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Full Length Research Paper

Role of rural youth in agricultural and rural development: A self perceived case study of Okara District, Punjab, Pakistan

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Rural youth in Pakistan play very important role in the political, economic and social development of the country. Many Rural Youth Organizations such as Chand tara, Boy Scouting, Girl Guide Movement, Farm Guide Movement and Farm Girl Guide were introduced in Pakistan. But in-spite of all these efforts, Pakistan had no formal system for organizing and training a bulk quantity of its Rural Youth. And it is time to create awareness among our rural youth about new technologies for adoption in the field of agriculture and rural development. Keeping in view the about fact present study was designed in 2008 to ascertain self perceived role of Rural Youth in agricultural and Rural development in District Okara, Punjab, Pakistan. The district comprises three tehsils (sub-division) namely Depalpur, Renala Khurd, Okara. From each tehsil, one union council was selected through simple random technique. Two villages were selected randomly from each selected union council and 25 young males whose ages were in the range of 15 - 25 years were selected randomly from each these selected villages, thus, making a total number of 150 respondents. The data were collected with the help of a specifically designed and pre-tested interview schedule. The results showed that 88.0% of the respondents had an education from primary to matric (tenth examination) and above level. Slightly more than one fourth 28.6, 25.7 and 17.2% of the respondents were labourers, farming, farming and playing respectively. On the basis of conclusions it was recommended that for first of all the educational level of the study area should be increased. To establish the cottage industry in villages so that maximum numbers of Rural Youth get employed there and initiate various agricultural developmental programmes for the betterment of Rural Youth.

Key words: Rural development, agricultural technology, rural youth.

INTRODUCTION

According to United Nation's General Assembly, "Youth are the persons falling between the ages of 15 and 24 years inclusive". The similar definition was given by Piqa (1999) and Lindley (1993) in their articles. The total population of Pakistan is about 142 million out of which 35 million comes under the category of Youth which is total population having age 15-29 years (UN, 2002). The first serious attempt was a Rural Youth movement run between 1952 and 1961 under the banner of country's first organized extension program and rural development entitled "Village Agricultural and Industrial Development

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Program (V-AID)". It was V-AID, which gave birth to Chandtara clubs (Mallah, 1997). Boy Scouting (BS) is one of the world-renowned institutions replete with infinite potentialities of shaping the thought and behaviour of younger generation. Girl Guide Movement (GGM) in Pakistan is towards the preparation of girls for social welfare programs at all levels and to cooperate with all other social welfare agencies such as Pakistan Child Welfare Council (PCWC), Pakistan Red Cross Association (PRCA), All Pakistan Women Association (APWA), etc (Chaudhary, 1967). Similarly different youth organizations such as Youth Hostelling in Pakistan, Farm Guide Movement (FGM) in December 1966; Farm Girl Guide (FGG) in 1968 were also introduced.

Agricultural production in Pakistan is affected by a number of factors including lack of continuity in agricultural policies, politicized environment in agricultural support institutions, isolation of agricultural education, research and extension wings, unfavorable prices, buyer's and middleman "Mafia", absence of necessary infrastructure for farm exports, deficient management and marketing skills, a large number of small operators and unproductive tenancy systems, etc. (NRSP, 1999). These problems may be over come with the help of youth-serving organizations and the practitioners who work with them. During critical hours, they extend learning through rewarding growth and development experiences. They also foster caring environments that optimize the development of young people in community settings.

