

## The Story of Boaz in the Book of Ruth: A Veritable Tool for Arousing the Interest of African Youths in Agricultural Farming

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### ABSTRACT

In a continent where more than half of the world's arable farm land is located and more than half of its citizens are able bodied with their ages ranging between 15 – 25 years, there is unemployment crises. Research findings show that this continent – Africa, is home to youths who disdain agricultural practice. Furthermore, it is reported that those in governance rarely make and implement favourable policies for the youth. Infrastructural facilities are not provided adequately, especially in rural areas where most of the youth live. While it is expedient to use quality Bible characters (one of whom was Boaz), who were wealthy farmers of high repute to arouse the interest of Africa's youth in getting involved agricultural farming, it is incumbent on African governments, multi-national firms and big private businesses to synergize and provide comfortable resource platforms for the youth in Africa to get involved in agricultural farming business. This work uses Boaz as a typical role model to show African youths that farming is not dirty, tedious, nor tended toward poverty. Rather it makes one to be materially wealthy, physically and mentally healthy, as well as naturally appreciative of God who gives people the power to make wealth.

**Keywords:** Gleaning, Arouse, Unemployment, Philanthropy, Arable land, Entrepreneurship, Wealth, Population, Agriculture, Hard-work.

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### 1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

An African adage states that "one cannot be inside a river and his eyes will be penetrated by soap". This seeks to explain the fact that water which is what in its abundance constitutes a river, easily washes off soap, thereby deterring its chemical components from penetrating the eyes and causing pain to the one bathing in it. In spite of this fact, it is common to see little children who while bathing in river banks, cry for help due to pain caused by soap chemicals that have penetrated their eyes. Usually these children are succored by the actions of adults who splash water upon their face and wash off the soap. When God created man, He bequeathed to him the work of tending the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15). After the fall, man was told that he will eat out of his sweat resulting from toiling in tilling the ground. Man has continuously depended on food cultivated on the soil for survival. The rise of industries that manufacture several different products which has also led to the development of various markets and business firms has created job opportunities that vary in type and scope around the world. In many countries of Europe, North America and Asia, industrialization has developed to vast areas of societal endeavor. Several people in those countries therefore work in industries at various levels and in various capacities. However, in Africa, there is little or no industrial growth. But there is abundance of arable farm land.

#### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

When the African communities were focused on their agricultural activities of farming various crops and livestock that suited their environment, everyone was busy and engaged in production, supply and consumption. There was no term as unemployment among the people. The opening up of the continent to other parts of the world through the globalization effects of education, religion and technology, has aroused both positive and negative tendencies in the outlook of her people, especially the young ones. One major negative tendency that young Africans have imbibed is the disregard of agricultural practice as an honorable means of employment and livelihood (Bafana, 2014, paragraph 1).

This is why today reports have it that Africa which “has 65 percent of the world’s uncultivated arable land” (Bacchi, 2017, paragraph10), struggles to import food with her limited foreign reserves and houses about 30 percent of the 795 million people the world over, who lack enough food to eat. The following intimations from Losch call for urgent action:

In relative terms, the youth employment challenge affects every region ..., Africa is the region of the world where this challenge is - and will increasingly be - a deep concern: 60% of the world labour force growth between 2010 and 2050 will be in Africa; 60% of the African population today are under 25; African youth weights 35% of the economically active population; and in the only next 15 years, nearly 400 million youth will enter the labour market of the continent (2014, paragraph 2).

## 2. OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER

This paper aims at spurring African government policy makers to strategize on how to engage African youths in meaningful employment which must have great focus on agricultural practice and experts of religion to seek ways of arousing the interest of the youth in Africa in this direction as well.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

Adopting the qualitative method of research, this paper uses the story of Boaz that is found in the Bible book of Ruth to work up the Psyche of African youths who are unemployed and thus endear agricultural practice as an honourable employment option for them.

## 4. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION

### 4.1 Africa and the Problem of Unemployment

Improved ante-natal and post-natal health care has helped to reduce death rate and improve birth rate in Africa in recent decades. This factor has helped Africa to reap what Losch calls “demographic dividend” (2014, paragraph 7) to the point where it is estimated that by 2050, about 1.2 billion people would have been added to the population of Africa to bring it to a total of 2.1 billion people which will then constitute 25% of the world population (Losch, 2014, paragraph 6). This increase which is a blessing to Africa in terms of abundant human resources and productive personnel has not been matched with proper structural and infrastructural planning by policy formulators and implementers (Godwin, 2014, paragraphs 2, 5, 6).

