

Engaging youth in food systems

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1. Aim of this exploration

Youth in developing countries play an important role in facing the challenges on access, availability and use of food worldwide with more population growth, urbanization, globalization and climate change ahead. Globally, young people account for approximately 24% of the working poor, particularly in Africa. This exploration is an inventory of the ambitions of key international organizations to engage with youth in food systems. This exploration is in response to a growing interest of engaging youth in a food security-agriculture-employment interconnection. It is also a quest as the first overview of activities going on and knowledge questions that are present in the Netherlands and abroad with focus on developing countries. This is reflected in the work of [FAO on rural youth and employment](#) and [CGIARs commitment to improving the enabling environment of youth](#) in agri-food systems as a priority of their future work. Key events include CGIARs workshop on youth in agriculture in Montpellier as organized by [IITA](#), [The African Development Bank](#) and the [CGIAR Consortium](#) and a [recent seminar on the future of food](#) (organized by KIT, YPARD, AgriProFocus and CDI).

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This exploration outlines the first findings of key themes and examples of involvement of international and Dutch organizations on engaging youth in agriculture. It is based on desk research and personal contact of the Food and Business Knowledge Platform (F&BKP) Office via telephone and email. The organizations that are interested are also presented per subtheme in a first version of a [mindmap](#). This is not a static finished document; there are many other interesting organizations to include, so please feel free to contact the F&BKP for suggestions. The same goes for this paper; these organizations serve as the first overview guides on current trends and initiatives in the field of youth in agriculture for F&BKP. It serves as a basis for work within the F&BKP Office that will firstly explore the need amongst actors of joint knowledge developing sharing activities within the Platform that could help them achieve their ambitions.

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2. Why engage with youth in agri-food systems?

In developing countries, over 60% of the population is below the age of 25 and this youth population will only continue to rise with the high trend of global population growth.¹ Agriculture remains the dominant source of youth employment (57% of 15 to 19 year olds) and even under the most optimistic scenarios, nonfarm and urban sectors are not expected to be able to absorb more than two-thirds of youth labor market entrants over the next decade.² However, the agricultural sector is marked by informal, vulnerable and low-productive labor. About 90% of rural lands in Sub-Saharan Africa are unmapped and therefore highly vulnerable to land grabbing and expropriation with poor compensation, hence why youth do not find the agri-food sector attractive now or in the future.

Working the land has become highly unpopular. It is associated with hard physical work, low wages, uncertainty and dirtiness. Rural areas lack the facilities that are offered in urban areas. Young people prefer white-collar jobs in the cities and the projections on future urbanization rates illustrate those growing figures. The agricultural sector has to transform and become a more youth-friendly and stimulating environment.

There are opportunities to explore and barriers to be removed. The World Bank stated in their 2014 [report, Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa](#) that: "the future of Africa's young people is at present hostage to the wide gap between rhetorical commitment to the importance of agriculture and actual, effective attention accorded to it by Africa's leaders. Efforts to address are the constraints to land, capital, and skills will have to be redoubled and accelerated, and features to make programmes friendly to the needs of the young introduced."

However, organizations and companies are trying to make agriculture more attractive to youth and remove the obstacles for their involvement. Several themes stand out in the work of actors on engaging youth, which are described below.

¹ UNDESA (2013) *Cross-national comparisons of internal migration: An update on global patterns and trends*. Population Division Technical Paper No. 2013/1. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs; In: Suttie, S. (2015) Youth employment and agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa, INCLUDE. Available at: <http://includeplatform.net/youth-employment-agriculture-sub-saharan-africa/#note-3272-6>. Accessed on 15 March 2016.

² Jayne, T.S., Ferdinand, M., and Traub, LN. (2014) *Africa's evolving food systems: drivers of change and the scope for influencing them*. IIED Working Paper. London: IIED

3. Key themes

For this exploration, the themes used are listed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) in their extensive research on [good practices of initiatives engaging with youth](#), including initiatives engaged by youth themselves. They bring forward six key themes: 1) access to knowledge, information and education; 2) access to land; 3) access to financial services; 4) access to green jobs; 5) access to markets and; 6) engaging in policy dialogue. By exploring the work of the organizations working on this topic, it was concluded that these are the most important reoccurring themes, and therefore they will be used as a guide here.

