Targeting young adults/young households in Central Uganda: Where is the next generation of farmers?[1]

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Abstract

In Central Uganda, in spite of poor soils and high pest pressure, bananas are a primary source of household food and income. Farmers are increasingly challenged by how to maintain banana productivity and to expand production for nearby rapidly growing urban markets. In a grant proposal financed by the Austrian Development Agency we posed the question whether on-farm trees and shrubs as a source of fodder and mulch could be harnessed to improve banana productivity. The grant document additionally proposes a focus on poor young households, young adults and youth (defined as aged between 18-35 years) as potential users of the proposed new technology and improved marketing. Over 60 households have planted banana plots with agroforestry trees and shrubs and are preparing conditions for a zero grazed goat. However, we are still perplexed about where the poor young households, young adults and youth, are. Here we review our databases and activities and pose several hypotheses about the next generation of banana farmers in Central Uganda. Our starting point for field work was the existing farmer groups of our field partners who guided us to certain districts, Kiboga, Nakaseke and Sembabule. We conducted a baseline, drawn from the list of members in the local farmer organization with additional households in the surrounding community, on household resources, household livelihood strategies, decisions about land acquisition and use and the current techniques to maintain banana productivity. Of 203 households surveyed, the mean age of household head was 47 years. 13.9% of household head were under 30 years of age and only 4.8% and 0% was under 25 and 20 years of age respectively. Although only 29 youth headed households are present in the sample, more youth were identified as spouse (41 persons) or as dependant (71 persons). The total number of youth in the sample population of 825 persons (household heads, spouses and dependants) is 141, or 17 %. Among the 75 households participating in the farmer experimentation groups, 16% are under 30 years with 5% and 0% under 25 and 20 years. Among these households 15% are youth. *In spite of our efforts to emphasize youth and young households, why did we not have greater numbers of young households in farmer groups?* Based on additional data from the survey, we explore several explanations. Young households and young adults are little interested in agriculture and are working in local towns and larger urban areas. Young households have facultative livelihood strategies based in local towns, possibly due to lack of access to land, but will return when inherited land becomes available or resources are accumulated for land purchase. Young

[1] Paper submitted for the **Young People, Farming and Food Conference**, Accra, Ghana, March 2012. All comments welcome

households and young adults are located within the household setup of their parents, but are not reported as part of the household since they have some economic autonomy. The baseline survey and organization of farmer experimentation groups missed poor rural households of all ages, since partner organizations target households with above average resources with time and resources for group participation. We are currently gathering additional data to address these points.

Key words: youth, young adults, next generation

Introduction

The agricultural sector remains the backbone of Uganda's economy as its main source of livelihood and employment for over 60 percent of the population (FAO, 2002) and 21.5% of GDP. Agricultural output primarily comes from about 3 million smallholder subsistence farmers, who own an average farmland area of 2.5 ha. The agricultural sector is dominated by the production of food crops, but cash crops, livestock, fishery and forestry are also important. In Central Uganda, bananas are a primary source of household food and income. Due to declining soils fertility, high pests and diseases pressure farmers are increasingly being challenged by how to maintain banana productivity or grasp the opportunity to expand production to supply nearby rapidly growing urban markets (Gold et al 2000). In a grant proposal financed by the Austrian Development Agency we posed the question whether on-farm trees and shrubs can be used as a source of mulch for the bananas and fodder for zero-grazing livestock to improve banana productivity. The grant document additionally proposes a focus on poor young households, young adults and youth (defined as aged between 18-35 years) as potential users of the proposed new technology and improved banana marketing.

Currently we have 3 experimentation groups each composed of 25 households in the pilot sites of Kiboga, Nakaseke and Sembabule in Central Uganda. These groups are made up of delegates of 4-7 farmer associations in each site, selected in a large assembly of neighborhood farmers. As the selection process proceeded, groups were asked to consider the participation of both young and women-headed households. In the final tally of households, only 13.9% of households are headed by a person under 30 years of age and none are under 20 years of age, although for Uganda over 78% of the population (Restless Development) and 19.1% of households are under 30 years of age (Sserunkuuma et al., 2010). The farmers of each experimentation group have met every one to two months since late 2010 to review the status of trees, livestock and bananas on their farms and to analyze how their bananas reach the market. These meetings are facilitated by researchers and field assistants. The groups were also asked to consider inviting youth from their households to join a small commission to study options for getting improved prices for their bananas, but none of the three groups incorporated youth into the commissions. After completing the diagnostic phase, farmer meetings have focused on planning experiments. All households have established banana plots with trees and shrubs and have received a goat which is to be managed under zero grazing. Over the next year farmers, researchers and field assistants will be measuring, monitoring and analyzing results.

