

## **Youth Development Assets: Exploring Environmental and Psychological Factors Influencing Youth Agro-Entrepreneur Development in Kuala Terengganu**

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Agro-entrepreneurship is not solely focused on agriculture but also covers livestock, fisheries, crops, and the food industry. The government has implemented various programmes and initiatives towards agro-entrepreneurship. Youth involvement in this field is still perceived to be of low level; however, youth development assets are yet to be explored. This study will explore youth development assets from environmental and psychological factors that contribute towards youth involvement in agro-entrepreneurship by using a descriptive qualitative research design, and data collection involves semi-structured interviews. Sample selection was done with purposive sampling techniques based on expectations about the young entrepreneurs who could participate in this study. A total of five respondents from the Kuala Terengganu Young Agropreneur Programme were involved in this study. The results from this study show that there are two youth development assets that contribute towards the involvement of young agropreneurs in the field of agro-entrepreneurship, namely internal assets (positive identity, positive values, and commitment to learning) and external assets (support from family, peers, programme implementers, and the influence of entrepreneurial networks). Through the results of this study, it has been found that youth require support from areas such as families and various parties to increase involvement in the field of agro-entrepreneurship. Recommendations for future research are also stated through the writing of this article.

*Keywords:* youth development; developmental assets; agro-entrepreneurship; youth entrepreneur

Agro-entrepreneurship extends beyond traditional agriculture to include sectors such as livestock, fisheries, crop cultivation, and the food industry. (Ministry

of Agriculture and Food Security, 2022). The food industry is among the industries that has a place in the hearts of youths nowadays. This is because it is able to

provide opportunities for the youths to focus more on innovation as well as emphasis on the efficiency of repairing the economic resources (Deineko, 2022). The youth group can pay attention to safety, innovation, and the production of higher-quality food comparable to sophisticated technology (Valera, 2023). The importance of the food industry is that it is one of the main sectors that support economic growth in the country (Pro, 2021). The food industry is the global unification of social, economic, and cultural factors. Besides contributing to the country's economic development, manufacturers have a key strategic role to ensure fair trade among countries, and the future food security is more guaranteed (Lodorfos, 2018). In addition, the food sector is important for providing job opportunities to the local community (Das, 2021).

Unemployment is a severe issue faced by the country, especially youth unemployment. Several factors contribute to the unemployment issue in this country. Among the factors are the lack of skills desired by the organisations, the attitude of choosing jobs, the unstable state of the country's economy, not preparing for interviews, low levels of education, and unrealistic salary demands (Chang & Mansur, 2022). Unemployment can affect the lives of the youths themselves. One of the unemployment effects on youths is the effect on health. Unemployed youths are found to suffer from stress because they have to think about many matters, hence causing their personal health to be neglected. For example, they have headaches, high blood pressure, and heart disease (Fatehah, 2022).

The crime rate might also increase because unemployed youth tend to involve themselves in inappropriate activities to sustain their living needs. To solve this issue, the government has introduced many agro-entrepreneurship programmes, such as the Young Agropreneur Programme, organised by the Ministry of Agriculture

and Food Security of Malaysia, to offer job opportunities for the youth. This programme aims to help the youth delve into agro-entrepreneurship through training, guidance, consultancy service, financial assistance, and technical support. Additionally, emphasis on agro-entrepreneurship is essential because today's youth perceive this field as not receiving much response.

Even though the government has implemented many programmes, some young people are not interested in participating in agro-entrepreneurship. In the agricultural sector, only 15 percent of youths are involved out of 1.4 million youths in the country (Hizar, 2021). This is because of the negative perception of the youth towards agriculture (Abdullah et al. 2012), besides the lack of exposure to agricultural entrepreneurship programmes (William et al., 2004). Moreover, young agro-entrepreneurs have poor access to land and capital to start agricultural projects, making the youth uninterested in this field (Jamaludin, 2011).

However, through these kinds of programmes, some youths can generate employment in various sectors of agro-entrepreneurship. This ability is influenced by multiple factors or youth development assets, such as internal and external assets (Loan, 2018). Both of these assets contribute significantly to youth development and strengthen the youth's ability to face challenges in the future (Desie, 2019). Thus, this research has been conducted to explore the assets of youth development that contribute to the ability to run agro-enterprises among entrepreneurs of the Youth Agropreneur Programme in Kuala Terengganu. Through this research, it is hoped to raise awareness among youth to get involved in agro-entrepreneurship.