Pittman (1991) recommended strengthening the role of youth-serving organizations to reach underserved and marginalized youth, to extend programs and services to underserved youth and to develop within and cross-sector collaboration (Skuza, 2004). Youth is an important and vital segment of human resources, which not only today but in future will have to shoulder the responsibility for the development including agriculture and rural sectors. The same was voiced by UNESCO (2004) as Youth "not only the future…is also the present". To produce enough food for the world's six billion inhabitants with the aim to give a voice to the world's one billion youth (15 to 24-year-olds) who with better opportunities for education, training and employment, could funnel their youthful idealism, energy and determination into a positive force for change (Piqa, 1999). Pakistan is a developing country and agriculture is the mainstay of its economy. Its contribution to GDP is nearly 20.9 and 43.4% of the total employment is generated from agriculture. This sector not only fulfils the daily living requirements of population of the country but is also the main feeder of raw materials to all industries. Agriculture remains the dominant source of employment in Pakistan and approximately 66% of the country's population live in rural areas and directly or indirectly rely on the agriculture sector for their livelihood (Anonymous, 2007). However, in Pakistan, there is no formal system to organize the most energetic and enthusiastic youth for development purposes. On the contrary, they are being exploited by people with vested interests for creating instability in the country. This means there is a dire need to organize the Youth for development purpose as receptivity and responsiveness is more in the younger group than the elders particularly in the following context; risk aversion, mental activity and scientific orientation is better in youth; the process of learning is quick; mentally alert, socio-economically considerate, open to new ideas; take less time for creating awareness and interest and are able to experiment and adopt quickly. There was no study conducted previously for self-perceived role of Rural Youth in Punjab and especially in district Okara, Punjab, Pakistan. The present study was designed in especially to see self perceived role of Rural Youth in rural and agricultural development in district Okara, Punjab, Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology provides a structure and ways for various aspects of the problem which is under consideration that ultimate provides valid generalization about the phenomena (Thakur, 2003). Punjab means "The land of five rivers" that is, River Sutlej, Bias, Ravi, Chenab and Jehlum, all of these run side by side in the planes of the Punjab. The province comprising 35 districts extends over an area of 205,344 km^2 (Government of the Punjab, 2004). The total population of Punjab was 85.65 million; share in country's population was 55.63% (Government of Pakistan, 2006). The Rural population was 69% and Urban one was 31% (Government of the Punjab, 2004). Pakistan has been endowed by nature with a rich soil, aided by an efficient irrigation system. It has earned a name for agricultural productivity.

Selection of study area

The study was conducted in Okara District of the Punjab province of Pakistan. All the three tehsils namely Depalpur, Renala Khurd and Okara were selected for the study on the following grounds.

i. All the tehsils were similar in socio-economic and agricultural conditions
ii. The educational level in all the selected tehsils was very low.
iii. Traditional norms and male dominancy in whole the area prevails.
iv. Researcher himself working in this district for last approximately two years as Lecturer in the subject of Agricultural Extension Education at Sub-Campus University of Agriculture Faisalabad at Depalpur District Okara, Punjab, Pakistan and provide rendered advisory services to the farming community in this selection area.

Selection of sample for the study

Therefore present study was conducted in district Okara, Punjab, Pakistan. The Okara District is famous for its fertile lands, peaceful natural environment and green fields of potato, sugarcane, wheat, rice and maize crops. The district comprises three tehsils namely Depalpur, Renala Khurd, Okara. As the number of union council and villages in all three tehsils varies too much, therefore, researcher decided to give equal chance to all tehsils and on these basis it was decided that one union council and two villages from each tehsil were selected randomly (Sudman, 1983; Charmaz,