In this paper we reflect on the underrepresentation of this 'next' but missing generation of farmers in our experimentation activities. We asked ourselves the question: Where are the young adults and young households in our pilot sites? We first look at youth and young households in agriculture, then pose a number of possible hypotheses about these groups. We explore the hypotheses using our baseline data and a small survey conducted with the farmers in the experimentation groups with one or more adult children and draw conclusions on targeting agricultural technology and rural development to the next generation of farmers.

Young people

We had several reasons to focus on young people for this project:

1. Agriculture and fishing employ 69% of the private sector workforce in Uganda, being the largest employer for the Ugandan population (IYF, 2011). Youth makes up 60% of the agricultural labor force (IYF 2011). This workforce will depend on agriculture for food security and improved household income for the foreseeable future. Focusing on young people at the beginning of their working careers as the future farming generation is a logical strategy to make efficient use of investment in farmer training, technology development and improved marketing.
2. Investing in young people's rural livelihoods can be considered a diversification approach, since agriculture is not a single alternative. Numerous and mixed strategies are possible, including crops for local, national and export markets, livestock and processing and added value. These are alternatives to out-migration to urban centers with high unemployment rates and associated urban poverty (UBOS 2002).
3. The focus on agroforestry as an option raised questions about longer rates of returns and permanent access to land. Such a technology requires longer term interest from farmers and may potentially pay off better the longer the technology is maintained. We wondered whether technologies with increasing payoffs with time would have strategic interests for young households. Although such a technology is longer term in its returns, it is also land-saving and may appeal to young households with limited land resources.

Hypotheses: why are youth and young households underrepresented in our groups?

To guide our exploration of the whereabouts of youth and young households, since they appeared to be underrepresented in our baseline study and our experimentation groups, we proposed the following hypotheses:

1. Young households and young adults are located within the household setup of their parents and are not reported as independent households, even though they may have some economic autonomy.
2. Young households have facultative livelihood strategies based in local towns, possibly due to lack of access to land and other productive resources, but will return when inherited land becomes available or resources are accumulated for land purchase and investment in agriculture.
3. Youth and young households are present in the pilot sites and are involved in agriculture, but they are not among the clients of our partner organizations who focus on market-oriented farmer associations. Households in such

farmer associations must have both resources and time to participate in meetings.
4. Young households and young adults are little interested in agriculture and are working in local towns and larger urban areas instead.

Methodology

Grant Field partners were selected during the grant formulation phase based on their field activities in Central Uganda and their interest in agroforestry and bananas. With the approval of the grant, the field organizations then proposed the pilot sites based on their other on-going grants. For these sites partner organizations prepared lists of affiliated members. A baseline study was conducted from a random sampling from the list within the same area. We also interviewed households that were not affiliated to the partner institutions in the area. The survey was conducted in three different sites in Central Uganda in the districts of Nakaseke (N=55), Kiboga (N=91) and Sembabule (N=57) and had a total sample size of 203. The study consisted of a pre-tested survey with questions on diverse aspects of the household and farm system: Household characteristics; land holding; farm and cultivation characteristics and specifics; presence and use of threes, fodder crops and livestock; intra-household decision-making; household assets; land access; access to information; labor; and income.

Additional data were collected from members within the farmer's experimentation groups' with adult children. A total of 56 participants in the three farmer experimentation groups (Kiboga N=20, Sembabule N=20 and Nakaseke N=16) were interviewed with a total of 174 adult children. The survey asked about all adult children of the household; their residence, occupation, education, reasons for staying in the household or leaving it, providence of labor to the household and future expectations. Furthermore we interviewed a number of key-persons in the three districts (mainly community workers) about opportunities for young people in the locality; access to land and support services (such as credit and training), average age for marrying/family formation and their ideas about young people's aspirations to work in agriculture.