## **Literature Review**

Studies related to young agro-entrepreneurs are getting more and more attention from researchers and academicians. Adopting the Positive Youth Development framework (PYD) as guidelines for this research, the researchers refer to PYD as a holistic framework that emphasises the inherent strengths and potential of young individuals, rather than focusing solely on addressing their problems or deficits (Marín-Gutiérrez et al., 2024). This approach has gained significant traction in recent decades, as it seeks to promote affirmative and supportive interventions that nurture the growth and well-being of youth (Abdul Kadir & Rusyda, 2022). The positive youth development perspective challenges the traditional models that have often viewed young people as passive recipients of programmes designed to correct their perceived shortcomings (Abdul Kadir & Mohd, 2021).

Youth development assets are divided into two, namely internal assets and external assets. According to Benson (2007), internal assets refer to positive attributes of an individual, such as skills and competence. Internal assets can be divided into four categories; among them are commitment to learning and positive values that emphasise the principles of equality and justice. Thirdly, social competency includes the skills for young people to create effective interpersonal relationships, plan and make decisions, develop cultural competency, and develop resistance skills, as well as the ability to solve conflicts peacefully. Next, the fourth internal asset is positive identities, which include self-worth, having a clear purpose in life, personal power, and a positive outlook on the future.

According to Benson (2007), external assets represent the positive characteristics of ecological development that young entrepreneurs can receive to interact with various social systems, such as family, school, and community. The first external asset is support, which includes emotional

support, care, and acceptance from the people around them. Next is empowerment. The youth should feel valued and capable of contributing to other people. Thirdly, boundaries and expectations. The fourth asset is a constructive use of time (Benson, 2007). The framework of youth development assets emphasises that strength in relationships is essential for the youth regardless of background, culture, socioeconomic status, and demography (Sungmi, 2016).

Research should be done on the factors of entrepreneurs' success in the agro-entrepreneurship sector by taking both factors into account, which are internal factors and external factors, to develop a comprehensive model of entrepreneurial success among young agropreneurs to ensure this sector successfully attracts the youth entrepreneurs as it needs a more productive younger generation and better return of investments (Johari, 2020). In Malaysia, several policies have been established to encourage characteristics of more organised and holistic entrepreneurs among the local institutions of higher learning. One of the policies is the Entrepreneurship Development Policy, which aims to help the youth develop quality human capital with entrepreneurial thoughts, attributes, and values (Department of Higher Education, 2020).

The agro-entrepreneurship field is a vast field that can help the youth increase their income and knowledge. Among the main factors that influence youth involvement in the agro-entrepreneurship field are environmental and individual factors. Environmental factors, such as networking and support, significantly impact youth participation (Ahmed, 2017). Next, individual factors refer to the individual's background, knowledge, attitudes, and opportunities. Support from both moral and physical aspects proves it can positively impact youth pursuing agro-entrepreneurship. Solid support can foster

confidence and trust in youth towards the desired field, and at the same time, positive values can be applied (Ahmed, 2017).

The importance of understanding the entrepreneurship process is emphasised because it catalyses behaviour that can lead to progress for youth (Ibrahim, 2014). Even when youth merely think and set goals, it is driven by determined entrepreneurial values that already exist within them (Akuhwa et al., 2015). Generally, Malaysia is driven by a service-oriented industry, with agriculture ranked as the third priority for the government's economy (Ibrahim, 2014). Good agricultural practices alongside programmes designed for entrepreneurs can focus specifically on young farmers who are less experienced to gain as much input as possible (Hafidz, 2014). Agro-entrepreneurship programmes can also increase the youth's confidence in making the best decisions to achieve direction and ensure that the planning for becoming an entrepreneur is successful (Musa et al., 2021).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979, 1989) explains that an individual can be seen as mature, not in isolation but within the context of relationships that involve school, neighbourhood, community, peers, and family. This theory suggests that teenagers face different environments throughout their lives, influencing their behaviour at various stages (Ariffin, 2021). According to Kasim et al. (2014), the Young Agropreneur Programme can strengthen social skills, foster high aspirations, and enhance emotional control. Moreover, the program's educational initiatives can contribute to a positive and significant influence on interest in the field of entrepreneurship (Yusuf et al., 2009).

This Young Agropreneur Programme was established for individuals aged 18 to 40. This programme aims to help and encourage the involvement of youth in

agro-entrepreneurship based on all activities along the value chain of the agricultural sector, such as crop production, livestock, fisheries, as well as food and agro-based industry (Young Agriculture Development Authority, 2021). The objective of this programme is to change the perception of young people towards the agricultural sector as a viable industry and increase the income of the young agropreneurs through enhanced production productivity, product quality, the use of technology and innovation, and providing access to competitive markets.

