

by Agnieszka Kazimierczuk

I would like to bring two points into your question today: one – should we promote private sector large-scale agriculture activities in Africa (like the flower sector or big ranches) as they provide large scale employment opportunities for unskilled youth and women; and secondly – do we need to change our way of thinking about employment in Africa as not as straightforward a concept as employment in Europe.

I think we cannot assume that every single person in Africa is an entrepreneur – it is not true. These people should be considered more as survivors. And there are many out there – particularly among unskilled youth – that appreciate very much a steady and secure source of income provided by a waged employment every month. If you really think about it - it is the same here in Europe but what makes Africa different is that often the same person who works in formal employment also engages in a few other income generating activities. I want to share with you two examples from my field study I conducted in the sector of flowers and energy in Kenya earlier this year in the frame of my PhD research as part of the Inclusive Development Knowledge Platform (INCLUDE).

The **Flower sector** in Kenya provides 90,000 direct jobs (mostly for the youth and women) and employs indirectly 500,000 in the value chain and services. Through backward linkages, the floriculture industry has an impact on over 2 million livelihoods (or 5% of the Kenyan population). From the interviews with some workers and employers in the sector, it became quite clear that people value most the security of the job and the fact that it brings them salary every month. We can of course debate whether this salary should be higher or the working conditions better but the fact remains: many young people do not want to take risks and prefer a more secure solution, especially in the situation when access to land and credit is problematic as it is for many of them.

While conducting the research in the **energy sector**, I spent some time in the north of Kenya which is a very dry and insecure region of the country. Agriculture in this place is very limited as most of the local populations are nomads and herders. Livestock is their food, savings account and security. There is a very big renewable energy project on-going in this area that led to an increase in wage employment possibilities in the construction phase of the project. With money being injected in the economy, many people started to invest in local businesses, and education, and they bought many new animals and supported the unemployed members of their communities. The market for livestock is flourishing and a new road that came with the energy project opened up the area significantly. Even people from other parts of Kenya are coming to the area now to buy animals. Yet, most of my respondents still asked for more wage employment possibilities.

Should we then just accept that in the process of development, we cannot leapfrog all of the stages and perhaps a solution to improved and more professional farming and livestock keeping in the future is to support the large-scale farming and large-scale infrastructure project in remote and so far “non-productive” areas today? We need to appreciate the fact that especially these large-scale agriculture producers (like flower farms or big ranches) provide large scale employment opportunities for largely unskilled youth and women. While working there, they observe and learn on-the-job about new farming techniques, which also lead to transfer of skills. But time and resources (like money and land) are needed to learn from such places how to engage in professional agriculture to further apply similar techniques on their own fields, as they (or their relatives) usually own a small plot somewhere in Kenya.

What also really stroke me when I was in Kenya and when I was engaged with either the flower sector employees and employers or the population in the north of the country is the fact that most of them do not rely on only one source of income. A typical Kenyan does not have just one job – he or she would have a salaried job (if lucky enough), then his/her own business – consultancy (if educated and connected) or a little shop or another activity mostly in the informal sector; and then a small plot of land and animals that can be consumed or sold. That doesn't mean though that everyone is an entrepreneur – these people are survivors and they learnt very well how to cope and diversify. What is more important for us to understand is that providing a job to someone in Africa means that you provide 10 and even up to 20 additional people with a livelihood as the employed person supports his/her extended family and community members to a much larger extent than we do here in Europe. That means that we need to change our way of thinking about the employment in Africa as not a simple and straightforward process and think more how to provide more secure jobs with regular incomes. So my question to you today is: would private sector large-scale agricultural and energy activities in Africa be the solution for agricultural/rural transformation and inclusion of youth for the time-being?