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Analyzing Youth Participation in Backyard Farming in Dzwerani Village, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

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Youth participation in agriculture is recognized as a pathway to employment, food security, and economic empowerment. This study examined the socio-economic characteristics of youth involved in backyard farming, as well as the challenges and opportunities influencing their participation in Dzwerani Village, South Africa. A quantitative survey was conducted among youth participants engaged in backyard farming. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic characteristics, farming activities, income sources, challenges, and perceived opportunities. The findings showed that most participants were between 21 and 35 years of age, with male youth dominating participation. Most of the participants had completed their secondary and tertiary education. Livestock production was the most common agricultural activity, and most participants farmed for both income generation and household consumption. The study identified the following challenges: lack of access to land, limited inputs, and financial constraints. On the other hand, key opportunities included income generation, food security, job creation, and entrepreneurship. The study highlighted the need for targeted policies and support programs to strengthen youth access to land, resources, and training, thereby enhancing their participation in agriculture.

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Introduction

Youth unemployment and poverty remain serious challenges in many rural areas of South Africa. Agriculture, particularly small-scale and backyard farming, offers potential opportunities for youth to generate income, improve household food security, and develop entrepreneurial skills (Kote et al., 2024). Backyard farming is especially relevant in rural communities where land sizes are small and resources are limited (González-Félix et al., 2021). Despite these opportunities, youth participation in agriculture is often constrained by limited access to land, inputs, credit, and training, as well as negative perceptions of farming as a low-status occupation (Boye et al., 2024). However, an increasing number of young people are engaging in backyard farming as a livelihood strategy and to contribute to household well-being (Rana and Bisht, 2023). According to Geza et al., (2022) Understanding youth farmers' socio-economic characteristics, their farming activities, and the challenges and opportunities they face is essential for developing effective youth-focused agricultural support programs. Therefore, the objective of this study was to examine youth participation in backyard farming in Dzwirani Village, with a specific focus on their socio-economic characteristics, farming practices, challenges, and perceived opportunities.

Materials and Methods

Description of Study Area

The study was conducted in Dzwirani Village, a rural community where backyard farming is practiced as a source of food and income. The area is characterized by limited formal employment opportunities, making small-scale agriculture an important livelihood strategy for many households, including youth.

Study Approach and Sampling Technique

A quantitative research approach was used. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to youth participants engaged in backyard farming. The questionnaire collected information on demographic characteristics, education, employment status, income sources, types of farming activities, farming purposes, challenges, and perceived opportunities. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents provided informed consent.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the data. Results are presented in tables and figures and discussed in relation to relevant literature on youth participation in agriculture.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Youth Participants

Age

The results show that youth participation in backyard farming is highest among those aged 21 to 35 years. Youth aged 21 to 25 years accounted for 32.4% of respondents, while those aged 26 to 30 and 31 to 35 each accounted for 29.4%. Only 8.8% were between 15 and 20 years. This suggests that participation increases with age, especially after school completion. Younger youth may still be in school or lack access to resources such as land and capital. Similar findings by Girdziute et al., (2022) indicate that youth are more likely to engage in agriculture when faced with limited employment opportunities and the need for income.

Gender

Male youth accounted for 70.6% of respondents, while female youth accounted for 29.4%. This imbalance may be linked to cultural norms and unequal access to land and agricultural resources. Gender disparities in access to support services and productive assets often limit women's participation in agriculture in rural areas (Njuki et al., 2023).

Education Level

Most youth were educated: 61.8% had completed secondary education and 38.2% had tertiary education. This suggests that youth engaged in backyard farming have the educational background to adopt improved practices and innovations. Education can play an important role in shaping positive attitudes towards agriculture and improving farm management skills (Maini, De Rosa & Vecchio, 2021 and Zhang, 2025).

Employment Status

Participants in this study had varied employment statuses. About 35.3% were students, 29.4% had formal employment, 23.5% were unemployed and 11.8% were self-employed. Backyard farming therefore serves as a complementary livelihood activity that allows youth to gain experience, generate income and develop skills alongside education or other work (Rana, Bisht, 2023).

Source of Income

Farming was the main source of income for 38.2% of youth, followed by wage employment (26.5%) and remittances from family members (23.5%). A small proportion earned income from non-farming businesses or other sources. This indicates that backyard farming contributes significantly to youth livelihoods and is not limited to subsistence purposes (Neglo, Gebrekidan & Lyu, 2021).

Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	percentage
Age	15-20 Years	3	8,8%
	21-25 Years	11	32,4%
	26-30 Years	10	29,4%
	31-35 Years	10	29,4%
Gender	Male	24	70,6%
	Female	10	29,4%
Education	Secondary	21	61,8%
	Tertiary	13	38,2%
Employment	Unemployed	8	23,5%
	Self-employed	4	11,8%
	Employed (Formal)	10	29,4%
	Student	12	35,3%
Income source	Farming	13	38,2%
	Non-farming business	1	2,9%
	Remittances (family support)	8	23,5%
	Wage/salary employment	9	26,5%
	Other	3	8,8%
Kind of Backyard farming practice	Crops	8	23,5%
	Livestock	18	52,9%
	Both crops & livestock	8	23,5%
Purpose of backyard farming	Household consumption	6	17,6%
	Income generation	10	29,4%
	Both	18	52,9%

Types and Purpose of Backyard Farming

Farming Activities

The majority of the youth (52.9%) were involved in livestock production, while 23.5% focused on crop production only, and another 23.5% engaged in both crop and livestock production. Livestock farming may be preferred because it requires less land and can provide quicker financial returns through the sale of products such as eggs, milk, and meat (Moran, Blair, 2021). Mixed farming systems, although less common, can improve sustainability and diversify income sources (Sennuga et al., 2022).

Purpose of Backyard Farming

A significant number of youth (52.9%) practiced backyard farming for both household consumption and income generation. About 29.4% farmed mainly for income, while 17.6% focused on household food supply. These findings show that youth view backyard farming as both a livelihood strategy and a means of improving household food security. The emphasis on income generation reflects a shift towards viewing agriculture as a business opportunity (Borda, Sárvári & Balogh, 2023).

Challenges Affecting Youth Participation in Backyard Farming

Lack of access to land was the most significant challenge, reported by 32.5% of youth. Limited land availability continues to restrict youth engagement in agriculture. Other important challenges included a lack of farming inputs (11.8%), capital or credit (8.8%), and farming knowledge or skills (8.8%). These constraints limit the scale and productivity of youth farming activities.

Additional challenges included limited water supply, pest and disease outbreaks, low market access, and limited institutional support. These issues reduce the attractiveness and profitability of backyard farming for youth and highlight the need for targeted support in terms of resources and training (Osumba, Recha & Oroma, 2021).

Table 2. Challenges affecting youth participation

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of access to land	11	32,5%
Limited water supply/irrigation	2	5,9%
Lack of farming inputs	4	11,8%
Lack of capital/ credit	3	8,8%
Lack of knowledge of farming or skills	3	8,8%
Limited support from the government or NGO's	2	5,9%
Pest and diseases	2	5,9%
Low market access for produce	2	5,9%
Other	5	14,9%

Opportunities for Youth in Backyard Farming

The participants identified several opportunities linked to backyard farming. Income generation was the most important opportunity (38.2%), followed by food security (23.5%), job creation (14.7%) and skills development (14.7%). A smaller proportion (8.8%) viewed backyard farming as a pathway to entrepreneurship. These results suggest that youth see backyard farming not only as a survival strategy but also as a potential business opportunity. Supporting youth with training and access to resources could help transform backyard farming into sustainable enterprises and contribute to rural development (Maulu et al., 2021).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR BACKYARD FARMING

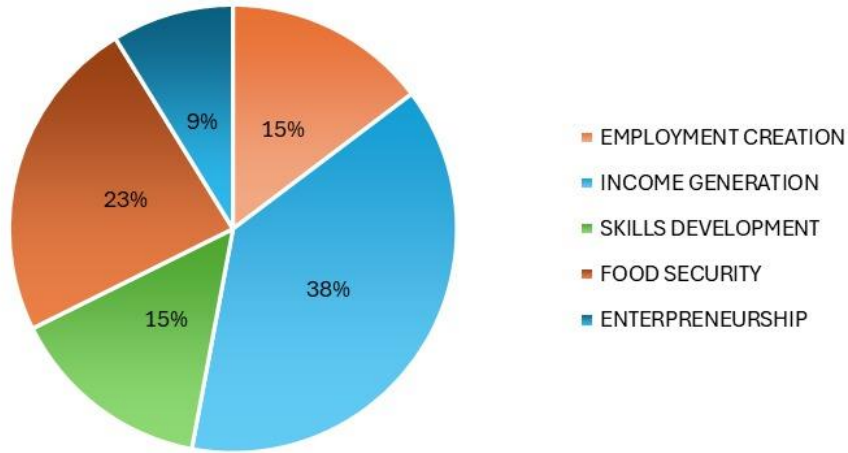


Figure 1. Opportunities youth can explore in Dzwerani village

Conclusion

The study shows that youth participation in backyard farming in Dzwerani Village is driven by the need for income and food security. Participants were mainly educated youth aged 21 to 35, with male youth dominating participation. Livestock farming was the most common activity, and most youth engaged in it for both consumption and income. However, youth face significant challenges, especially limited access to land, inputs, and financial resources. At the same time, they recognize important opportunities in income generation, employment creation, and entrepreneurship. The findings suggest that programs aimed at increasing youth participation in agriculture should focus on improving access to land, finance, and training. Strengthening these areas can enhance backyard farming's role in reducing youth unemployment and improving rural livelihoods.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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