of Land Grant Universities in the Global Development of Youth

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Introduction

Not many land grant universities have seriously addressed the issues related to the global development of youth. In the United States, colleges of agriculture have a long and proud domestic record of youth leadership development through extension 4-H programs and high school agriculture programs, including FFA. Rural and urban young men and women have benefited from being involved in these educational and leadership development programs. However, with some notable exceptions, the international record has been spotty and almost entirely related to United States Agency for International Development (USAID) support for projects that included some type of 4-H or FFA component in a larger program. These efforts have tapered off over the last few years as the priorities of funding agencies have changed and fewer agricultural education and extension personnel are employed by USAID.

In addressing this topic, it is prudent to ask why, if working with rural young men and women is so important, there are so few resources available to those who work with youth? To the readers of the Journal of Agricultural Education, this may be a sermon directed to the converted. To legislators and politicians, the global development of youth is not in the mainstream and is all too often set aside as "more important" issues are addressed. Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have tried to take up the slack, but with few exceptions their efforts have not been well coordinated. They suffer from a lack of financial support and are frequently dependent upon funding from fragmented sources. Financial constraints are a limiting factor and universities are under pressure about how and where funds should be spent.

Finances should not be identified as the only problem to consider. Additional constraints, such as a lack of expertise and appropriate opportunities for university faculty and extension staff who desire to make a career out of working with youth, make it even more difficult to find the expertise needed to build youth components into international projects. In land grant university departments, tenure and promotion criteria have not placed much emphasis on the number of young people who have been positively influenced by dedicated persons in the agricultural education departments or on the state 4-H staff. A comprehensive survey may show a decline in the number of faculty members who are directly involved with youth programs. Differences from region to region and from country to country present challenges that must be dealt with on a location-specific basis by individuals experienced and sensitive to cultural and language differences, educational values, and prevailing political constraints.

The Contest of Global Youth

The specter of AIDS hovers over rural families in many developing countries where HIV infection is a heterosexual, behavioral phenomenon. Massive preventive education programs are underway, but the results are less than encouraging and infection rates are continuing to rise at a rapid rate. There are those who think, for example, that patterns of infection in many of the less-developed countries are the same as the infection patterns encountered in more-developed regions of the world. The severity of the problem is not often recognized until villages are observed whose demographic patterns have been altered to the extent that grandparents and small children make up the bulk of the population. It was found, for example, in the Rakai District of Uganda with 350,000 inhabitants, that there may be as many as 40,000 children who have lost one or both parents to ADIS and/or related diseases (Barnet & Blaikie, 1990). The effect of this catastrophe on rural families and youth is not sufficiently clear and more research is necessary.

Famine continues in many developing countries. A generation of young people is being affected by malnutrition and the lack of effective health care. Food aid continues to flow, but self-sufficiency is more elusive than ever. Educational systems that place an emphasis on academic study for urban youth tend to further marginalize rural young men and women, and rural schools are nearly always less-equipped and more poorly staffed than those in the cities.

Although a comprehensive delineation of the role that land grant universities should pursue with regard to global youth development is not possible in this limited time and space, it is possible to draw attention to some of the most pressing needs and to offer ideas and suggestions for consideration. For two reasons the following discussion will concentrate more on the situation and needs of rural youth in the developing countries. First, the need is great, and second, rural young men and women in developing countries are at a distinct disadvantage when compared to their urban counterparts. The intent of this article is to prompt the opening of a dialogue among agricultural educators regarding their personal role and the influential role their institutions may play in global youth development.

There is a need for positive action programs that will help the world's future food producers, rural young men and women, receive better training and support. The answer is not in the resettlement of urban people in rural areas. The solution lies in rural community development that includes good schools, improved health facilities, running water and electricity, better infrastructure, agricultural advisory services, and functional markets that encourage rural youth to stay in rural areas and be producers instead of consumers. The goal must be to move beyond the level of subsistence production and to make young men and women more aware that agriculture, including the production (farming) component, may be an honorable and profitable profession. Unless there is a reduction in the push of poverty, the massive rural to urban migration of the world's young people will never be brought into a reasonable balance.