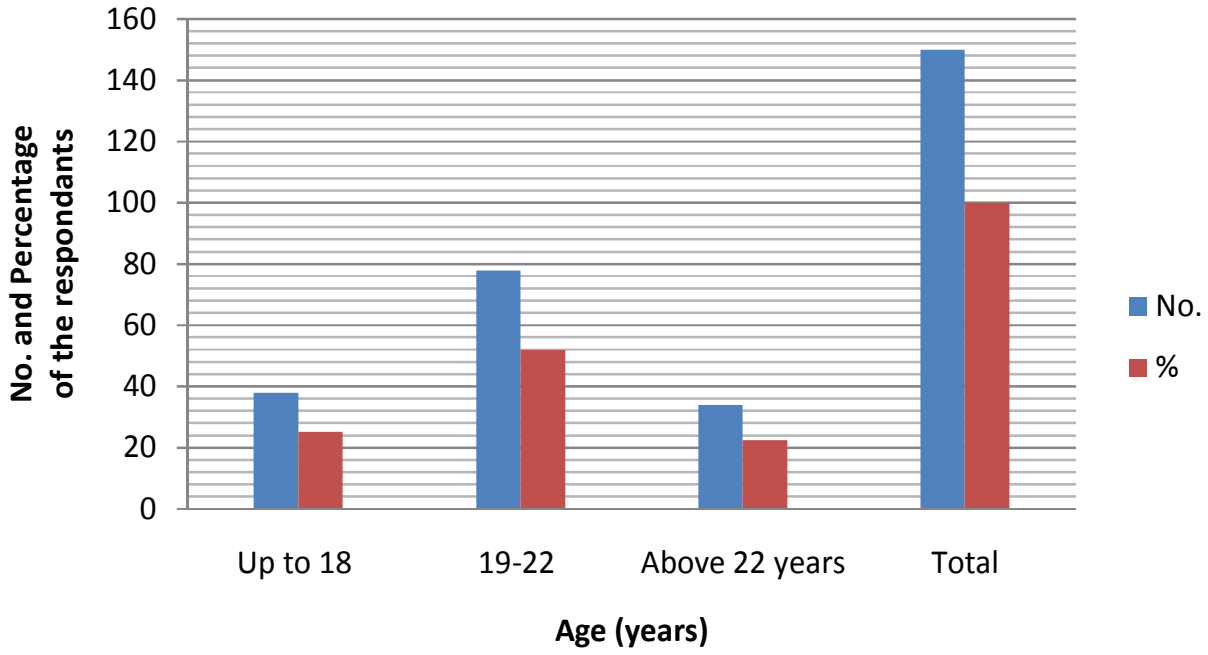

Figure 1. Distribution of the respondents according to their age.

2000). From each tehsil, one union council was selected through simple random technique. For the selection of villages lottery method was adopted (Thakur, 2003) and names of villages were written on pieces of paper, then union council wise two tickets were selected. Thus, making a total of six villages, the respondents were selected through simple random sampling method (Ogunjuyigbe et al., 2005).

Two village was selected randomly from each selected union council and 25 young males whose ages were in the range of 15 - 25 years were selected randomly from each these selected villages, thus, making a total number of 150 respondents. The data were collected with the help of a specifically designed and pre-tested interview schedule. The collected data were analyzed with the help of an appropriate statistical package for interpretation and formulation of suggestions.

A well structured interview schedule having open and close-ended questions was prepared (Acharya et al., 2005; Tucker et al., 2005). The data were collected with the help of a specifically designed and pre-tested interview schedule. The collected data were analyzed with the help of an appropriate statistical package for interpretation and formulation of suggestions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Age of an individual makes him mentally mature and able to take rational decisions (Khan, 1991). Therefore, data collected from respondents and showed in Figure 1 which reveals that 52.0% of the respondents fall under the age category of 19 - 22 years, followed by 25.3% of up to 18 years and 22.6% of them were above 22 years of age.

Education is the process of developing knowledge, wisdom and other desirable qualities of mind, character and general competencies, especially by a source of formal instruction (Evenson and Mwabu, 1998). It is visualized that more the percentage of educated people more will be the rate of development (Hussain et al., 2003). Keeping in view the importance of this aspect respondents were asked question about their level of education and the results cleared the picture in Figure 2 which shows that a large majority of the respondents collectively had different levels of education, that is, 29.3% were middle to matric, 26.7% were above matric, 23.3% were up to primary and 8.7% had primary to middle level of education. However, only 12.0% of the respondents were illiterate.

Table 1 shows that out of the 150 respondents 44.0% were students, out of them 53 (35.3%) were studying in school/college or university and 13 (8.7%) were studying at their homes and 84 (56.0%) were not going to school.

Almost similar results were achieved by those of Idrees (2003). This rate of education is bit lowered than that of provincial or national level (GOP, 2008). The 13 (8.7%) number of respondents who did not go to school/college or university and got their education at home were further asked about their sources of education at home.

The results of their responses highlighted in Figure 3 which indicates that 46.2% of the respondents, who studied at home, got education through private tuition, followed by 38.4 and 15.4% of the respondents who got education through AIOU (Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan) and by relatives, respectively. Present almost similar results as reported by Idrees (2003) who found that most of the respondents were gone to school/college or university for education. After investigating the status of respondents as student they were further asked about their timings to spend after