The baseline study – perspectives on youth and young households

The data from the baseline study provide the first insights into household formation and intergenerational issues.

Age

The average age of the household head was 44.7, 48 and 47.1 years for Kiboga, Nakaseke and Sembabule respectively with no significant difference. The spouses' average age was much lower with 32.8, 38.1 and 42.9 for Kiboga, Nakaseke and Sembabule respectively and there were significant differences in years between the sites, with spouses being on average 4 years younger than the household head in Sembabule site but 12 years younger in Kiboga. Although efforts were made to include especially young people in the project baseline, only 13.6% of all household heads were below 30 years of age and only 0.5% was below 20 years of age. Nearly 14% of the household heads are from 30-35 years of age. For spouses 29% was below 30 years of age. Three fourths of the households were headed by males with a

female spouse present, while 1/4 of households were headed by a female, either older women widowed or divorced or unmarried younger women.

All 203 households together had a total of 821 'dependant' household members living on their compound. Of these 821 household members, usually the children of household head and spouse, the large majority (619 persons) was under 14 years of age. One hundred fifty persons were between 15 and 19 years old and there were 36 persons (4.3% of total number dependants) present within these household in the age between 20 and 35 years. Two hundred twenty five persons described as 'dependants' were over 36 years of age; this category probably consists mainly of parents of household heads and spouses, (unmarried) siblings, second wives and adult children. In total our baseline data included 1143 persons (household head, spouses and dependants) and 12.8% of these 1143 can be defined as young between 20 and 35 years.

If we compare national statistics on age composition of the population and the age composition of our sample population we see that the number of persons below 14 years of age is quite similar with 49% of population under 14 years nationally and 54% in our sample (CIA Fact Book, 2012). The percentage of young people in the age of 20-35 is significantly smaller with 12.8% of our sample population and 21.7% of national population falling within this category (based on 2002 census, UBOS). This indicates an out-migration of young people from the intervention sites or establishment of independent households.

Land

Since land ownership was one of the criteria for selecting respondents, all households owned at least 0.25 acres. Acreage owned went up to 187 acres for an individual case but averaged 5.3 acres when those owning more than 28 acres were removed. In most cases respondents had acquired their land by purchase followed by inheritance. In cases that respondents owned more than one plot, consecutive plots were more often purchased than the first plot which was inherited in 30% of cases. Forty percent of respondents rent land in addition to what they own.

Twenty-three percent of respondents mention that at least one child has used household land at some point for personal activities. Only 3% say to have denied access to land to a child. Sixty-eight percent of respondents say that their children will inherit their land. This is also part of tradition that at the demise of the parents, available land is shared amongst the off springs.

Decision Making

In the study we tried to assess intra-household decision-making on farm with respect to crop planting, destroying diseased or pest infested plants, sales of agricultural produce, pasture management, planting of trees and shrubs and sharing of work on farm. Data show that adult children are little involved in household decision making. Most decisions taken in the household (40-65%) are made by the household head alone and 20-30% of decisions are made by the spouse alone. Twenty to thirty percent of the decisions are jointly made by the spouse and the household head. Only in 0.5-5% children have a say in decisions regarding work and crop cultivation. In general spouses are more often named as sole decision-makers when it concerns

the food crops: beans, cassava and sweet potatoes. Coffee, banana and pasture are more often controlled by household heads. Decisions regarding tree planting and labor-allocation are mainly made by households head alone (in approximately 50% of cases) or together with spouse in approximately 20% of cases. A small minority of respondents answer that decision-making is inclusive for all household-members and a few mention 'other' family-members as being involved. This is based on the fact that in many households, land belongs to the man who hence makes decisions with respect to long-term investments like planting trees, while the woman has the role to provide food for the table. Many of the children are not involved in decision making since they are either very young or still in school. Some of the adult children might participate in household decision making on major investments, but since they live off farm, they are rarely consulted on small issues.