### **Research Methodology**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research method based on its primary purpose: to deeply understand the youth development assets that contribute to the ability to run the agro-enterprises among the entrepreneurs of the Young Agropreneur Programme. One reason the qualitative study is chosen is that the qualitative methods emphasise in-depth concepts and examine something that happens every day (Sarwono, 2006).

According to Trochim (2006), a qualitative study involves inductive reasoning in understanding a situation, whether it is historical or individual experience. This method thoroughly examines every question to understand how people tend to gravitate towards a particular field by implementing related programmes. The data collection for this study is through in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews. For the aspect of sampling, this study uses the purposive sampling method and several strategies to determine the type of purposive sampling (Bailey, 2007). The researcher uses a criterion strategy, which is selecting samples that fit the criteria set based on the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002).

The number of study samples is determined based on the saturation of the data obtained

in this qualitative study. This study involves five participants of the Young Agropreneur Programme in Kuala Terengganu who were selected as respondents. They obtained their consent through several methods, such as the WhatsApp application, before contacting them verbally through phone calls. The researcher ensured the respondents were given clear explanations through the procedure and consent forms that had to be signed before the interview session to prevent any ethical issues throughout the study. The researchers could record the interview sessions using a voice recorder and make personal notes. Following that, the data analysis and interpretation process was carried out manually using Microsoft Word software. Meanwhile, the records and information the programme participants gave through the WhatsApp application serve as solid evidence in the written report.

**Demographic background**

This study involves five respondents, three men and two women, who are young solopreneurs from the Young Agropreneur Programme in Kuala Terengganu. Table 1 summarises the respondents’ demographic information.

To sum up, the income backgrounds of the respondents of this study range from below RM10,000 to RM20,000. All participants are youth aged between 26 and 37. They are also among the youths participating in the Young Agropreneur Programme by the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI).

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Level of education</i>	<i>Place of residence</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Type of business</i>	<i>Monthly sales revenue (RM)</i>	<i>Business Period (Agro entrepreneur )</i>
<i>A</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>PMR</i>	<i>Terengganu</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Fresh coconut milk</i>	<i>20,000</i>	<i>2 years</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>STPM</i>	<i>Terengganu</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>KeropokLe kor</i>	<i>15,000</i>	<i>6 years</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>Diploma</i>	<i>Terengganu</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Pastry and Bakery</i>	<i>4,000-6,000</i>	<i>5 years</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>SPM</i>	<i>Terengganu</i>	<i>Single</i>	<i>Pastry and Donut</i>	<i>20,000</i>	<i>3 years</i>
<i>E</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>SPM</i>	<i>Terengganu</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Pizza</i>	<i>8,000</i>	<i>4 years</i>

*Figure 1: Summary of Respondents’ Demographic Background*

## Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that two youth development assets have contributed to the respondents' ability to engage in agro-entrepreneurship: internal assets consisting of positive identity, positive values, and commitment to learning. On the other hand, external assets consist of support from the family, peers, programme implementers, and the influence of entrepreneurial networks.

### Internal Assets that Contribute to the Ability to Run Agro Enterprises Among Entrepreneurs of the Young Agropreneur Programme

Internal and external assets influence respondents' ability to run agro-enterprises. The internal assets are positive identity, positive values, and commitment to learning, which were found to contribute to respondents' ability to be resilient in the field of agro-entrepreneurship.

#### Positive Identity

A positive identity is among the internal assets identified in youth agro-entrepreneurs under the Young Agropreneur Programme. According to Tsang (2012), positive identity can refer to how a person deals with situations and impediments without thinking negatively. The positive identity emphasised in this study is that all respondents have a clear goal. According to the study of Kasa (2009), entrepreneurial success depends on the youth's perspectives towards entrepreneurial activities. This study contends that the potential to become a successful young entrepreneur is more likely to be self-motivated and have a positive mindset towards entrepreneurial activities.

*"I am planning to produce a carton of coconut milk. After all, currently, I am*

*learning to produce carton coconut milk because there is a plan to open a factory."*  
(Respondent 1)

*"My target shortly is to do a baking class and 'focus on cookies'".*  
(Respondent 3)

*"I intend to open 2 3 more branches so that more people can learn about coal-fired pizza."*  
(Respondent 5)

Based on this study, it can be seen that the main internal asset that influences youth to dive into agro-entrepreneurship is having a clear goal. Entrepreneurs who have a clear goal in the enterprises they run while possessing extensive business knowledge dare to take risks and are capable of making sound decisions in any challenging circumstances (Zafir & Fazilah, 2007). Creative ideas derived from the knowledge possessed by entrepreneurs will affect their business achievement.