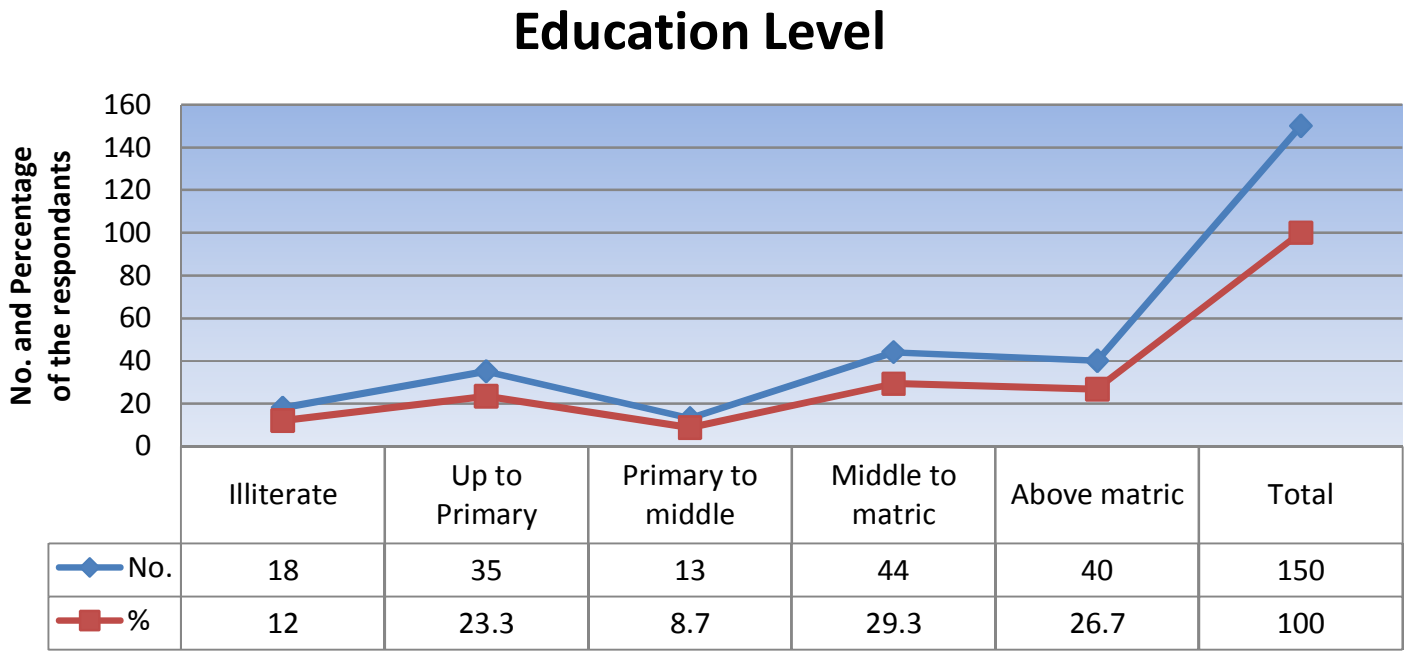

Figure 2. Distribution of the respondents according to their education.

Table 1. Distribution of the respondents according to their studentship.

Status	Yes		No	
	Yes	%	No	%
Students	66	44.0	84	56.0
Study in school/college or university	53	35.3	13	8.7
Study only at home and not go to school/college or university	13	8.7	53	35.3

coming from school/college or university.

It is evident from Table 1 that 66 (44.0%) number of respondents were students, so enquiry was made about the distribution of timings they utilized after coming from their respective institutions. Gathered data displayed in Table 2 reveals that slightly more than one fourth (31.8%) of the respondents were busy in studying, playing and went to dera after coming back from school/college or university followed by studying and playing, studying and went to dera as reported by 20.4, 15.9 and 15.9% of the respondents, respectively. Only 2.3% of the respondents served their parents after coming back from school/ college or university. In Punjabi or Pakistani rural context it is customary that male children shouldered field burden of their parents and serves as unpaid labour, therefore they indulged in different pieces of work at home after coming back from their studies. But one thing is alarming for the change in society norms, that is, only one respondent serve his parent. Therefore, it is necessary to probe into the societal setup and found the causes of this change.

Out of total number of 150 respondents 66 were students and rest of 84 (56.0%) were indulged in different types of bread earning activities. The data in this regard exhibits in Table 3 which showed that 23.8%, 21.7%, 14.3% and 10.7% of the respondents were involved in laboring farming, farming and playing and farming, business and playing respectively. The rest of the respondents involved in activities like farming and labour, playing, labour and playing, trading, driver, pulling cart and unemployed.

The respondents were asked questions about their suggestions for improving and increasing rural youth participation in various agricultural and rural development activities and their responses are tabulated in Table 4 which depicts that most (44.0%) of the respondents suggested that youth should take part in making NGOs for the development of village but on the other hand 35.0% of the respondents suggested that Government should develop agricultural industry in villages for better employment chances for Rural Youth, similarly 28.0% of them suggested that youth should fully concentrate on