Global Trends

By the year 2000 it is estimated there will be over one billion youths 15 through 24 years of age. Nearly 85% of these young people will be from low income countries where

there are food shortages; massive rural-to-urban migrations; inadequate housing, health care, and education; and high unemployment rates. The two most significant global issues are the increasing numbers of youth and the lack of educational and employment opportunities open to rural young men and women. High drop-out rates, low standards of instruction, and increasing numbers place rural youth and young farmers at a distinct disadvantage when compared to their urban counterparts. Migration is exacerbated by the "push of poverty" in rural areas combined with the "pull of the bright lights" of the urban centers. The magnitude of potential and current problems of rural youth differs considerably among countries even within the same region. Many of these differences may be attributed to culture, different population sizes and growth rates, stages of development, wealth and resources available within countries, and current resources and experiences utilized in rural youth development work.

Africa-Regional Trends

By the year 2000, there will be approximately 152 million rural youths from the ages of 10 to 24, or nearly 20% of the total African population. In Africa alone, there will be nearly 200 million young people to educate and prepare for employment. Rural young people constitute the largest sector (70 to 75%) of the African youth population. They are confronted with many problems such as a lack of amenities, social services and educational facilities; isolation and lack of organizations for youth; contradictions between new aspirations and traditional values and systems; limited access to land and the need to introduce new techniques in agriculture; old and new marriage systems (including relevant financial constraints); and traditional attitudes with regard to the status and role of girls and women in society.

Asia and The Pacific-Regional Trends

A comprehensive look at the rural youth in this region reveals some similarities to that of Africa. The number of rural youth will increase by approximately 10%, or 35 million, by the year 2000. Unemployment and underemployment continue to be problem areas. The persistence of rural unemployment and the related migration to urban centers are serious problems. There is a need for appropriate training to prepare rural young people for employment and entrepreneurial roles in the rapidly expanding economies that are growing at unprecedented rates. The expanding job markets of many of the Asian countries offer opportunities for rural young people who have the necessary skills. A serious problem lies in the inadequate employment opportunities that are available to rural youth who have not had access to appropriate training.

Latin America-Regional Trends

Figures from 1980 to the year 2000 indicate that the rural youth population will increase by only one-half of one percent, or 200,000. However, in the urban centers there will be an estimated increase of 66.1%, from 77 million to 128 million. Young men and women of child-bearing age are continuing to migrate to the urban centers that compounds the population pressure in the cities. Estimates from the Economic Commission for Latin America show that over 70% of Latin America's population will be located in urban areas by the year 2000. These figures head to the projection that farm producers are going to have to become more efficient and farm prices are going to be increasingly at the mercy of

a politically powerful urban voice. Adequate solutions to the problems of Latin America's rural youth and young farmers require unprecedented recognition and action in the areas of land reform, incentives for agricultural production, employment opportunities, training for productive work in the rural areas, leadership training, community services, health programs, and social services.

Near East-Regional Trends

Demographic trends in this region tend to parallel those in other regions. Approximately 20% of the population fall between the ages of 15 and 25. Farm incomes continue to be low for small-scale producers and family members often look for off-farm employment opportunities. Rural education, in many cases, fails to educate rural youths who need to learn about becoming self-reliant in their small communities. Increasing numbers of young people are feeling the effects of rural poverty and they are migrating to urban centers in the hope that their lives and those of their children will be improved. Of particular concern is the lack of appropriate educational and employment opportunities for rural young women. The situation and needs of rural youth of the countries in the Near East Region vary widely. This strongly supports an approach of defining the needs in each country before attempting to introduce activities aimed at strengthening programs for rural youth and young farmers.

