

Who Are the Young Agricultural Entrepreneurs of Southern Benin?

A Policy Brief
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The agricultural sector in the Republic of Benin has the potential to employ more youth, produce more food, raise food security and enhance economic development. However, youth unemployment persists despite numerous initiatives in the sector of employment. This policy brief presents the key findings of a study that analyzed who the young agricultural entrepreneurs are, what they do, and how they feel about their occupation. The findings summarized in this brief could provide a knowledge base for agricultural sector employment initiatives.

Introduction

The government of Benin and other organizations have implemented initiatives to support youth entrepreneurship in agriculture. But the engagement of youth in agriculture continues to decline even though youth unemployment continues to rise (Figure 1).

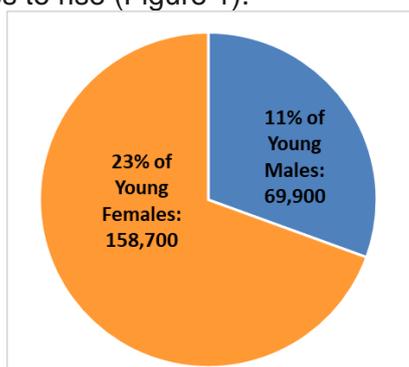


Figure 1. Benin Youth 15-24 years old Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET), 2011. Data Source: ILOSTAT http://www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/oracle/webcenter/portalapp/pagehierarchy/Page3.jspx?MBI_ID=20

All savvy entrepreneurs know that understanding their clients is critical for success. But the designers and directors of Benin's agripreneur initiatives might not have much information about the young farmers and agribusiness people in Benin. The study behind this Policy Brief was designed to fill this gap.

In late 2018, we surveyed about 600 young people and agricultural entrepreneurs in six southern departments: Atlantique, Littoral, Ouémé, Plateau, Zou and Mono; including eleven ethnicities: Adjas, Aizos, Fons, Gouns, Guins, Holis,



Houedas, Ouatchis, Toffins, Yoruba, and Xwlas (General census of population and housing, 2002).

Most Young Agripreneurs Farm

We found that in these six departments, the largest share of young people in the agricultural sector are in fact engaged in producing crops (58%) (Figure 2).

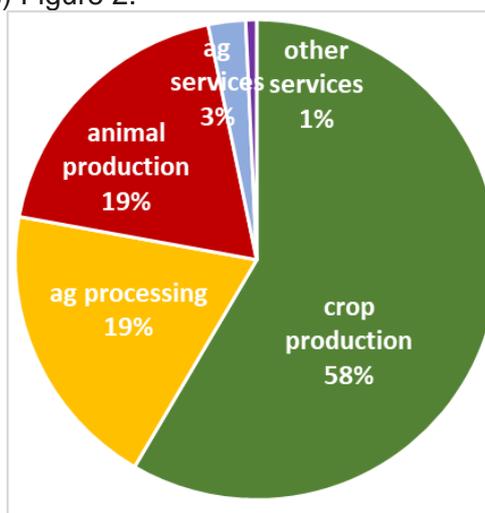


Figure 2. What young agripreneurs do

Animal husbandry and agricultural processing both employed 19%, respectively. And a minority are engaged in providing agricultural services (3%) or other services (1%).



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Characteristics of young agripreneurs

The young agricultural entrepreneurs in Southern Benin are predominantly male.



They also have fewer years of education than those in non-agricultural sector employment. However, we also found a negative correlation between the level of education and the probability of being an agri-entrepreneur. The less educated one is, the greater the chance they are an agricultural entrepreneur.

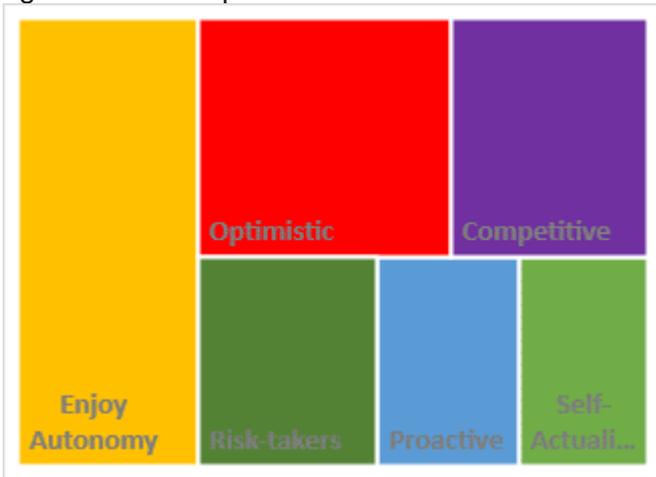


Figure 3. Personality of Young Agripreneurs

Agricultural entrepreneurs are more willing to take risks, enjoy more autonomy, are more willing to compete, more self-actualized and more proactive compared to their counterparts in non-agricultural employment (Figure 3). Furthermore,

young people in the agricultural sector are more optimistic than their counterparts in non-agricultural jobs.

Beninese young agricultural entrepreneurs are polyvalent. They are "Jack-of-all-trades" flexing to engage in different agribusiness activities. They engage in other economic activities to improve their standard of living. In contrast, people who hold non-agricultural sector jobs working for others may not have any opportunity to allocate their time to other income-earning activities. They must usually focus on the occupations for which they are hired.

Income Opportunities in Agriculture

The three main reasons for choosing to engage in agripreneurship among the youth are: (1) to earn money, (2) to escape unemployment and (3) to pursue an opportunity. Indeed, we found that the agricultural sector does offer youth's opportunities to earn higher incomes compared to non-agricultural employment. The maximum earned per month by a young person in non-agricultural employment was 200,000 FCFA (332,259\$). In contrast, 12% of the young agricultural entrepreneurs we surveyed earned more than 200,000 FCFA/month.

Earning a living is difficult for many, but it appears less difficult in agriculture. Almost half (46%) of those in non-agricultural employment reported that it is difficult or very difficult to obtain income, but only a third (33%) of young agricultural entrepreneurs reported it was difficult or very difficult.



Photo: http://www.bj.undp.org/content/benin/fr/home/operations/projects/poverty_reduction/projet-commune-du-millenaire--pcm--de-bonou.html

Implications

- Given our findings, we propose the following:
- 1) **Encourage young women** to take leadership roles in the agricultural sector. Take care to remove gender biases from land ownership, credit, and employment practices. Facilitate

female agripreneurship networks. Target funding to agribusinesses owned by women.

- 2) **Encourage partnerships between university educators and agripreneurs** to upgrade agricultural education and research, emphasize entrepreneurship skills, and keep course content modern and relevant over time. Highlight innovative production practices. Showcase successful young agripreneurs.
- 3) Don't wait until it's too late: **Include agriculture in primary and secondary school curricula.** For example, teach organic gardening to school children; modern farm record-keeping or management to teenagers.