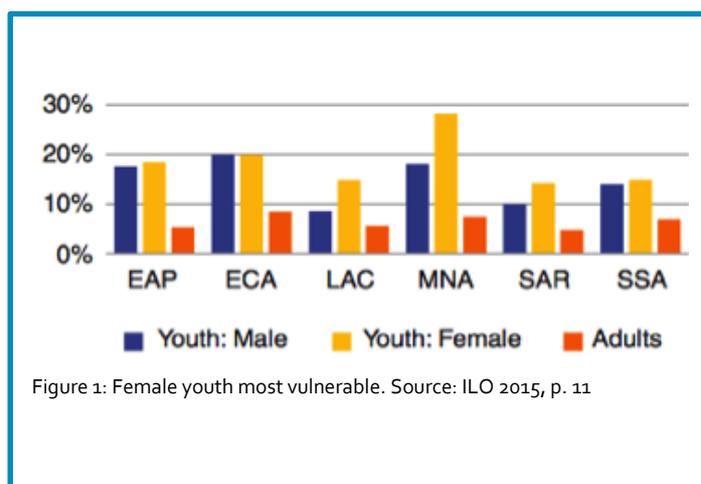
The next section describes the key bottlenecks for youth in agri-food systems and examples of recent initiatives that have been successful. Most of the initiatives could have been placed under several themes, as the goals and ambitions to improve the conditions of youth within the agri-food sector for agricultural development, employment and food security are multiple. For the purpose and organization of this exploration, examples of initiatives are placed under only one of the themes.

a. Access to knowledge, information and education

On a global scale, youth are unemployed up to four times more than adults (see Figure 1).³ Young females are the most vulnerable as the unemployment rates are generally higher for young women. The ILO Figure 1 shows the employment rates across the globe. The difference between men and women is most notable in the Middle East and North Africa (MNA) where unemployment rates are skyrocketing with 27% for young women and 17% for young men.

One of the key issues why young people are struggling is because they lack the required practical skills. FAO and [FANPRAN](#) have done work on how to integrate traditional or intergenerational knowledge and the use of new technologies to develop knowledge, skills and talent of youth to further food security and nutrition.⁴ Case studies that have shown success include peer-to-peer knowledge transfer, vocational training and skills development, and education systems and research. Such initiatives streamline the skills of youth and coach them in reaching their ambitions. ICRA impacts youth indirectly via its training of educators at higher education (universities and TVET) institutions who work with students as well as agricultural extensionists or agribusiness coaches who work with farmers, including more entrepreneurial youths. In partnering up with other organizations such as YPARD, ICRA seeks to work with youth specifically. They have recently partnered up with the [Mastercard Foundation](#) (who has youth livelihoods in Africa as one of their core themes) to start coaching trajectories for agricultural graduates.

Access to information is a key aspect of improving the skills of youth, but also to make the agri-food sector more attractive. Social media and ICT can demonstrate agriculture to young people as a modern, profitable venture and organizations are following this strategy. Several organizations have started promoting agriculture as an interesting way of living. In the event mentioned earlier (organized by KIT, YPARD, CDI and AgriProFocus), [many examples of ICTs were brought to the foreground](#). CTA has had success with sharing information about the farming business



through social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp, which has improved skills of young farmers. Via blogs such as [Yobloco](#) and social media initiatives such as [Makuli MaYoung](#), young people are being taught how to exchange knowledge with others. Through the social enterprise [Hello tractor](#) in Nigeria, low-income farmers can measure the fertility of their soils with a mobile phone.

Thus access to knowledge, information and education can improve the skills of youth along the value chain. It can motivate youth to take the lead in innovation. It also helps to make connections and improve the access of youth, and it can be used by organizations to promote the agricultural sector as a profitable venture and attract youth.

³ ILO (2015) Towards solutions for youth employment: a 2015 baseline report, p.11. Available at:

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_413826.pdf. Accessed on: 15 March 2016.

