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Why Entrepreneurial Education in a faculty of Agriculture?

Sub-Saharan Africa has the fastest growing and youngest population in the world. By 2035, 375 million young people will reach working age on the continent. Providing meaningful and dignified employment for this enormous cohort of young people has to be a major priority, not just for individual African governments but also for national, regional and international organizations and governments beyond Africa.

The agricultural transformation from subsistence production to a more commercial system involving both on-farm and many related off-farm activities goes hand-in-hand with broader economic and social transformations, particularly

the increased importance of the urban economy. As subsistence farmers increase their productivity through technological advances, for example through the introduction of fertilizers, the surplus yield can be commercialized and generate income. This rise in income in turn generates increased demand for goods and services and the growth of the non-farm economy. As this process continues, opportunities for employment arise along the agri-food value chain (and beyond) and many rural dwellers migrate to urban centers seeking these new opportunities. The result of this process is that the percentage of the population engaged in small-scale farming, while still very significant, has decreased markedly from even a decade ago. This has been particularly true in countries that have experienced the highest rates of growth in agricultural productivity (Yeboah and Jayne, 2018).

Unlike the case of many Asian nations, in which the growth of the manufacturing sector attracted tremendous numbers of rural youth to cities and towns, manufacturing represents a relatively small part of the economies of most sub Saharan African countries. Instead, the opportunities open to youth in Africa tend to be in the goods and services sectors. Unfortunately, these opportunities are limited and in many cases are found within the informal economy, which often translates into poor remuneration and unstable employment.

It is important to note that while there are many challenges in solving the youth employment crisis in Africa, at the same time there are tremendous opportunities. Unlike much of the

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industrialized world that have rapidly aging populations, Africa has a very young population. Under a positive policy environment that encourages economic growth, stable government, an emphasis on education and training and controls on corruption, these young can not only fill an increasing demand for skilled workers, but can also create new economic opportunities. Given the right conditions, Africa's demographic dividend represents an important asset (Filmer and Fox, 2014).

To meet the demand for employment for the massive numbers of youth coming into the labor market, more stable opportunities must be created. While expanded agri-food value chains have the potential to create a great number of jobs and opportunities for young people, in many countries such value chains are still relatively small and vulnerable. In order to create additional opportunities, agricultural productivity must rise to increase the availability of commodities required by processors, who can in turn expand production and create additional jobs.

Preparing young people to take advantage of the opportunities offered by an expanding agri-food value chain is a significant challenge. Faculties of agriculture have an extremely important role to play in this process. In spite of common critiques of their detachment from farmers and other actors in the agri-food chain and rural communities, their research and extension activities can play an important part in helping farmers increase productivity. They also are responsible for the training of professionals for the agricultural sector. Historically, the formation of these future generations of professionals has focused largely on technical and scientific training and has ignored business and entrepreneurial competencies and so-called "soft skills". A dynamic agri-food value chain needs professionals who not only understand the technical aspects of agricultural production, but also marketing, processing, logistics, etc. "Soft skills", including communication, teamwork, conflict resolution skills, among others, are also indispensable competencies for future leaders of the food system (Crawford *et al.*, 2011).

In the minds of many young people in Africa (and beyond), agriculture is associated with poverty, drudgery and low status. It is often considered an occupation of last resort, and perhaps reflecting this perception, some universities require the minimum entrance requirement for admission to the agriculture faculty. In order for this to change and for young people to associate agriculture with opportunity instead of poverty, with dynamism instead of drudgery, and technology and science instead of simply digging in the field, the way universities and TVETs teach agriculture has to change. Agricultural education needs to include an avenue for young people to become participants in a more dynamic agri-food system and to become "agropreneurs".

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An essential element of this transformation is the inclusion of entrepreneurial and business education within the agricultural curriculum. This is not to say that all graduates of faculties of agriculture are destined for careers in business or as entrepreneurs. However, at the level of technical/vocational training and undergraduate level studies, curricula should include opportunities for students to both learn about and gain competencies in the business side of agriculture, as well as hands-on experience in entrepreneurship (Sherrard and Alvarado, 2017).

Changing mind-set is without a doubt the single greatest challenge in terms of how to incorporate business, agribusiness and entrepreneurship in the curriculum. It involves changing the way academics (and students) view the educational enterprise. It recognizes the tremendous potential of experiential learning and the value of hands-on, practical experience at the farm level. It recognizes that, while the preparation of some students for careers as researchers and academics is essential, the majority of the opportunities for graduates of faculties of agriculture will be found in the private sector.

There is an increasing recognition of this, and in response, many TVET's and faculties of agriculture are including courses and other options for students to learn business skills and in some cases to gain hands-on experience in entrepreneurship. These initiatives need to be mainstreamed and not simply seen as "add-ons" to the "real" curriculum.

On a recent visit to Kenya and Uganda I had the opportunity to visit a number of initiatives that are being developed under the umbrella of the TAGDev Project (Transforming African Agricultural Universities to meaningfully contribute to Africa's growth and development). Egerton University in Kenya, Gulu, Uganda Christian and Busitema universities in Uganda are just some examples of the institutions that are moving rapidly to include entrepreneurial training in their agricultural curricula. The enthusiasm of students and faculty to participate in such programs is tremendous. However, the resources available for developing these programs are scarce and in many cases depend on external, short-term funding. If they are to flourish, the universities need to include stable funding in their core budgets. Only when such programs become integral components in the agricultural curriculum will meaningful change occur.

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Dr. Daniel Sherrard has been with EARTH University in Costa Rica since its founding in 1990. He has been a professor, dean and provost at the University. He is currently leading EARTH's *Education for Leadership* initiative.

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