Issues Affecting Rural Youth

Rural Young Women

In developing countries, a large proportion of rural youths do not enjoy the benefits of full participation and integration into the social and economic sectors of their countries because of unequal or inadequate access to opportunities. For example, in education and employment there are a limited understanding and support for the special situation with regard to rural youth and health. Young women and the disabled are likely to suffer from long-entrenched discriminatory practices and habits. In times of limited resources, rural young women have been described as being last in line with the least preparation. Well-established cultural norms often demand that educational priorities go to the male children when there is a shortage of money for school fees and supplies. Rural young women may receive little or not return for their very significant contributions to both the economy and society, and they are often denied the same opportunities as men for training and paid employment. In total, young women are prevented from maximizing their individual development and participation in society. In rural societies of many developing countries, there is little room for unmarried girls who are not in school. The result of girls dropping out of school is a continued high level of illiteracy and a series of life-long health problems that all too often accompany early marriage and multiple adolescent pregnancies.

Educational Need

Illiteracy rates among rural young people remain high in many developing countries where broad access to education and training has not become a reality. A central question is the degree to which rural young people participate in rural development. Vocational training in many rural areas is under-funded, the equipment outdated, and the curriculum

often does not address the needs of the current job market. The connection between economic recession and the lack of available jobs, especially in rural areas, is clear and well established.

While considerable progress has been achieved, educational reform has not kept pace with the needs of rural young people. A related global tendency has been the generally distorting affects of a scarcity of jobs in the labor market. As more and more young people have acquired the requisite qualifications for jobs, the number of jobs has not increased proportionately. A solution for many employers has been to progressively raise the educational requirements for entry-level employment. The negative result of this has been that young people who have recently acquired a minimum level of education are pushed out of the job market and must shift to lower-ranked occupations. There has been a general downward movement in which those with rudimentary education are being driven out of the formal job market. This has a particularly negative affect on youth who are the products of many lower-quality rural schools.

Agricultural Education

An emphasis needs to be placed on involving rural youth in learning improved agricultural principles and practices through both formal and non-formal training. Providing incentives for youth to remain in their communities and be full participants in rural community and economic development are necessary. Examples of increased agricultural training for rural youth could include: 1) Formal education with a rural development bias -- in some countries, school curricula at the elementary and secondary levels have been modified to include practical agriculture, handicrafts, and home economics; 2) Non-formal education programs for out-of-school youth -- generally these are introduced as special training programs in literacy improvement, leadership development, vocational and productive skill training, youth cooperatives, and population education; 3) Provision of rural services that include youth as beneficiaries -- these services may include supervised credit for young farmers and rural youth, making available learning and production resources, health care and recreation activities; and 4) Organized community development programs -- reforestation, community beautification and community agricultural shows are examples of programs that challenge and satisfy the energies and aspirations of rural youth.

The growing urban segment of the population is becoming increasingly dependent upon agricultural production that must be geared to creating enough surplus to feed the growing population of nonproducers. Increased production will, to a large degree, depend upon incentives at the farm level. Rural to urban migration will be reduced only when the apparent disparity between the two sectors is reduced. Competency-based education that emphasizes developing skills, knowledge, and attitudes, is only just beginning to be understood in many countries. There the traditional lecturer speaks of how to give a demonstration and laments, from the comfort of his or her classroom, that the prevailing attitude toward farming is negative.

At the college level, affirmative action programs need to be initiated to help ensure that the children of farmers have proportional access to higher education in agriculture. With college entrance now based only on examination results, youths who go to inferior

rural schools have less chance to reach the entry-level plateau. They are denied the opportunity to become effective researchers and extension workers who know and understand farm life and the complexities of the agricultural production system.

Entrepreneurial Development

Education and training for self-employment continue to be neglected. Entrepreneurial and technical skills gained through apprenticeships are not frequently included in formal vocational training programs. In many cases, the goal of working for someone else has superseded the need to be self-reliant. Small, rural, nonfarm businesses, as well as industrial development, are needed in the local communities to support the agricultural producer. At the subsistence level, production for current needs often overrides concerns about sustainable agricultural production. The small-scale producer, in turn, may be more concerned about the immediate needs of his family than the long-term affect of certain cultural practices that may lead to the degradation of the environment.

