

ABSTRACT

Youth unemployment remains a daunting challenge for most developing countries, Uganda inclusive. Several government and non-government (NGO) initiatives have been undertaken to deal with this challenge. A major cause of failure of such initiatives is inadequate attention to governance issues. This study determined the governance challenges embedded in the different modes of engagement for promoting youth in agricultural enterprises, established the potential for sustainability of existing groups, and described the youth's innovation performance amidst the impeding factors. The study was conducted in Hoima and Masindi districts in Mid-Western Uganda. A mixed methods research design was used, combining a cross sectional survey, and case studies to generate quantitative and qualitative data respectively. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to collect qualitative data. The Producer Organizations Sustainability Assessment (POSA) model was adapted to analyze potential for sustainability of the youth groups, and SPSS software version 19 was used to analyze quantitative data. Pair wise ranking was done to establish the major factors impeding engagement in agriculture from the youths' perspective. Results indicated that several government and NGO initiatives are providing a wide range of services to support youth engagement in agriculture, but they operate independently, and are not coordinated to harmonize and synergize for complementarity. As a result, the initiatives face governance challenges that are linked to the multiplicity in the actors, and the lack of monitoring and coordination. The NGO supported groups were likely to be more sustainable than Government supported groups. The critical determinants for likelihood for sustainability are the capital structure, product quality and access to extension services. The study further revealed that the major factors impeding youth engagement in agriculture are soil exhaustion; lack of relevant technical knowledge and information; and limited access to land for production. Amidst the numerous constraints faced, some youth innovate, and are more successful than their counterparts. The major innovations practiced by youth are irrigation, mechanization, and market linkages. The key areas of support to foster innovativeness of the youth include supporting them to develop and sustain relevant partnerships and networks; ensuring access to relevant and quality knowledge and information; supporting access to, and use of quality inputs; reducing labor intensity through mechanization; and market linkages. This study motivated a proposal of a governance-based model for the design and implementation of youth development initiatives. The model suggests strengthening youth involvement in planning for better targeting of different categories of youth, limiting the involvement of political actors, coordination and management of multi-actors, and engagement of appropriate mentors to support sustainability of youth agricultural enterprises.