Role of Youth in Agrifood Systems

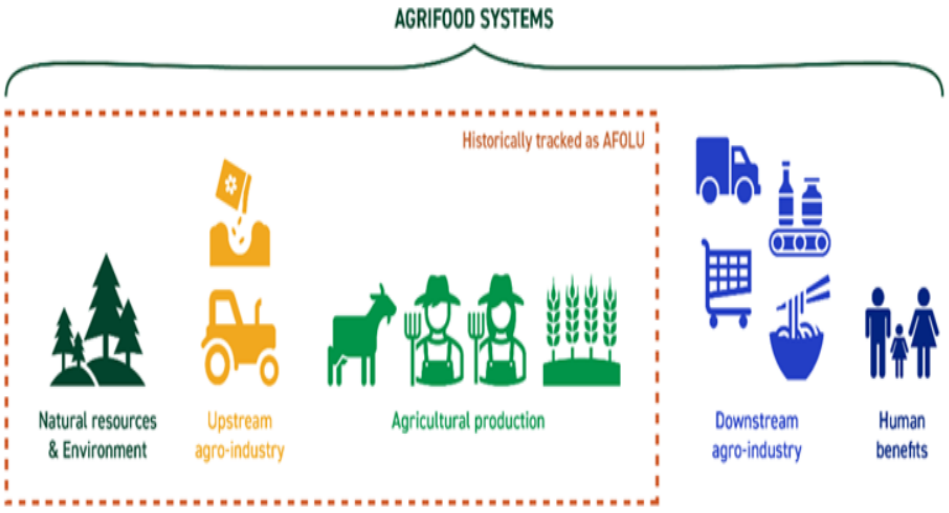
***Mains**: GS3 – Inclusive growth | Economic Development*

Why in the news?

Recently, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has released "The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems", which emphasizing the crucial role of youth in transforming agrifood systems.

What is the current status of youth in agrifood systems?

- **Youth –** According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), youth are generally defined as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24.
- **Agrifood systems –** Agrifood systems encompass all the *activities involved in producing, processing, distributing, and consuming food*, as well as the associated socio-economic and environmental factors.



- **Need –** Youth aged 15 to 24 constitute 1.3 billion individuals with nearly 85% living in low and lower-middle-income countries globally have agrifood systems as livelihood options.
- Food insecurity has risen from 16.7 % to 24.4 % between 2014-16 and 2021-23 among youth, especially affecting young people in Africa.
    - Report notes that over 20 % of youth are not in employment, education, or training (NEET), with young women twice as likely to fall into this category.
- **Share of youth in agrifood –** The share of working youth in agrifood systems has

decreased from 54 % in 2005 to 44 % in 2021.

- Rural youth account for only 5 % of the population in industrial agrifood systems, signaling potential labor shortages if agricultural careers are not made more attractive.
- Globally, 44 % of working youth rely on agrifood systems for employment compared to 38 % for working adults.

What are the challenges in youth participation?

- **Landlessness –** Fragmented landholdings or no landholdings encourage youth to choose different career paths, which are comparatively more productive.
- **Social status –** Agriculture profession is discriminated in society i.e. if someone do agriculture, their social status often linked to lower status.
- **Internal migration –** In search of better livelihood chances youth prefer migrating to urban areas, which provides multiple opportunities.
    - **Youth demographics** – It indicating that 54 % live in urban areas, with the highest concentrations in eastern Asia.
- **Lack of access to information -** These challenges were mostly related to access factors such as production resources, finance, knowledge and information, extension, innovation, and technology.
- **Lack of human capital -** Lack of education, career guidance, employable skills to enter the job market, mentorship challenges linked to requiring human capital.
- **Lack of financial capital –** Access to finance and credit and rising input costs are challenges together associated bringing initial investment in agriculture.

How youth can be encouraged?

- **Awareness on modern agriculture -** Necessary awareness on agriculture business (modern methods of crop/animal production, input and service provisioning institutions) through experiential learning has to be created.
- **Youth targeted schemes –** Ensuring access to training, land, and credit through youth-targeted schemes enhances their ability to catch up.
    - **For example** - ATMA Cafeteria subsumed under *ATMA (Agriculture Technology Management Agency)* provides skill training courses of at least 200 hours to rural youth and farmers
- **Converting agri-farmers to "agripreneurs" -** Youth-specific initiatives facilitating unhindered access to financial services and prioritising aspiring young men and women is equally important.
- **Developing a market -** Elimination of existing barriers via real-time transfer of information to support products, markets and consumer demands by infusing the state of the-art ICT tools would be crucial.
- **Value adding processing** - Value addition to agricultural produce by primary processing (cleaning, grading, packing whole or packing ready to cook normal or freeze-dried cuts) is known to cause an additional surge in income and employment.
- **Policy intervention and institutionalization** - Comprehensive backing of public policymaking bodies NITI Aayog and Ministry of Agriculture in that the core concerns of youth are addressed effectively.

    - **For example** - *"Sun-rise agriculture enterprise"* is a potent strategy to attract and sustain the youth in agriculture and to generate new jobs.

What are the measures taken in India?

- **Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centres Scheme –** Government introduce in April 2002 focuses on training and subsidy.
    - National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management, provides training to agricultural graduates to help them establish business units under agricultural allied activities.
    - Trained candidates establishing agri-ventures availing credit facilities are extended with subsidy depending on certain factors.
- **Skill Training of Rural Youth (STRY) –** It provide rural youth with skill-based training in agricultural and related fields to increase rural employment for both farm and non-farm tasks.
    - The training to rural youths shall be imparted through any identified training institutions at state / district level.
- **Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM) -**Government releases funds for farm mechanization like establishment of custom hiring centers, farm machinery bank and high-tech hubs to different states.
- **Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY-RAFTAAR) –** Remunerative Approaches for Agriculture and Allied Sectors Rejuvenation.
- It is aimed at strengthening *infrastructure in agriculture and allied sectors* by building agripreneurship & agri-business ecosystem in the country.
- **Certified Farm Advisor/Certified Livestock Advisor programme –** It is develop agricultural extension personnel into specialists in a particular crop / livestock.
- **Skill Development Programmes –** It involve providing employable skills to the youth through short term and long-term program on pan India basis both in rural and urban areas.
- **Project ARYA (Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture) –** It's goal is to engage and empower rural youth in various agricultural and related economic activities.

What are the benefits of youth inclusion?

- **Innovation and climate adaptation** – Young people bring energy, creativity, and a willingness to experiment with new technologies and act better in climate adaptation.
- **Economic potential** – Many rural youths reside in areas with high agricultural productivity potential, presenting significant investment opportunities in market access and infrastructure.
- **Prevent labor shortages** – Youth inclusion is essential to replace retiring farmers and prevent labor shortages, especially in adapting to climate.
- **Flexible in technology adaption** – Young people generally more adapt with digital tools and technologies, which are critical in modern agriculture.
    - **For example**, adaption of digital apps, weather alert systems etc.
- **Resilience and Social Networks** – Youth social networking abilities help disseminate information quickly and mobilize communities for collective action.

What lies ahead?

- Youth engagement in agrifood systems can be possible with continued investment in data and research to inform youth-targeted policies.
- Expanding digital access and literacy will keep youth connected to technologies and further help for agrifood transformation.
- Flexible career switch mechanisms can be developed, to retain youth in agrifood systems.

References

1. The Hindu| Role of Youth in Agrifood Systems
2. EPW| Encouraging Youth In Agriculture