Labor

A total of 821 dependants (all ages) were profiled within the surveyed households, Seventy four % of these dependants were still in school and their fees are being paid. The majority of dependants (75%) contribute to household farm labor, the degree in which however is very variable. Most dependants contribute to farm labor only during holidays and/or weekends, unsurprisingly since most dependants are school-going children. Six percent of dependants are said to contribute to farm labor on a daily basis. Thirty percent of respondents have adult children who live elsewhere but come to the farm occasionally to contribute to farm labor, usually in school holidays or in times of increased farm activity such as coffee harvest. Thirty percent of respondents have children who live elsewhere, but occasionally visit their parents and contribute to farm labor.

Tracking adult children from households in the experimentation group

Of a total of 174 adult children mentioned by our 56 respondents, the large majority has moved away from the household's compound. Data show that 38.5% of these 174 adult children reside in Kampala-city, 24.7% stay in regional towns and trading centers (such as Masaka, Kiboga-town, Luwero and Lwamata), 21.8% live in the same village as the parents, and 14.9% live with their parents' on the same compound. Sites vary in this factor, For Nakaseke, 68.8% of the adult children live in Kampala whereas this is 33.3% and 22.2% for Sembabule and Kiboga respectively. All but one of adult children in Nakaseke have left the parents' compound and the village all together. In Kiboga and Sembabule considerable numbers of adult children continue residing in their parents' compound (12.6% and 25% respectively) or have their own residence in the same village as their parents (33% and 25% respectively). This variation may be due to the proximity of Kampala to Nakaseke in comparison to Kiboga and Sembabule which facilitates urban migration.

Occupation

Contrary to the wide-spread idea that most young men opt out of agriculture to become a boda-driver (motortaxi- driver) in town, only 3.8% of adult children in our sample actually drive a boda-boda. The largest employer of adult children in this study is still agriculture with 27%, followed by business/merchandise with 18% and teaching with 9.7%. Nearly 8% of adult children are still in school, studying. Other

occupations which are mentioned several times are: mechanic (5.1%), hair-stylist (4.5%), housewife (3.8%) and administrative officer (3.2%) and 6.4% of adult children are allegedly not employed. Adult children who live with their parents and contribute to farm labor are usually not paid by their parents.

Land ownership

A number of adult children, both those who left and those residing in the village, own land themselves. 51% of adult children from Sembabule own land, 35% from Kiboga own land and 22% from Nakaseke site owns land. Like in our baseline data land was purchased by the owner in most cases. Men tend to own land more often than women with 58% against 34%. No significant correlations were found between land ownership and residence of the adult child. Few children in our sample had inherited land, not unexpectedly, since their parents are still alive and thus not in the position to leave land to their children. Some adult children who own land, however, have received this from their family or husband as a gift; 31% in Kiboga, 12.5% in Nakaseke and 38% in Sembabule. The respondents had an average of 9.7 children, with no significant difference between the sites. Taking into account the average land holding size of 5.3 acres, it is clear that (most) children will not inherit sufficient land upon which to base a viable farming livelihood. When children work on their parents' land they are usually not paid.

Expectations

We asked parents if they think their children whom have left the village will one day return to live in the village. In Sembabule parents say of 55% of all adult children in the sample that they expect them to return one day. For Kiboga this is 41% and for Nakaseke only 33%. Reasons why children were not expected to return were because they were married elsewhere (especially in the case of daughters) or because they owned land and a house or had a job elsewhere. Children were expected to return home after finishing studies or because they loved farming.

Parents of adult children who live in the same compound expect their children to leave in most cases. Only a few mention that they expect a certain child to continue living with them. Reasons to leave the compound are: To get married and start a family, finish of studies, start a living in Kampala or get a job elsewhere and when enough money is saved to buy and own house and land. Many children, especially girls, get married before they are adult, and thus leave the household at a young age (14-17 years).

Discussion: what is the status of our hypotheses?

A review of our data confirms the low presence of young people in the baseline data. We can safely conclude that the young (20-35 years) are not living with their parents. We did not find any proof for our first hypothesis - Young households and young adults are located within the household setup of their parents, but are not reported as part of the household since they have some economic autonomy - that young adults are hidden within the household set-up of their parents. Only 15% of adult children mentioned were still living at their parents' compound, and most of these children were expected to leave the compound when their studies were finishing or when they would start a family of their own. In addition those adult children did not have economic autonomy; they were either in school or contributed to household farm

labor (usually unpaid). Young people in general move to their own house once they marry and/or start a family.