#### Positive Values

A positive value, according to Friedrickson's (2001) study, is a value that examines the indicators of an individual's positive thinking. Feelings of joy, interest, and satisfaction in performing a task influence the decision to be made, either positively or negatively. In this study, determination or perseverance has been recognised as an internal asset contributing to youth's ability to run agro-enterprises. The diligent temperament of the entrepreneurs refers to the readiness to undertake any necessary task to gain new knowledge and improve existing skills to further develop the agro-enterprise being run.

*"Preparing the proposal took a year, and MARDI is monitoring it. I sought guidance*

*extensively, revised the work multiple times even though it was wrong, and continued to make corrections until they 'approved'".*

(Respondent 2)

*" I 'keep going and pushing' until I see the results for myself; I 'keep going' to ensure that my efforts are not in vain."*

(Respondent 3)

Meyer et al. (2004) explain the earnestness of entrepreneurs in planning matters that provide maximum benefits to the agro-enterprises they run. They ensure that everything that has been planned will be flawlessly executed without any need for external assistance from surrounding individuals. The entrepreneurs' perseverance has empowered them to bravely confront the challenges and obstacles ahead.

### **Commitment to Learning**

The third internal asset identified is a commitment to learning, and this study reveals that the entrepreneurs of the Young Agropreneur Programme demonstrate a commitment to studying. According to the survey by Hayati (2021), commitment is an inner desire to achieve something, and a committed attitude in the learning process will assist in facilitating the acquisition of new knowledge, enhance thinking skills, and be able to increase achievement. The study of Sull (2003) states that individuals who hold the title of entrepreneur and show commitment to seeking knowledge will acquire advantages such as increasing motivation and performance and understanding of knowledge related to the business being run.

*"Seize the available opportunities. Read much about the grants or programmes MARDI offers so that no information will be overlooked."*

(Respondent 2)

*"We must know what knowledge we lack and what needs to be added to help us. Read a lot so that the knowledge 'keeps updated'."*

(Respondent 3)

Each question posed to the respondents was within the context of the study, namely the internal assets related to the young agro-entrepreneurs. In the context of this study, each respondent understands that commitment to learning is essential to ensure their business continues to grow. Next, Moeller (2011) explains that commitment to learning positively impacts other matters, such as improving quality of life. When individuals know something that they should not do as entrepreneurs, to some extent, it will help increase their chances of advancing their enterprise.

### **External Assets that Contribute to the Ability to Run Agro Enterprises Among Entrepreneurs of the Young Agropreneur Programme**

External assets also contribute to all respondents' ability to run agro enterprises. The support received from family, programme implementers, peers, and the influence of the entrepreneurial network are among the external assets that have been identified.

#### **Support from Family Members**

Support from family is an external asset that has been recognised as a contributor to the success of running an agro-enterprise among the entrepreneurs of the Young Agropreneur Programme. Support also refers to agreement on what other individuals want without rejection or negative comments that can hinder performing something (Dermott, 2020). A study by Thomas (2017) suggests that family support can positively impact individuals experiencing the learning

process, particularly those planning to become an entrepreneur. This indicates that strong encouragement from family members significantly influences individual actions to thrive in agro-enterprises.

*“My family is 100% supportive of my business-related decision.”*

(Respondent 2)

*“The business runs in the family; that is why I am interested in business, too.”*

(Respondent 4)

*“My family helped me a lot, especially my late mother.”*

(Respondent 5)

A positive family relationship can help individuals refer to others who are more mature than them. In addition, according to Thomas (2017), the family that provides adequate mental and physical support to individuals involved in enterprises can drive the entrepreneur to be more persistent in their efforts.

### **Support from Peers**

Positive peers or support from familiar peers are identified as an external asset to the Young Agropreneur Programme's entrepreneur contributors to venture into agro-enterprises. A study by Shahrudin (2018) states that peers are a close and influential group in youth's lives. The influence and encouragement received by the entrepreneurs of the Young Agropreneur Programme have made them capable of running agro-enterprises.

