

# **Young People, Agriculture and Employment: A Case Study of Brunei Darussalam**

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## **Introduction**

One of the global challenges facing the agricultural sector today is the ability to meet the increasing demand for food due to world population growth whereby world population is estimated to reach 9.3 billion in 2050 (FAO, 2009). Another question which surrounds the agricultural sector is who will be the next generation of farmers and agricultural producers? This is “the biggest issue facing agriculture and farmers in the United States” and there is “an impending crisis in agriculture” (USDA, 2012). Globally, the agricultural population is ageing whereby the average age of farmers is now in the range of high-50s to early-60s (Leavy, 2013). Youths who are the future generation need to be encouraged into agriculture to improve global food supply and to address the issues of food security and the sustainability of agriculture.

## **Methods**

This study applies a sequential exploratory mixed method research design employing both qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell and Plano, 2007). The study is divided in to six phases. In the first phase, the qualitative approach is employed by conducting in-depth interviews with policymakers from the agriculture, agribusiness sector, and education sectors. This phase aims to explore the opportunities and constraints of agriculture in Brunei. The first phase also aims to explore the aspirations and perceptions of young people regarding agriculture. This is done through focus group discussions. Focus groups with parents of different age groups and socio-economic background to find out the influence parents have over their children’s aspirations and career choice are also carried out in this stage.

The main focus in phase two is to analyse the qualitative data that is collected via interviews and focus groups. These are audibly recorded and are transcribed and translated. The transcripts are then analysed using thematic analysis whereby codes emerged and themes are created.

In the third phase, the literature review together with the codes and themes derived from the qualitative data serve as individual survey items. Only the items that were substantial in the qualitative data sets are selected as survey response to keep the survey short and simple.

The fourth phase uses quantitative methods from a survey. A pilot study is undertaken to refine a draft questionnaire. Seven education institutions took part in the quantitative phase and final questionnaires were distributed through teachers in schools with a sample of n=407 young people answering the surveys.

The results of the survey is analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 20) in phase five where descriptive statistics, factor analysis and ordinal regression analysis are the main statistical techniques used.

### **Findings**

The common themes that emerged across the three groups (policymakers, young people and parents) led to the construction of four major themes of "institutional barriers", "challenges of agricultural education", "rentier attitude of young people", and "the role of parents and family". The main findings of the qualitative phase are firstly; there are lack of opportunities in the agricultural sector for young people. There are no specific policies regarding youth and agriculture and this can be attributed to the top-down nature of administration in Brunei whereby there are lack of youth representatives in the policy making process. The initiative to promote agriculture as agribusiness and secondary sector is constrained by the unconducive business environment. There is too much dependency on the government and lack of entrepreneurial culture among the young people in Brunei.

Second; the education system does not give particular attention to agriculture. Agricultural subjects in schools is on the brink of extinction throughout the country and there is no higher educational institutions offering agricultural courses. There is also a negative stigma attached to students that takes up agricultural courses whereby it is perceived to be for the less academically inclined students.

Third; for the occupational aspirations, the findings revealed that there are two different views. The mainstream students' aspirations in Brunei are more towards high pay and prestigious jobs that are easy and secured whereas those from the Wasan Vocational schools showed interest in the agricultural sector; both in the manual farming and agri-food sector but are constrained by the lack of opportunities. They have limited access to land and credit. One common themes

between the two groups is their interest in entrepreneurship and some are already doing business part time and online. However, none are willing to take it further because of the difficulties of starting up a business in Brunei.

Finally, the role of parents in shaping aspirations of their children proves to be true in Brunei. Parents are the children's main source of advisors when it comes to seeking advice on education and occupation. It is thus important to seek the parents' perceptions of agriculture and careers in agriculture in Brunei. There seems to be two different views on this. The young and more educated parents tend to have higher expectations for their children and are reluctant for their children to be involved in the agricultural sector unless they are the 'manager' of the farms. The older and less educated parents showed no concerns if their children are to become farmers on the field. However, one common perception that both groups of parents had is the concern of the agricultural sector in Brunei. They find that the sector is still undeveloped and is in need of more attention from the government.

The results of the quantitative study, on the other hand suggest that the factors affecting young people expectations of farming are lack of opportunities, rentier attitude of young people, experience of having agriculture education and family members in the agriculture sector and influence of parents. Those that affect young people's expectation of agribusiness are age, status, experience of agriculture education and the rentier attitude of young people. All relate to the themes of the qualitative findings of institutional barriers, challenges of agriculture education, rentier attitude of young people and role of parents and family.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

To promote the agricultural sector, there needs to be a clear vision for the development of modern agriculture which can generate secure income that carries the same level of status as other respectable jobs to meet the occupational aspirations of young people. A clear roadmap for modern agriculture is needed consisting of extensive consultations with various stakeholders including youth representatives. This entails a change in the way the government works. Instead of a top-down approach, the government needs to work more in partnership with the other stakeholders to ensure that policies are well thought of and realistically achievable.

Second, a clear strategy led by the government is required to implement the goals of youth involvement in agriculture. This needs to be a collaborative development between the government, industry and the education sector. Different government Ministries should work

together to put in place an efficient support system for young farmers and agri-entrepreneurs. For example, the Department of Agriculture and Agri-food could be in charge of gathering information on skills needed in the industry and identifying the type of agribusinesses that are viable for youths to set up. Industry and agribusinesses could be involved by providing access to role models and mentors to interested youth entrepreneurs. Financial assistance and land provision needs to be easily accessible for the successful implementation of strategies. The education sector could respond to the needs of the agriculture and agribusiness by providing courses and trainings in schools as well as short courses to those who are not in schools. This type of collaboration can be effective in changing the image of agriculture and at the same time changing the agricultural landscape of Brunei in to one that is modernised, mechanized and focusing more on agribusiness which can create more employment opportunities for the young people. Finally, a support network consisting of the media, awards for youth in agriculture, compilation of success stories and other channels can be formed to promote modern agriculture.

## **References**

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