Almost three quarters of the adult children are working outside agriculture, quite a large number considering that crop cultivation and sales are still the main source of income for 70% of households in our baseline survey with an additional 14% having a land-based main source of income such as waragi/banana-beer production and sales or livestock sales. The adult children of our baseline population are greatly diverting from this. Whether this is because of lack of access to land like we hypothesized (H2) - Young households have facultative livelihood strategies based in local towns, possibly due to lack of access to land (Some have had land and sold it), but will return when inherited land becomes available or resources are accumulated for land purchase – or because of other reasons is not convincingly proven. Quite a number of young adults though (varying between 22% and 55% for the different sites) do own land, although we didn't ask where this land was located so this might be outside the parents' village. Many parents expect their children to return back to the village one day. There is also a tendency among urban dwellers however to buy land and built a village house for after retirement. A return to the village thus needs not to imply any noteworthy activity or investment in agriculture. The number of young people owning land and expectations of their parents regarding their return seem to be positively correlated. Noteworthy was that for Sembabule site the number of young adults owning land and the number of parents expecting them to come back was much higher than for the other 2 sites. An explanation for this difference might be that farming conditions in Sembabule (soils, climate) are more favorable for commercial agriculture, providing more incentive for young farmers to invest in land and agriculture. The current residence of the young adult and if she/he owns land is not correlated indicating that both young adults living in their parents' village as those living elsewhere own (or not own) land. Taking into account the relatively small land holdings of our respondents (5.3 acres on average) and the large number of children they have it seems likely that not all children will inherited or receive enough land from their parents to base a living upon and land purchase is therefore inevitable should they wish to pursuit a land-based livelihood such as farming.

There is a possibility that a bias in selection of our respondents for the baseline data resulted in an under representation of young households as we describe in H3 - Young people are present in the intervention sites and possibly interested in agriculture-based livelihoods but we were not able to reach them because of bias / partner interests or similar. For the baseline study however respondents were selected randomly from lists that supposedly included all households in the sites. A significant bias therefore is unlikely. Even if a bias could (partly) explain for the high average age of household heads in the baseline, most of the adult children of these households heads have left the village and are not working in agriculture.

Many of the key-persons we interviewed support our fourth hypotheses that - Young households and young adults are little interested in agriculture and are working in local towns and larger urban areas instead – This is also supported by our data: 63.2% of the adult children have moved to Kampala or other towns and trading centers. According to their parents the main reasons to move away are to marry or to

start a living/ find employment. The large variation between our sites with regards to out-migration suggests that many local factors such as: proximity to city, local land availability, farming conditions and market access play a role in determining the degree of out-migration. Then out-migration of young people does not necessarily need to rule out their participation in farm work, especially for sites like Nakaseke which are very near to the city. This can apply to farm activities on the parents' farm but also to seasonal agricultural labor. The hope or chance on employment that is well paid is major incentive for young people to move to Kampala according to many of the interviewed key-persons. The latter is not necessarily very easy taking into account that urban youth unemployment is 24% (Garcia & Fares 2008), although 83% of unemployment and underemployment in rural areas are youth (IYF 2011). The odds of a job may be better in urban than rural areas. Prospects are apparently more appealing than the rural (farming) life. The appeal of urban areas lies not only in (potentially) better employment. Beuving (2010) arguments that the absence of close kinship ties and therefore increased personal freedom is one of the main attractions of urban centers, in combination with the existence of a 'leisure industry' that can be enjoyed with peers. It is not the 'quest for economic opportunity' so much that makes young people go and stay in urban areas, Beuving concludes, but 'a cultural preference' for urban life. Comments from Ssemwanga (2011) on a online forum about smallholder agriculture are in line with this; He says that many rural people see 'farming' as: "a temporary measure required to get the hell out of the village (…) hence with the first significant amount of money they'll get they will free themselves from their land based livelihood (...) in order to get piped water and decent schools, a salon to do your hair". He adds that "village life is horrible, unless you have significant amounts of money and only those that see the prospect of making such money will remain there". Except for the pull-factors of the city there are also conditions or situations that 'push' rural people from their village like: under- or unemployment and crop failures (Divyakirti 2002). In the case of young people the lack of support services also seems to be an important 'push' factor (Garcia & Fares 2008). According to the majority of key-persons we interviewed access of young people to financial services for investment in agriculture, training or any other support are virtually non-existent. Another factor that enhances rural-urban migration is the education that rural youth receive; often the curriculum is much more geared toward academic accomplishments and urban focused studies than to learning useful skills that enhance rural livelihoods (World Bank 2009). However, IYF (2011), in a survey of youth, found that agriculture could still become an important source of livelihoods, if entry conditions were improved and training were more available.

