

Youth participation in the Sago industry: A Malaysian case study

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Abstract

Studies have shown that today's youth are shunning away from agricultural activities leading to workforce shortages to sustain production. The present study includes a survey of 200 youths involved in the sago industry in Malaysia's four major districts of Sarawak to understand their general perceptions of the sago industry and employment patterns in both sago and non-sago. Results showed that a proportion of the youth respondents were employed either full-time or part-time, with more than half working full-time in the private sector. Of great concern, about 25 per cent of them are not employed full-time. Nevertheless, approximately 70 or 35 per cent of the youth respondents admitted that they are engaged in part-time sago-related activities. Generally, rural youths have favourable attitudes toward the sago industry. The level of education is an essential factor influencing youths' full-time employment in the sago industry. Whereas for part-time employment in the industry, age was a significant determinant.

Keywords: Agriculture, Sago industry, unemployment, youth, youth participation

Introduction

Agriculture continues to significantly stimulate the economy in many countries worldwide, including Malaysia (D'Silva et al., 2010). The importance is more prevalent among rural communities. For example, the socioeconomic status of rural people can be improved by achieving the objectives of increased productivity, job opportunities, and income redistribution capable of delivering agricultural labour (Adisa, 2016). Over time, Malaysia's agriculture sector remains secondary to other more popular sectors, such as the manufacturing and services sectors. The agricultural sector remains unpopular due to its image as a challenging job with low wages that do not, in particular, guarantee a promising future for those with tertiary education (Abdul Aziz & Norhlilmatus, 2013; Othman & Ishak, 2009). Despite its great potential to improve people's livelihood, particularly in rural areas, agriculture generally faces acute labour shortages.

The known fact is that Malaysia has a relatively high youth unemployment rate. The Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the youth unemployment rate. One might wonder why these unemployed youths were not brought to the market to address the problem of labour shortages, particularly in labour-intensive plantation-type farming (Neorehan et al., 2016; Lee & Zhang, 2021). Additionally, most farmland is abandoned due to a lack of workforce (Abdul Aziz & Norhlilmatus, 2013). Despite its sizeable economic potential, sago is one of the agricultural