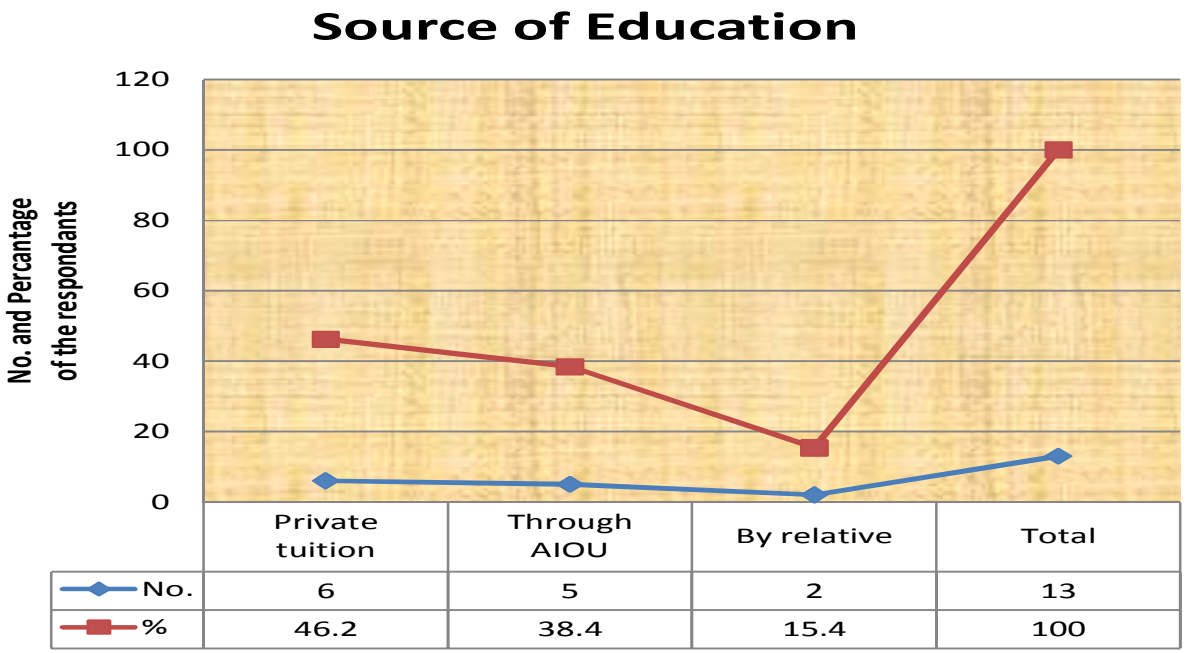

Figure 3. Distribution of the respondents according to their sources of education at home.

Table 2. Distribution of the respondents according to their work at home after coming back from school/college or university.

Activity	No.	%
Studying, playing and go to dera	14	31.8
Studying and playing	9	20.4
Studying	7	15.9
Go to dera	7	15.9
Taking rest	3	6.8
Playing	3	6.8
Serving parent	1	2.3
Total	44	100.0

Table 3. Distribution of the respondents according their activities in case they do not go to school/college or university.

Activity	No.	%
Labouring	20	23.8
Farming	18	21.7
Farming and playing	12	14.3
Unemployed	6	7.1
Farming and labour	5	5.9
Playing	3	3.5
Labour and playing	2	2.4
Trading	5	5.9
Driver	1	1.2
Pulling cart	3	3.5
Farming, business and playing	9	10.7
Total	84	100.0

their study and a nominal percentage (19.2%) of the respondents suggested that highly educated should stay in their villages and should not migrate to cities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From above discussion, it was concluded that youth were the important asset of the nation but was exploited by the different agencies and their capabilities/competencies were not fully utilized by the Government or nation. On the basis of conclusions it was recommended that first of all Government should take serious steps for developing rural based NGOs in which Rural Youth actively participate for the development of their villages. Government should initiate various agricultural developmental programmes for the betterment of Rural Youth. Government should establish technical and vocational institutes in villages for the training of Rural Youth.

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Table 4. Distribution of the respondents according to their suggestions about involvement of Rural Youth in agricultural and rural development.

Suggestions	No.	%
Youth should take part in making NGOs for the development of village	55	44.0
Government should develop agricultural industry in villages for better employment chances for Rural Youth.	44	35.0
Youth should fully concentrate on their study.	35	28.0
Highly educated peoples should stay in their villages and should not migrate to cities.	24	19.2
Government should start various developmental programmes for the betterment of Rural Youth	19	15.2
Government promote positive activities so that youth should not involve in bad activities.	18	14.4
Rural youth should help their parents in agricultural activities and take interest in getting more agricultural knowledge.	14	11.2
Technical and vocational institutes should be established in villages for the training of Rural Youth.	4	3.2
There should be good transport facilities for Youth so they go easily to educational/vocational institutes which are far from villages	3	2.4

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