All together our data suggests that young rural people don't have much interest in investing in agriculture nor do they have the capacities and opportunities to do so. They see more future in migrating to urban areas, although this migration is not necessarily permanent. Even when living in urban areas many young people frequent their parents' compound to help out with farming activities, indicating that links with agriculture remain even after out-migration. The degree in which young people migrate seems to be related to distance to urban centre(s) and economic (farming) opportunity in the locality.

Conclusions

Rural-urban migration

Rural populations often take a decision to move from their lands to cities, often attracted by a better quality of life in the urban areas or a higher standard of living with more freedom. These factors that 'pull' people away from rural areas could be greater job opportunities, higher wages, better health & educational facilities, increased personal freedom etc. However, there are several instances when rural people are 'pushed' from their villages due to unemployment in agriculture, which results from mechanization, farm consolidation, crop failures, land shortage, etc. Whereas some of the migration is long-term and permanent, a significant amount of seasonal migration takes places (Virat Divyakirti, 2002). The out-migration of rural youth has a grave implication on labor availability and the future of agriculture. Girls often leave home at a very young age (even as young as 10 or 11) and may never return. Clearly there are advantages and disadvantages to such migration. While it may reduce the number of people the family has to feed, simultaneously it also deprives the household of labor. The emigration of male youth is due to their limited land rights and culturally imposed restrictions, and to the presumed attractions and promises of city life.

Considering these kind of situations, rural youth are often included as an important target group for development projects that seek to increase their interest in agriculture through use of modern or more accessible agricultural technologies. Such initiatives would be hampered by cultural constraints, particularly those that affect land access and economic independence for youth.

The degree of seasonal migration is difficult to assess but it implies that urban livelihoods of these people that go back and forth between the city and the village are not very dominantly established. Increased opportunity in the rural area might tempt them to (permanently) migrate back and invest in land-based livelihoods. The question is how to reach this group.

Poverty’s Effect on Rural Youth

The rural youth are most affected by poverty. This group, which represents over half of the world’s youth population, is among the most disadvantaged groups as they often have limited access to vocational educational programs that address their specific situations and needs. This results in high dropout rates at an early age. School curricula are often geared more toward academic accomplishments and to urban-focused studies than to learning useful skills that enhance rural livelihoods. The resulting low enrollment rates, coupled with low completion rates, have contributed to the difficult transition into quality employment. As a compounding factor, education can be cost prohibitive and sometimes viewed as unnecessary in an agricultural society that is dependent upon farm working. There is also a debate about who move out of the villages. Skeldon (1997) argues that it is not the poorest that move out of villages. He suggests that it is the wealthiest who can afford to send their children for education and the well educated are the first to move out in search of best opportunities in urban areas. Therefore, most rural youth remain poor—three out of every four live on less than US $2 per day—lacking the resources and skills to be competitive (World Bank 2009). With educated people mainly migrating to urban

areas, rural areas are also deprived from people that have the potential capacity to bring about change and development in the rural area.

Recommendations

Investing in the rural youth—for education, for jobs,—is imperative if national governments seek to reduce poverty and diminish urban drift. Investments in rural infrastructure; electricity, health care and roads are also essential in order to keep the rural area attractive to young people. Policies and programs must recognize youth and decision-makers need to engage youth in poverty reduction strategies. With this framework, youth can improve their rural livelihoods through self-sustaining employment prospects, education, health care, and social life. Training in agricultural management and technology specifically directed at young people is essential when aiming at viable and sustainable rural livelihoods. The type of agricultural activities and technology, including agroforestry, may be an important factor, but still requires additional studies.

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