Balogun laments that of the 10 million graduates that are turned out every year from Africa’s 668 Universities, only about half are able to get jobs. Even, those who are picked for employment are found not to be very competent. What happens, Balogun continues, is that they at Coca-cola pick these people and retrain them to suit the jobs offered them (2017, p.1). Expatriating further on the unemployment situation in Africa, the International Labor Organization (ILO) reports that there is a mixture of “high levels of unemployment, vulnerable employment and working poverty with little signs of potential recovery in 2017” (World ... Outlook, 2016, paragraph 1). Contributing to this dangerous situation, Frost and Sawa put the number of young Africans that enter the employment market annually at 11 million and aver that Africa has “a double employment crisis” (2017, paragraph 1). The situation of things with the youth in Africa is best captured by this submission which states:

Based upon internal documents of the African Development Bank, youth attempt to migrate from Africa ...for several reasons. They flee the turmoil of civil wars fomented by extremists and those fighting for resource control. They seek to escape political, economic and social repression resulting in endemic joblessness, poverty, and lack of opportunities to earn a decent living. Too much of their country’s economic growth is captured by the top of the society, while the majority of the population endure low and stagnating incomes as well as declining purchasing power. Despondency pushes too many youth into hopelessness, rebelliousness, lawlessness, prostitution, substance abuse and joining fanatical causes (Sanginga, 2015, p.1).

Sanginga (2015) in his submissions found in the background paper’s executive summary of presentations at the “Youth in Agribusiness” forum held in Dakar, Senegal, corroborates the high number of African youth being poured out into the labor market annually. He puts the figure at 10 – 12 million each year and affirms that many of these young people search for work without success. Given these submissions, it is certain that there is a great problem of unemployment of young people in Africa.

Every sector of the African managerial groupings needs to seek ways of reducing this problem to the barest minimum. It requires a holistic solution to be nipped in the bud. Economists, Politicians, Agriculturists, Religionists, Educationists, Philosophers, Technologists, Lawyers and indeed every other professional group should get involved in working out plans to drastically reduce unemployment in Africa. From the biblical point of view, one of the fascinating agricultural personalities whose story could be of immense help in arousing young able people's interest in agricultural practice is Boaz whose account is recorded in the book of Ruth.

#### 4.2 Boaz and His Occupation

The name of Boaz is brought into focus under a situation of succor for the needy. To elicit confidence in his ability to meet the requirements for the solution of the adversity at stake in the story, he is introduced as a "mighty man of wealth" (Ruth 2:16 KJV). Two widows; one old and the other young, the old widow by name Naomi being the mother-in-law of the young widow Ruth; had returned from another country to the home of Naomi in Israel called Bethlehem. They were lacking food and something had to be done to fetch food for their survival. It happened that there was a custom in Israel which required harvesters of farm produce to leave some yields in the process of harvesting in their farm. This was to create an avenue for the poor and strangers who lacked food to go and glean those leftovers for food. Ruth, the young widow, obtained the approval of her mother-in-law Naomi to go gleaning, since the time of their arrival was during barley harvest (Ruth 1:22).

It was in pursuance of this act of gleaning by Ruth that the name of Boaz came up the second time in this story and this time he is identified as a farm owner (Ruth 2:3). The story further reveals that Boaz had people who worked for him in his farm. This shows that he carried out farming as a business. Notwithstanding the fact that he had workers under his employment in the farm, he joined in the farming activities himself. This could be buttressed by the following statement: "And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshing floor" (Ruth 3:2). The whole account of the story portrays Boaz as a wealthy man who got his riches through agricultural farming (Boaz's Profile, online). People are hungry today, may be due to their neglect of agricultural farming or lack of proper planning that issues from the controllers of the economies of Africa. The leaders and the led of Africa need to affirm Guthrie's summation that the occupation that Boaz engaged in remains very important for employment purposes (Boaz the farmer, online). By choosing to be a farmer, Boaz engaged in an occupation which is the earliest and oldest known to man. It afforded him the ability to be an employer and a philanthropist. Rather than debase his personality, his occupation as a farmer availed him the privilege of becoming an ancestor of David the most popular king of Israel and subsequently an ancestor of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the man whose life and times changed the historical dating of events in the world.

#### 5. USING THE STORY OF BOAZ TO AROUSE THE INTEREST OF AFRICAN YOUTH IN AGRICULTURAL FARMING

Boaz was a model farmer. His story radiates much of a personality that the African youth should desire to become. These personality traits and achievements include kindness, hard-work, wealth, philanthropy, sincerity, entrepreneurship and Godliness.