⁴ Please find an overview of the work of FANPRAN on youth on their website by clicking this link:

<http://www.fanpan.org/projects/youth-in-agriculture/>

b. Access to land

Access to land is a key theme for many of the initiatives mentioned in this exploration and therefore almost a crosscutting theme. A constraint for youth involvement is that agriculture is still dominated by elderly people. Elites and foreign investors own most of the arable farmland. At the community level, elders prevent youth from acquiring sufficient land to start farms and earn a decent living from farming.⁵ Hierarchical structures inside communities form an obstacle to ownership of assets or inclusion in decision-making processes. The [Slow Food Network in South Africa](#) is therefore specifically working with grassroots initiatives for youth in agriculture. By removing these cultural barriers, youth are engaging and starting at the local level by building networks and organizing events themselves.

In Ethiopia, the NGO Relief Society of Tigray (REST) has had great success. Through the project, 360 landless youth have received a total of 90 hectare of land in the Hawezien district. It has empowered the youth as they received a landownership certificate from the village administration to make the land transfer official. The results are multiple and these young people are now receiving income through the sale of their eucalyptus and honey. They produced fodder for animals and shrubs for firewood and fencing. Migration to urban areas has also reportedly decreased since youth found ways to earn a living within their communities, [the FAO, IFAD and CTA report](#).

These initiatives highlight that access to land remains a prerequisite for young farmers to strengthen their position and to generate a higher income. This can have a positive impact on the motivation of young people to not migrate to urban areas. Improving the access to land requires overcoming cultural hierarchies, legislative measures and financial barriers, which are listed in the next session.

c. Access to financial services

In 2012, Dalberg Global Development Advisors estimated that the global smallholder agricultural finance market had a value of 450 billion USD, of which Africa encompassed only 50 billion USD. Half of it is available for short-term credit, half for long-term credit.

Younger adults aged 25 to 34 have a more entrepreneurial mindset and this potential is largely untapped. They display the highest early stage entrepreneurial intention and start-up activity worldwide – 1.6 times more than adults. Though youth (aged 18 to 24) also display robust start-up activity, they lag behind their older peers. The biggest constraint is finding access to credit from financial institutions.⁶ Limited access to formal sector finance, both for investments and for working capital needs, is a greater constraint for youth than for older entrepreneurs as they have less assets and less access to informal finance as found in [an YPARD report](#) on innovative and inclusive finance for youth in agriculture. [The research done by FAO, IFAD and CTA found that](#) in both developed and developing countries, most financial support providers offer few savings and insurance services for youth and focus is more so on credit, despite the fact that savings remain extremely important to youth for building up assets for future investments and insurance. While financial services have become increasingly available to poor farmers, there is still much to be achieved to improve the availability of such services to young people in agricultural and rural enterprises (Dalla Valle, 2012).⁷

YPARD particularly is working on youth financial inclusion to produce and share reliable statistics on youth employment in agriculture and their financial inclusion. [YPARD mentions successful initiatives](#) as Findex, YouthSave23 and YouthStart24 – research activities that have significantly contributed to the current growing knowledge on youth and financial inclusion in Africa. Other newly created platforms such as <http://finclusionlab.org/>, <http://fspmaps.org/> and <http://finclusion.org/> are significantly improving the availability of information related to financial inclusion in Africa and can be adapted to include more specific information for youth and agriculture. The Ugandan digital platform for financial inclusion, [Ensibuuko](#), is an example of a young social enterprise was created out of a CTA AgriHack contest (more on this in section f, engaging in policy dialogue), which has now become a profitable company that creates innovative digital solutions to make financial services easily accessible to unbanked and underserved people.

Another example of successful initiatives is the Friends Help Friends savings group (FHF) which was launched in November 2009 by a small group from the Citizen Action Net for Social Development (CAN) youth team in Cambodia. The group began with ten members (including three women) and a total start-up capital of approximately 200 USD. By July 2013, there were about 91 members, approximately 65% of which from rural areas and owning a total capital stock of 62,539 USD as [reported by FAO, IFAD and CTA](#).

Any initiative that youth undertake requires start-up capital but by having few assets, they are seen in a risky category and therefore have limited access to finance. YPARD is already seeing success: “where African youth

⁵ Balt, M. (2015) Looking for greener pastures: African youth and their future jobs, INCLUDE. Available at: <http://includeplatform.net/looking-for-greener-pastures-african-youth-and-their-future-jobs/>. Accessed on 15 March 2016.

⁶ Based on the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2015.

