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Demographic Challenges for Agriculture in Tanzania

This policy brief is based on the AgriFoSe2030 report Report 15 [“Intergenerational Challenges for Agriculture in Rural Livelihoods in Tanzania”](#). The study aims to clarify the intergenerational challenges in rural livelihoods in Tanzania by addressing national demographic challenges, their implications for rural livelihoods and whether certain challenges relate to generational belonging. The study specifically addresses challenges related to youth and elderly.

Findings from the study are based on a literature review of existing research within the field. The findings aim to support policies addressing the ongoing demographic challenges and strengthen the Tanzanian agricultural sector.

Agriculture in Tanzania

Agriculture plays a significant role in Tanzania as it contributes to 24% of the GDP, 30% of export earnings and supports the livelihoods of more than 80% of its population. However, incomes from agriculture has failed to alleviate poverty. The country is still categorized as a low-income country and ranked as number 154 out of 189 countries on the United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Index (in 2018). Thus, the objective to transition from a low-income to a middle-income country by 2025, as declared in the [Tanzania Development 2025 Vision](#), seems difficult to realize. To have any chance of achieving the target, agriculture must be in the center of attention.

Key messages

- The agricultural sector in Tanzania is characterized by poor rural infrastructure and limited access to land and resources which limits the potential for increased agricultural productivity.
- The life expectancy rate in Tanzania has largely increased over the past decades, postponing intergenerational land transfer.
- Instead of being cared for by the middle generation, the elderly have been left with new dependents as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic hitting the middle generation hard.
- Farming without modern technology is labour intensiven which makes it difficult for elderly farmers to sustain their livelihoods.
- Tanzania has a young population and a strong population growth. For youth to become independent and financially sustainable their participation in economic activities needs to increase, and the agricultural sector constitutes a potential sector for youth to engage in and develop.
- Efforts to actively engage youth in agricultural production and agro-businesses, however, needs to be improved to support the rural elderly.

Smallholder farmers play a key role in ensuring national food security in Tanzania as they supply over 85% of the total agricultural production in the country. Tanzanian agriculture is characterized by smallholder farmers cultivating between 0.2 and 2 hectares of land. While 30% of the rural households' agricultural production is being marketed, 67% is consumed by the household directly and 3% is allocated as inputs for other uses. A majority of the Tanzanian population is settled in rural areas, and it is among rural households that the highest incident of poverty is found. Smallholder farmers' production, intensification and increased profitability is therefore critical to alleviate poverty.

The agricultural sector in Tanzania faces several constraints affecting smallholder farmers and their productivity. These constraints include; limited access to capital, poor rural infrastructure, underdeveloped use of irrigation, unreliable markets and limited access to agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, pesticides and improved seeds. Rural infrastructure is underdeveloped, resulting in poor road networks and insufficient access to water, storage, processing facilities, transportation, markets and electrification.

An increasingly young Tanzania

Tanzania has one of the youngest populations in the world with roughly 45% of the population being under 15 years of age. In addition, the fertility rate remains high and the country is projected to double its population in less than 25 years. This rapid growing population has implications for livelihood opportunities among youths. The national job market is already saturated and there is a strong mismatch between the number of youths entering and the number of new jobs available. Almost 1 million young Tanzanians are trying to enter the job market annually while only 50 000 – 60 000 new jobs are created.

Research from sub-Saharan Africa highlights youth's aspirations of leaving the rural life behind and moving to urban areas to seek a modern life. As diversity of economic opportunities is limited in rural areas, farming is an obvious livelihood opportunity for those that remain in rural areas. However, farming must become more productive, be less labour intensive, modernize and become more profitable in order to be an attractive and fulfilling livelihood for a growing population.



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By tradition, land is usually inherited from the older generation to the younger generation and the young generation therefore depends on this intergenerational transfer of land to engage in agriculture. However, early intergenerational land transactions are rare; as life expectancy rates increase younger generations must wait to access land. When inheritance does occur, youth generally inherit less than previous generations due to population growth and the need to subdivide land.

Access to credit is yet another limitation for an increasingly young Tanzanian population. This barrier is, however, not only faced by the younger generation. Banks perceive agriculture as a high-risk investment with no guarantees, thus very few banks in Tanzania offer loans to smallholder farmers, regardless of their age.

In 2016, the Tanzanian government launched the National Strategy for Youth Involvement in Agriculture (NSYIA) which is a five-year strategy plan to address youth specific issues in relation to agriculture. The NSYIA identifies six critical factors hindering youth participation in agriculture: (1) land acquisition and accessibility for agricultural investment, (2) acquisition and accessibility of resources for financing youth investment in agriculture, (3) availability and accessibility of agricultural inputs, machineries and other necessary support services, (4) a poorly developed agricultural infrastructure such as marketing of agricultural products, (5) climate change and variability and (6) limited technical and entrepreneurship skills.

The same challenges are also identified in the literature review underpinning this brief. While some obstacles, such as those relating to rural infrastructure, access to credit and climate change are a concern to all smallholder farmers, access to land is an issue impacting younger generations specifically. However, with regards to youth and their future aspirations, the need for agriculture to modernize and become more productive and profitable in order to attract youth is also emphasized in the literature review.

Elderly

In Tanzania the life expectancy rate has increased significantly from just above 50 years in 1980 to almost 65 in 2015, suggesting that access to



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nutrition and medical treatment has improved over the last decades. Despite this improvement, in the absence of a social pension system, it also raises challenges. For example, the livelihood opportunity for an elderly person in a rural area will decrease over time, as farming typically demands physical work which may be difficult to maintain with increasing age. Previous research suggests that older people cultivate only half or even less of their total land because it is too labour intensive. In addition, elderly depend on children and grandchildren to assist them with farming practices.

In rural areas access to health services is constrained by long distances and limited transport availabilities, which may also become problematic for an elderly population with increasing need for such services. Even where regular transport is available, low incomes among elderly may limit their access to health services further. The introduction of mobile phones and motorcycle taxis, however, has increased the mobility of elderly in rural areas.

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social security for old age. However, due to the AIDS-epidemic the middle generation is hollowed out and has instead left the older generation with new dependents, namely their grandchildren, turning many households into so-called “skipped generation households”. In Tanzania, more than three million children are orphaned and elderly living alone or caring for orphans are identified as most vulnerable within the category of old people.

In addition, a growing unemployment and underemployment among the generation of productive adults has resulted in their continuous dependence on financial contributions from their parental generation, adding to the already heavy burden on elderly.

Policy recommendations for strengthening the agricultural sector in Tanzania in regard to demography

To meet the domestic demands of a rapidly growing, as well as aging population, the agricultural sector needs to be strengthened and agricultural production and productivity must increase. Therefore, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Improvements in the rural infrastructure (including building road networks, electricity, water and storage possibilities) need to be prioritized to increase access to markets and value chains as well as possibilities for agro-food business investments in rural areas.
- To support youth in agriculture, legislation to ease access to land through land reform, unused land or community land is needed.
- Policy makers should create incentives for agro-food businesses to increase the value of primary

agricultural products to meet the demands of a growing domestic market and to create employment opportunities.

- Training institutions such as schools, vocational training institutions and universities, should provide training in entrepreneurship for youths.
- An inclusive formal social security network needs to be adopted to reflect the increase in national life expectancy rate and improve the quality of life for elderly.
- Policy makers and institutional training should continuously have a high awareness of the severe impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on the active workforce available for farming.
- Elderly need to be systematically included in training to ensure their capacity to make use of existing and accessible technology.

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