- 1. Kindness.** In dealing with those who worked for him and with him as a farmer, Boaz exhibited kindness. When he came to see how his workers were faring, he greeted them first and in the name of the Lord (Ruth 2:4). The African youth who engages in farming should learn to be kind to his coworkers as Boaz was, and as time progresses when he becomes an employer of labour he should show kindness to his workers/employees.
- 2. Hard-work.** It was hard-work on the part of Boaz that made him to possess a farm so large that it is described in the Bible as a field (Ruth 2:3). His coming at the heat of the sun to oversee what his workers were doing as well as his engagement in the act of winnowing the grains at the threshing-floor prove Boaz to have been a hardworking farmer. Practical farm work is part of physical exercise. This act does not only bequeath material wealth, it also accords the practitioner, physical and mental health. Young Africans would like to possess material, physical and mental wealth and health respectively.
- 3. Wealth.** Boaz was not only introduced as a wealthy man, but as "a mighty man of wealth". In order words he was a big time farmer with riches. With the opportunities that abound in Africa for a variety of agricultural farming, the youth who diligently engage in farming will equally become rich and big time agricultural business people. Specializing in growing a selected type of crop or engaging in a particular poultry or fish farming business will surely plummet the young practitioner of agriculture to the top of wealth in due course.

**4. Philanthropy.** Apart from charging his workers to leave extra grains than they ordinarily would have done, to enable Ruth glean a handsome quantity, he availed her of the privilege to dine with his workers at meal time in the field (Ruth 2:14-17). This benevolent spirit of Boaz should be replicated by young farmers in Africa who as they learn and practice farming as a Profession realize that God is the owner of all things that man possesses. The joy of being a giver to the needy rather than an unemployed beggar will create peace of mind and enhance spiritual growth and good neighborliness.

**5. Sincerity.** The epitome of Boaz's sincerity is revealed in his words and subsequent action in response to the request of Ruth that he should perform the customary act of a near kinsman and thereby marry her to raise children for Elimelech's family. He asked Ruth to exercise patience while he gives the nearer kinsman the privilege to respond to her request. He promised to take up the responsibility should the nearer kinsman renege in this customary duty (Ruth 3:6-13; 4:1-13). When the nearer kinsman refused to meet the demands of Ruth, Boaz took up the responsibility. He told Ruth the truth from the onset and did not rush to displace him whose duty it was to perform the custom of raising children in the late man's name. Though such customs are no more trending, the principle of Boaz's conduct, which is sincerity, is still very much required today. When the African youth imbibes sincerity as part of life's principles, the labours of his hand will be blessed. Thus there will be abundance to reap as harvest in the farm and other businesses.

**6. Entrepreneurship.** Boaz must have been an optimistic investor. This could be seen in his maintenance of workers who assisted him to cultivate large farm lands. His ability in entrepreneurship informed his willingness and subsequent marriage to Ruth. The nearer kinsman expressed fear of the unknown as part of his reasons not to marry Ruth (Ruth 4:6). He feared about marring his inheritance, but Boaz did not. Ultimately it was the decision of Boaz that preserved the inheritance of Israel. African youth would have to emulate this trait of character exhibited by Boaz by venturing into agriculture even when others think it is not profitable. With optimism they should invest their time, energy and talent in agricultural farming and trust in what God the farmer's ultimate motivator can do.

**7. Godliness.** The overriding characteristic exhibited by Boaz was godliness. His treatment of his employees and later Ruth and Naomi show that he feared God. He made his workers feel comfortable by greeting them in the name of God each time he came to see what they were doing in the farm as evinced in Ruth 2:4 where he greeted his workers "the Lord be with you." They in turn answered him, "The Lord bless thee". And indeed God did bless Boaz, for he is reckoned in the lineage of the Saviour of mankind. When the African youth is encouraged to lean on God and learn of Him in the practice of his agricultural farming, the outcome will be bumper harvest and favourable market for the produce.

## 6. CUTTING THE COAT ACCORDING TO THE CLOTH

For the unemployment menace to subside in Africa, there is need for the youth to realize that one must cut one's coat according to the cloth one has. The continent of Africa is blessed with a vast cultivatable expanse of land. The population is extremely young with over half of the people aged less than 25 years (Jumia, 2017, online). Rather than remaining idle and being a ready tool in the hands of mischief makers, resorting to the available job options is a better decision that young people in Africa should make. These options abound in agricultural practice. This fact is affirmed by the Ghanaian Chronicle report which asserts that agricultural practice both in production and supply remains the field that can contain the massive surge of youth in need of work (2017, online, paragraph 3). Just as it was outlined in the preceding section, there is need for a mindset change among the youth in Africa. Sanginga pictures the African youth mindset rightly when he submits that:

The importance of mindset change by educated rural youth must be understood within the context of their aspirations and frustrations. These youth were the best of their class throughout schooling and praised for their cleverness and potential. Their families sacrificed to pay for their education and they were often the first in their families and communities to earn a university degree. After graduation, their attempts to secure white collar employment failed, forcing them to accept menial employment or return to their family farms. On the farms they work in the garden every morning for a few hours and then socialize at local market centers in resigned idleness. Past praise and potential are replaced by humiliation and situational depression. The first step in mindset change is to position youth to convince one another that they have merely suffered a temporary setback and their brighter future rests in acquiring the skills and teamwork needed for successful agribusiness (2015), p.7).