⁷ Dalla Valle (2012); http://www.ruralfinance.org/fileadmin/templates/rflc/documents/8_Rural_finance_challenges_web.pdf

have had the opportunity, they have found innovative and creative strategies to secure a future for themselves while contributing to the development of the private sector and social stability in their countries.”

d. Access to green jobs

Sustainable farming practices such as organic farming are particularly important in developing countries because they require more labour inputs. They are relatively labour-intensive in comparison to conventional farming and have the potential to generate higher social and economic returns (UNDESA, 2010a).⁸ New skills are required to achieve a green economy and this can be done by reducing the demand for some jobs, increasing the demand of other jobs and “greening existing jobs”.⁹ Some initiatives have started to work in this direction and they are worth mentioning here.

The CGIAR research programme Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE) promotes a youth-inclusive approach to sustainable intensification in which a healthy, functioning ecosystem is seen as a prerequisite to agricultural development, resilience of food systems and humans well-being. They are innovating with climate-smart technologies and business models that generate employment opportunities and promote a youth-inclusive approach.

There has been success with the Advanced Beekeeping Enterprise Development (ABED) training programme in partnership with the Apiary Research Center of Yunnan Agricultural University, as mentioned in [the research by FAO, IFAD and CTA](#). Young farmers in the Tibetan area have been trained to develop honey-making enterprises. As a result of the introduction of new techniques and technologies, 308 local beekeepers have increased the demand for honey, the quality of their product and the yield, which has increased 400%.

Another good example is the work of KIT as part of a Dutch consortium that supports a Sustainable Trade Academy at the business school of the Eduardo Mondlane University (ESNEC) based in Maputo, Mozambique. ESNEC consistently delivers graduates that meet the demands of the labor market, including the growing commercial agricultural sector in Mozambique. The project provides technical support, including the training of management, teachers and students in the principles of action research and the supervision of the value chain research. It also organizes a “writeshop” where research results are discussed and reports finalized. The support to the development of a business incubator center at ESNEC is provided and a number of study tours for ESNEC staff in the region are organized.

These initiatives are combining the goals of youth employment and greening the economy. They are responding to the challenges of climate change and improving the ecosystem, agricultural development and resilience of the food system and the population.

e. Access to markets

The [Africa Agriculture Status Report 2015](#) found that youth participation throughout the value chain is vital to the growth of the agriculture-based economies of most African countries – from agricultural research and development, to food production, storage and handling, to agroprocessing, to marketing and distribution in local, regional and international food markets. [The FAO, IFAD and CTA](#) argue that the current market structures are not favorable for youth.

Most initiatives are exploring the opportunities of improving the participation of youth along the value chain and in business-oriented strategies. A good example in the Niger Delta is the IFAD-supported Community Based Natural Resource Management Programme where they have fostered of a new category of entrepreneur-cum-mentor called the “N-Agripreneur”. These N-Agripreneurs are dynamic university graduates who own and run medium-scale enterprises at different stages of food value chains. Their role is to promote rural-urban linkages by acting as intermediaries between small-scale market-oriented farmers and large-scale agro-industries and wholesalers. The N-Agripreneurs deliver business development services to producers, especially young people, who are interested in agro-based activities such as farming as a business, small-scale processing, input supply and marketing. The result has revealed more interconnected, stable and prosperous communities and local food systems, as well as jobs for the (mostly young) entrepreneurs.¹⁰

Another example worth mentioning is [Connect4Change](#), a consortium of five Dutch development organizations (Akvo, Cordaid, Edukans, ICCO, IICD and Text to Change) who are using ICT to enhance the performance value chain work and the motivation and commitment of youth to improve management and development of their farms.

⁸ UNDESA (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division). 2010. *World youth report: youth and climate change*. New York

⁹ ILO (International Labour Organization). 2009. *Skills for green jobs: A global view*. Geneva (available at http://www.ilo.org/skills/projects/WCMS_115959/lang-en/index.htm)

¹⁰ IFAD (2015) *Entrepreneurship and micro-enterprises for rural youth in West and Central Africa*, [online]. Available at: <http://www.ifad.org/english/youth/regional/wca/bests/enterprises.htm>, [accessed 15 March 2016].

