

COMMENTARY



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At the recently ended **AFAAS 2019 Week in Abidjan** I made two comments with regards to **1. Re-Thinking the youth question in Agriculture** and **2. Radical Mass consumption of farmer produce as a solution for improved viability of smallholder farmers**. The background to these comments is premised on the notion that having listened to several recommendations that were discussed to improve youth participation and improved viability of smallholder farmers it appears we are going round in circles; however, I believe as promoters of best practice in extension we have the opportunity to lead a new way of thinking. I will describe the two comments below:

1. Re-Thinking the youth question in Agriculture

There is an endearing assumption that introduction of technology to agriculture will be the panacea for youth participation. This is quite risky as until now technology has struggled to deliver a mass movement of youth into agriculture. Many discussions on how to make agriculture look "cool and sexy" for youth all seem to gravitate towards introduction of technology. All these dimensions are correct, but I think the focus should be on showing the youth the kind of life that returns from agriculture can give. About three years ago I wrote an article where I described the power of secondary triggers <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/power-identifying-secondary-triggers-productsolution-uptake-sansole/>, so I believe we will need to think of "**secondary triggers**"¹ that will stimulate youth participation. It is not really about making agricultural operations high tech, but rather more about what will one get from participating in agriculture. Take a leaf from the other professions or enterprises that attract youth; it is the lifestyle that the fruits of the profession provide that will get youth participation. Introduction of tech alone will not carry the day and I believe the evidence is glaring in our faces. There is need to face the reality that agriculture may never really be "cool or sexy" for youth, because honestly there is nothing sexy about washing pigs, cleaning poultry housing facilities and getting all muddy in the fields. But with a clear vision and attractive end in sight, youth participation will take off; what I think should form the core of the next era of attracting youth to agriculture is the demonstration of a possible lifestyle that comes with good earnings from agriculture. It

¹ <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/power-identifying-secondary-triggers-productsolution-uptake-sansole/>

is a role that Extension services can play, meaning that the transformation needs to begin at that level. If the Extension Officers demonstrate a better a life from agriculture, there will then be an understanding that technology will enhance the returns and with increased returns, there is a lot more disposable income to fund the desired life-style.

In conclusion let us rethink how we will attract youth participation in Agriculture. I think I have attended one too many meetings that are still hitting the same brick wall, and none are achieving mass participation of youth in agriculture. The reality is agriculture will never be "sexy or cool", but what agriculture will give access to is what could be "cool and sexy". The "**secondary trigger**" will carry the day and that is what I think.

2. Radical Mass consumption of farmer produce as a solution for improved viability of smallholder farmers

The second issue raised was that, there is a need for Extension services to play a role in the promotion of radical consumption of our own produce. One of the challenges we are facing in Africa is that, we do not consume enough of our own local produce; a good but wild example is Morocco, which is pitted as the second largest producer of wine in Africa after South Africa, but the catch is that most of the wine is consumed locally <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2019/09/282776/morocco-largest-wine-exporter-africa-south-africa/>. In order to make smallholder farmers viable, there is need for radical consumption of our own local produce as this guarantee's farmers a market for all that is produced. In many of the countries that have developed agricultural systems, most if not all is based on local consumption first before growing for other countries. For example, the Dutch consume their milk and its various value added products (cheese, yoghurt, ice cream) in huge volumes; for example, almost every meal has a dairy product and this in turn puts pressure on farmers to produce more, and also encourages farmers to seek more efficient ways of producing more from their given hectare. The Germans consume pork in huge volumes, hence being a pig producer is viable owing to the guaranteed market. The idea is that if we consume our own food, we create the demand; this will in turn push farmers to produce more, and in turn begin to seek for more efficient ways to enhance productivity. We must be the market for our smallholder farmers, once they can efficiently produce for local consumption, export enterprises becomes complementary.

It is important to note that, the governments of the day may have a major role to play, as in some cases they may have to mandate local consumption, by making certain declarations such as "every child must have a glass of locally produced milk a day", "every child must eat porridge with locally produced peanut butter" or "every child must have a cup of hot locally produced cocoa/chocolate drink a day".

In conclusion, let us open our mouths and eat our own locally produced food; it will save thousands of our smallholder farmers.

I was in the audience when Mr Kanyangu made this powerful comment. I requested him to write it up, which he kindly did. What does he say? He says one of the ways of uplifting our smallholder farmers is for us to consume what they produce. Thank you Mr Kanyangu for this message. Ed. AJFAND