A Role for Land Grant Universities

Modern transportation and communication methods have enhanced the capacity for universities to be more involved in formal and nonformal education and research on a global scale. At no time in history have channels of communication been more open and educators more receptive. The challenge lies in choosing the issues and addressing them appropriately.

To a large extent, universities have and will continue to be dependent on external funding to support programs that address global or international issues. Universities should not, however, be entirely dependent upon these external sources for program direction and innovation. The individual and collective thinking of members of the university community, international organizations and agencies, governments and nongovernment organizations should consider a number of issues including global youth development. There is a need for a focal point, a center for global youth development, that can call upon the international community for support and guidance in developing a comprehensive approach to addressing important issues.

Graduate and Undergraduate Education

Introducing foreign graduate students to 4-H and agricultural education, including FFA, programs are small but significant actions that could be taken. Graduate students from colleges of agriculture would go back to their own countries with a better understanding of the potential of youth programs and how they function. The cost of introducing foreign students to 4-H or FFA programs would be very small and would provide examples of the value of these programs.

Every year a relatively large number of US Peace Corps volunteers receive their undergraduate and graduate degrees from land grant universities. With the increased interest of the Peace Corps in youth of developing countries, potential volunteers should be encouraged to elect youth-related course work available in some colleges of agriculture. Collaborative efforts between the Peace Corps and land grant universities could lead to specialized youth development courses being organized at home and abroad and taught as

residential or pre-service courses for volunteers. Institutions could be identified and developed as centers of study for international youth work. It could be an exciting innovation that would take advantage of university facilities, faculty members' experiences from previous international assignments, and draw upon expertise and support from international organizations, foundations, and NGOs that recognize the importance of youth leadership development.

Scholarly research in the area of youth development on a global basis has been neglected. There is a need to document the types, content, and delivery of programs that have been most successful, and to help in defining the steps that countries could take in establishing programs in which young men and women may learn what it means to be self-reliant, productive members of their communities. The development of a DC-ROM data base with demographic data and instructional materials should be encouraged and supported. Courses of study need to be developed, field tested, and integrated into existing curricula. Above all, there is a need to demonstrate the value of working with youth. Documented evidence is needed to convince both donors and recipients that youth work on an international basis is worth the investment in both time and money. Funded research programs will help U. S. and foreign graduate students document the value of youth development and the need for training at the college and university levels in developing countries.

Training Youth

Vocational and technical training is needed in every less-developed country. Young people are not being prepared to enter the world of work with the skills needed for employment in the private sector. From central and eastern Europe to Africa, more skilled workers are needed. Universities can help in the identification of the skills needed as well as in the development of training programs that are responsive to those needs. Land grant universities can carry out manpower studies that describe the situation and identify the needs for skilled male and female agriculture technicians. Land grant universities can also help with the review and revision of agriculture curriculum for research and development. Curriculum revision is essential if rural young people are going to be competitive. Closely tied to this activity is the need for faculty and student exchange programs that allow participants to observe both needs and accomplishments in other countries. Regional exchange programs that address the issues within specific ethnic and cultural settings should take priority.

Developing Centers of Excellence

Land grant institutions have established rich traditions in resident instruction, research, and extension. By concentrating on these interrelated components, much can be accomplished. There is a need for new approaches to old problems. The establishment of graduate centers of excellence and the development of long-term twinning arrangements between universities are two steps that can take advantage of the strengths of the land grant universities. These strengths can be brought to bear on problems in the developing countries. Faculty and student exchanges are needed on a much larger scale than levels now being undertaken. Now is the time for improvement in both the quality of educational programs and the establishment of community-based educational approaches that will support national growth and development. Sabbatical policies that encourage experienced

faculty members to work in developing country universities could be established with relative ease. USAID and foundation support could be solicited through well-conceived proposals that have support and encouragement from university administrators who recognize the value of leadership development and international experience.