The enhancement has resulted in better and timelier marketing services to members, and higher and more stable prices. It also helped strengthen farmer organizations by: forging unity among members; bringing more producers together to acquire a better position in the value chain and; receiving better information on prices and markets to inform production planning. The attention for using ICTs is growing as its potential is far-reaching in both improving the value chain and in attracting more youth to work alongside it. Some of the organizations involved in this exploration have explicitly expressed their seeking of more knowledge on ways to attract youth by using ICT in its programmes.

Connecting farmers to producers is key and ICTs can help achieve this. [M-farm Kenya](#) for example is a digital service that provides up-to-date market prices through a text message that is sent directly to farmers. It has given the opportunity to connect with buyers and farmers in their community to sell their produce.

Engaging youth along the value chain is important to meet the global demands on food availability. The initiatives illustrate that educating youth on business-oriented strategies and helping them to make connections, also via ICTs, can improve the inclusiveness of markets for youth.

f. Engaging in policy dialogue

The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, which guides the United Nations Youth Agenda, identified “the full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making” as one of their ten priority areas. The agenda recognized that youth participation has an important role in decision-making and policy dialogue.¹¹ This recognition has been integrated into the initiatives of many international organizations, as the initiatives described in this exploration have already highlighted. This partly requires adjusting the political and judicial environment, as well as engaging with youth as leaders. For example, CTA and YPARD train youth in taking action and addressing landscape challenges as a young leader today. Examples of CTA motivating the ambitions and entrepreneurial mindset of youth are the [AgriHack Talent contest](#) and the [Agriculture Film and Video Competition](#).

At a PIM’s seminar (organized by CGIAR and IFPRI), Frank Byamugisha made the recommendation to improve access for youth-to-land by reforming laws to counter customary biases against youth land rights. In Ethiopia, successful interventions have been implemented in land, inheritance, marriage and divorce laws. In Tanzania, Mozambique and Uganda, interventions have been executed to accelerate registration of communal land rights with allocation for youth.

Improving the policy environment is essential in paving the way for women as leaders in agriculture and food systems. Successful examples of that advance particularly the involvement of women, which include the work of CTA with women working in livestock value chains to improve their welfare.

Hivos has had success in encouraging particularly women and girls in the coffee production value chain.¹² The SOPPEXCCA Strategy for youth participation ran a clear and proactive gender policy, and many of the young people who were trained up to university level are women. Some of the young women opened their own coffee bars after they were trained, others became tasters, and one even went to university, studied agriculture and became a farmer.

Changing the policy environment is key for youth involvement in food-systems, particularly for young women. These initiatives show that young people themselves can successfully take on the leadership role and change the policy environment themselves.

4. Knowledge gaps and recommendations for follow-up

To conclude, this exploration has shown that many organizations have started to recognize the important role of youth in the agri-food sector and they have acted upon it with success. However the ambitions of these initiatives as well as the challenges to overcome are many. As this is the beginning of our exploration, F&BKP will further explore how it can facilitate knowledge sharing to advance the work on engaging youth in the agri-food sector. A few preliminary findings on what knowledge questions on engaging youth are listed below. These will be used to guide a follow-up on knowledge sharing activities and discuss best approaches and barriers to overcome.

- There is little data on rural youth in general, or on the motivation of youth to go to urban areas versus to stay in rural areas.
- A better understanding of the constraints for youth to get access to land and finance and in particular for women to participate.

¹¹ UNDESA. 2010b. *World Programme of Action for Youth*. New York

¹² Hivos (2015) *A future in coffee: growing a new generation of coffee professionals*.

- A better understanding of best approaches: focus initiatives on youth employment or the involvement of youth in development programmes?
- Most policies and programmes on youth entrepreneurship are based on the assumption that youth want to be an entrepreneur, or should they diversify their approach?
- A better understanding of what young men and women are already doing to adapt to changing conditions and the innovations they are continuously implementing in agriculture and agri-food enterprises.
- Bridging the disconnect with the private sector from multinational corporations to national companies and local entrepreneurs.
- A better understanding of practical solutions that can improve the performance of companies and organizations on engaging youth.
- Identifying role models and early adopters to inspire youth to follow suit.
- Sharing information on developing more innovative communication systems and means of attracting youth.
- Sharing best practices on improving the opportunities for youth taking up leadership in policy and planning.
- Sharing knowledge on monitoring, evaluation and learning activities to identify unintended negative effects.