The story of Boaz reveals the possibility of the African youth who takes to agriculture becoming rich. Adesina is cited by Bacchi (2017, paragraph19) as stating that he is convinced that agricultural practitioners constitute Africa's future billionaires. The fact that people in Europe, North America and Asia are practicing agriculture with success suggests that such could be replicated in Africa. It is said that "where there's a will, there's always a way." In this vein, it behooves African policy formulators and their implementers to fashion out ways and means by which massive youth engagement in agricultural farming will be implemented. To attract people to agricultural practice, drivers of the African economy have to provide proper infrastructure in the rural communities. Land allocation policies need to be clearly outlined. Financial assistance to these young farmers should come both from the governments, the multi-national investors and the big private businesses. Where necessary, the idea of loans should be discarded, if the youth are to accept to begin on a low scale to test-run their ideas in the agriculture venture. Scaring away the youth with loans and their accompanying interests and subsequently spending huge sums of money to tackle youth restiveness is like "penny wise, pound foolish." The youth should be engaged severally in respect to which area of farming suits their area of operation. Different crops, seedlings, fruits, livestock, birds, and fishes, could be allotted different groups. As they begin in a small-scale and prove capable, their allocation of operational factors of production could be increased. At this point, interest attracting loans, could be given the farmers. Experts in agricultural science should be engaged to work with these new entrants to supervise and oversee their operations. Medium and low-scale agricultural mechanical equipments should be provided for the youth to enable them feel the difference between the type of farming practiced by their parents in time past and the modern method of farming. Finally and most importantly, the youth should be taught to believe in and depend daily on the one who created the universe and has the power to control the affairs of mankind. He, it is, that gives people the power to make wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18).

## 7. CONCLUSION

There is never a problem that can befall man that has no solution. Before God created man, He had prepared a suitable environment for him. What brings in difficulties for man in his livelihood is self-will which severally contradicts God's will. Right from the onset, man's occupation has been farming. However, in these periods of inventions and innovations, many young people in Africa feel that farming is dirty, tedious and tends to poverty. The outcome of this feeling as well as the attitude of the youth toward farming is redundancy tagged unemployment. Ironically, in Africa where millions of youth are idle, situates over half of the world's arable land, and it lies fallow or is being sparingly cultivated. This situation brings to the fore the parable that "in the abundance of water the fool is thirsty" which the Late Robert Nester Marley (aka Bob Marley) infused in the lyrics of his reggae track captioned "war" (Babylon by Bus).

African youth who are wise should be guided to following the original plan of the creator which incidentally suits the continent's natural endowments. Agricultural practice gives one ready food. It avails its practitioners opportunities for physical and mental health, material wealth, and appreciation of nature. Through agricultural practice African youth will cease to be unemployed. They will instead become employers of labour. Governments, multi-national and big private businesses in Africa should plan together to provide enabling laws, allocate farmlands, provide take-off funds without interest and supply needed machinery, crops, seedlings, fruit-seeds, live-stock, birds and fishes for the teeming youth who will accept to join the agricultural regeneration pursuits of the continent. When these things are properly done, like Boaz in the book of Ruth, African youths will become mighty people of wealth.

## 8. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

Owing to the various submissions of experts whose ideas and views were reviewed in the course of writing this paper, the following recommendations are herein presented as the contribution of this paper toward reducing unemployment in Africa:

1. African governments should draft and implement policies that will lead to increased infrastructural provisions (such as electricity and water supply, good motor able roads, internet link facilities, and recreational facilities) in the rural communities.
2. Governments, multi-national firms and big private businesses operating in Africa should synergize and set up bodies that will sincerely and honestly receive funds from them and disburse same as free agricultural investment encouragement grants to young Africans who are willing to engage in agricultural farming.
3. Religious organizations should step up efforts aimed at designing and inculcating ideas of farming models prominent in the annals of their various historical backgrounds. For Christians, other examples besides Boaz who was used in this paper include Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Amos, to mention but these.
4. Medium and small scale agricultural machinery should be provided at subsidized prices to young emerging farmers in Africa.
5. Land, seedlings, live-stock, poultry birds and nursery fishes should be made available to new youth farmers as part of their take-off factors of production.

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