Technical and Vocational Education

There is a continuing need for agriculture to be included as a subject in the primary and secondary school curricula in developing countries. Agriculture has been introduced during the last 25 years at the secondary school level with varying degrees of success. These activities should continue, but a recognized difficulty with this concept is that in the least-developed countries most students who complete secondary school do not become active small-scale farmers. Secondary school agriculture has, therefore, provided many students with an understanding of agricultural principles and practices, but only a small percentage of these young people has become agricultural producers. Many of these secondary school students have gone on to higher education and their agricultural knowledge and appreciation, though not wasted, has not been put into practice at the field level.

The introduction of agricultural subjects at the primary school level has been even more difficult. There is a need for new approaches to agricultural training at the primary level because of problems related to poorly trained teachers, shortages of funds, inadequate facilities and a propensity towards using the school farm as a punishment plot. Records show that, in many developing countries, the majority of rural students who drop out of school do so at the upper elementary level. Agricultural education at the elementary level could be part of the answer in developing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed by rural youth who are likely to be the future farmers in their countries. Universities could play a major role in helping with the design and implementation of pilot projects where agriculture is introduced at the primary level.

Extension Programs that Include a Youth Component

Land grant universities can cite the successes of the 4-H and FFA programs. Thousands of testimonials and examples of the difference that these programs have made in the lives of people all over the world provide ample evidence for the need to further extend these programs on a global basis. In every country where youth programs have been introduced, there has been a positive affect on the lives of thousands of young men and women. One role that universities could play would be to insist on a leadership development component for youth in every foreign aid project that supports extension work and educates extension workers.

In many developing countries, Ministry of Agriculture extension advisory services have been patterned after models that did not include youth as a part of the extension clientele. It is imperative that project and program designers understand the philosophical and policy changes that are implied when a youth component is proposed in an extension project. The situation and needs of youth and the potential roles of NGOs and other ministries also need to be considered at the earliest stages of project formulation.

Conclusion

We quite often hear the question posed, "What can be done about the youth problem?" In a more positive sense, the questions should be, "What can be done to protect, nurture, develop, and refine our greatest resource, the world's youth? How can we enable and empower them to reach their highest level of potential?" Wars are fought over mineral wealth and other natural resources. Mineral resources are refined to the peak of perfection. Ongoing research points the way to new and better uses of these resources and Nobel Prizes are awarded to scientists who excel in this field. Human resource development has been relegated to a position of less importance than it deserves. In some circles, the term human resource development is out of style because it is hard to define and difficult to quantify. Decision-making officials in many countries don't understand the potential of comprehensive youth development programs. Government officials are looking for ways to deal with the "youth problem" because of high levels of rural to urban migration and the overcrowding of cities. There has never been a more appropriate time to propose workable solutions. Universities can introduce these decision makers to the value of youth leadership development programs. This would not be a coercive action but a genuine attempt to demonstrate why youth programs are important and how they can be introduced in a non-controversial, nonpolitical way.

Donors respond to an expressed need. An expressed need for a youth component in an extension program will not come from uninformed government officials. It is also unlikely that youth programs will be initiated by donor agencies and their development officers who do not fully understand the value of such programs. This proactive approach that implies leadership and international development work that goes beyond responding to requests that many be too narrow because those who are in need fail to understand the implications of including a specific youth component in their request. It seeks to educate both recipients and donors and places an emphasis on the value of leadership development and a problem-solving approach to global youth development.

As a starting point, why not initiate an international symposium on consultation on the global development of youth? In 1995, there will be recognition of the ten-year anniversary of the International Youth Year (IYY). What better way to recognize the value of youth work than to organize a meeting in which the participants will examine the situation and needs of youth and role of universities in initiating a global plan of action that would be a bold step toward preparing rural youth for their roles as productive and responsible members of their communities. The preparation of papers and case studies for such a meeting would lay the foundation for renewed land grant university involvement in youth development on a global basis. The challenge is yours.

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