*“My friends joined the programme, and it made me want to join it too, and my friends convey a lot of information regarding the grant under MARDI”.*

(Respondent 3)

*“I get a lot of information from friends; I see a lot of their 'posts', so that is how I started looking for information myself. My friends also always 'support'”.*

(Respondent 5)

This finding is aligned with the result of Suratno's study (2021), which emphasises the role and positive support from peers in shaping an entrepreneur's mind to be more open and accepting of the views of others. Each individual has a different opinion and advice on something, and entrepreneurs' behaviour can also be attributed to seeing individuals who are their friends.

### **Support from Programme Implementers**

Support from the programme implementers plays an important role for respondents, as the encouragement and advice given to the respondents contribute to the ability to run agro-enterprises among the entrepreneurs of the Young Agropreneur Programme. The study by Albers (2020) states that support from the programme means that professionals support and approve of conducting activities and providing documents based on solid evidence that is related. The Young Agropreneur Programme is one of the programmes seen as capable of developing successful agro-entrepreneurs from time to time due to frequent monitoring by the programme implementer.

*“The programme implementer always monitors us, and the paperwork preparation gets easier as there are people who reprimand me for what is right and wrong.”*

(Respondent 1)

*“As for me, I think the higher-ups are the best. They provide many programmes that can help entrepreneurs like me.”*



(Respondent 2)

*“Because many people do not know that this programme will indeed ‘guide’ them from the beginning to the end. For instance, we are involved in the first month; for the next month, they will always monitor and ‘guide’ which ones are okay. Many provide courses for entrepreneurs for free. They monitored us for two years”.*

(Respondent 4)

Based on the statement above, the support from the programme does contribute to the ability of the Young Agropreneur Programme entrepreneurs to run agro-enterprises. The advice and guidance provided by the programme help entrepreneurs identify strengths and weaknesses that need to be improved.

### **Influence of the Entrepreneurial Network**

The influence of entrepreneurial networks is a youth development asset recognised to contribute to the ability to run agro-enterprises among the entrepreneurs of the Young Agropreneur Programme. A study by Lean (2019) explains that network influence is a process of fostering, building, and increasing the ability and effectiveness of individuals to achieve their goals. Network influence can also be seen as the potential for individuals to get to know others in the same or different fields (Chen, 2018).

*“I explore and socialise a lot. The connection has to be ‘strong’ to maintain business”.*

(Respondent 3)

*“At the programme, there is surely a chance to meet great people; my ‘networking’ is growing”.*

(Respondent 5)

The influence of an excellent entrepreneurial network can help new entrepreneurs to involve themselves in the field of business. Sharing knowledge and the appropriate methods to be used in business can make individuals more respected and recognised for sharing their business knowledge (Torlak, 2021). This can also increase acquaintances in the same field. The external asset, which is the influence of the entrepreneurial networks, helps entrepreneurs of the Young Agropreneur Programme to recognise more experienced individuals and contributes to the ability to run agro-enterprises.

### **Study Implications**

The study's implication on the theory used in this study is that it can identify the youth development assets that become an advantage in running agro-enterprises so that all respondents can achieve a level of competitiveness that can help develop potential within themselves. The entrepreneurial attitude in oneself and the agro enterprises run can also reach the desired level of progress. Individuals and groups involved in providing support to the entrepreneurs under the Young Agropreneur Programme play an essential role in ensuring that all respondents maintain the ability to run agro-enterprises. The government may augment the existing programmes related to agro-entrepreneurship further to encourage youth involvement in agro-enterprises. Families also need to give their children exposure to agriculture from an early age. This is because interest can be nurtured early, and families also have a significant potential to notice their children's tendencies in agro-entrepreneurship.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the data obtained from the five respondents show that internal assets (positive identity, positive values, and

commitment to learning) and external assets (support from family members, peers, programme implementers, and the influence of entrepreneurial networks) are youth development assets that contribute to the ability to run agro-enterprises among the entrepreneurs of the Young Agropreneur Programme. The presence of internal and external assets is crucial to maintaining the entrepreneur's ability to remain resilient in agro-entrepreneurship. However, this study has unavoidable limitations. Among the limitations is that it only focuses on the entrepreneurs of the Young Agropreneur Programme in Kuala Terengganu. In addition, the participants' documents and paperwork could not be viewed in detail due to the issue of confidentiality. Therefore, the suggestions to ensure better research can be conducted in the future are that the researchers can broaden the scope of research to encompass youth beyond the Kuala Terengganu area and not be limited to the Young Agropreneur Programme alone but also investigate various other agro-entrepreneurship programmes. The other youth development assets can also be emphasised through future studies in a more extensive and precise manner.

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