

Engaging youth in food systems

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Updated version 08 June 2016

1. Why a growing interest in engaging with youth in agri-food systems?

In developing countries, over 60% of the population is below the age of 25, and this youth population is expected to grow. Most extreme figures are those of Sub-Saharan youth, who are expected to have tripled by 2050.¹ This puts a great stress on agri-food systems and creates big challenges for food security and food nutrition. Put differently, youth in agri-food systems are the future of food security.² This exploration looked at the work that has already been done on engaging with youth in agri-food and the F&BKP is looking to facilitate the synergies between them.

Getting youth in agriculture faces numerous obstacles. To many, it is associated with hard physical work, low wages and uncertainty. 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. Rural areas lack the facilities that are offered in urban areas and young people prefer white-collar jobs. Thus, youth often seek jobs in the cities and see this as upward mobility. The projections on future urbanization rates illustrate those growing figures. Despite this trend, 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.³

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.” An example of one key obstacle is the constraint on having access to financial services from financial institutions.⁴ 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. For youth, the obstacles are highest. Limited access to formal sector finance, both for investments and for working capital needs, is a greater constraint for youth than for the young adults and older entrepreneurs. [Research has found that](#) in both developed and developing countries, most financial support providers offer few savings and insurance services for youth and focus is more on credit. Savings, however, 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.⁵

Youth also offers a large potential for the agri-food sector. Younger adults aged 25 to 34 have a more entrepreneurial mind-set 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. Another important factor mentioned is that within the process of making agri-food systems more youth-friendly, a double win could be achieved when engagement with youth is done in sustainable and climate-smart agri-food practices. Sustainable farming practices such as organic farming have also been mentioned as particularly important in developing countries because they require more

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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 FAO, IFAD and CTA (2014) Youth and agriculture: key challenges and concrete solutions. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3947e.pdf>

³ Jayne, T.S., Ferdinand, M., and Traub, L.N. (2014) *Africa’s evolving food systems: drivers of change and the scope for influencing them*. IIED Working Paper. London: IIED

⁴ Based on the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor ([GEM](#)) 2015.

⁵ Dalla Valle (2012); http://www.ruralfinance.org/fileadmin/templates/rflc/documents/8_Rural_finance_challenges_web.pdf

labour inputs. They are relatively labour-intensive in comparison to conventional farming and have the potential to generate higher social and economic returns.⁶ New skills are required to achieve a green economy and this can be done by reducing the demand for some jobs, while increasing the demand of other jobs and “greening existing jobs” at the same time.⁷ So it is about making the transformation in agribusinesses. When engaging with youth in agri-food systems, opportunities arise along the value chain in rural and urban areas. The projects in this exploration illustrate this.

2. Aim of exploration

This exploration is an initial inventory of the ambitions of key international organizations to engage with youth in food systems. It is a response to a growing interest in engaging youth in a food security-agriculture-employment interconnection. It also provides the first overview of activities and knowledge questions that are present in the Netherlands and abroad with a focus on developing countries. The interest is, for example, 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, France as organized by [IITA](#), [The African Development Bank](#) and the [CGIAR Consortium](#), and in the Netherlands a [recent seminar on the future of food](#) (organized by KIT, YPARD, AgriProFocus and CDI) to name a few.

The exploration is based on desk research and personal contact of the Food and Business Knowledge Platform (F&BKP) Office via telephone and email or in person. Several organizations are also presented per subtheme in the first version of a [mindmap](#). This mindmap is not finished nor static; there are many other interesting organizations to include, so please feel free to contact the F&BKP for additions.

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.

3. Key themes

The next section describes the key bottlenecks for youth in agri-food systems and examples of recent initiatives by organizations 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 agri-food 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

One of the most important themes for organizations to be working on is access to knowledge, information and education to provide opportunities for young people who are struggling due to a lack of practical skills such as vocational training. Such initiatives streamline the skills of youth and coaches them in reaching their ambitions.

FAO and [FANPRAN](#) for example integrate traditional or intergenerational knowledge and the use of new technologies to develop knowledge, skills and talent of youth to further food and nutrition security.⁸ Case studies that have shown success include peer-to-peer knowledge transfer, vocational training and skills development, and education systems and research. SNV has a programme called Youth Employability through Enterprise and Skills Development (YES) that trains youth in Uganda on business and market relevant skills. 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. 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.

⁶ UNDESA (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division). 2010. *World youth report: youth and climate change*. New York

⁷ILO (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)

⁸ Please find an overview of FANPRAN's work on youth here: <http://www.fanpran.org/projects/youth-in-agriculture/>

But access to information is not only a means to improve the skills of youth; it also is to make agri-food systems more attractive. Social media and ICT can demonstrate agriculture to young people as a modern, profitable venture and organizations are following this strategy. In an event 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. Through 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. In the recent [event](#) organized by F&BKP and AgriProFocus, many other initiatives were added. For example, Woord en Daad, AgriProFocus and Day for Change have recently started working together on an entrepreneurial module for (agri) formal education. CDI is working on training material to involve youth in projects on the value chain. Youth are trained throughout the year in courses such as market access, rural entrepreneurship and economic development.

b. Access to land

Access to land is a key theme for many of the initiatives mentioned in this exploration and a prerequisite for youth engagement in rural and urban areas. Most of the projects mentioned in this exploration have a linkage to the theme though they are not specifically mentioned here. 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.⁹ 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 working with grassroots initiatives for youth in agriculture. By removing 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, according to [the FAO, IFAD and CTA report](#).

c. Access to financial services

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. Several initiatives have been started to provide youth with access to financial services.

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports access to finance for young entrepreneurs including those working in agriculture in ten Sub-Sahara African countries. It does so through the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, which was founded in 2011 during the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, South Korea.

Successful initiatives also include 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.¹⁰

YPARD is working on producing and sharing reliable statistics on youth employment in agriculture in their aim to advance their financial inclusion. [YPARD mentions 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 [FinclusionLab](#) 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 that 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 more easily accessible to unbanked and underserved people. YPARD is already seeing success: “where African

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ FAO, IFAD and CTA (2014) Youth and agriculture: key challenges and concrete solutions. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3947e.pdf>

youth 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

Some initiatives have started to work in this direction and they are worth mentioning here. 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.

The CGIAR research programme Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE) promotes a youth-inclusive approach to sustainable agriculture 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. 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 centre at ESNEC is provided and a number of study tours for ESNEC staff in the region are organized.

e. Access to markets

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.

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.

Heifer Netherlands has several projects on improving the participation of youth along the value chain and in business-oriented strategies. In Burkina Faso, the organization supported the establishment of an agricultural Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) centre (with Asudec). In Ghana, it participates in the Youth Resilience and Livelihoods development project (Yoreldep). This latter project had provided TVET and market linkages to 1,000 unemployed youths (with Heifer Ghana, business incubator CCLEAR, WUR and Edukans).

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 to 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.¹¹

¹¹ 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].

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

f. Engaging in policy dialogue

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.

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.¹² 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.

Oxfam Novib and their local partners have started the four-year programme [My Rights My Voice](#) in several Asian and African countries to empower youth. It supports marginalized young people in getting right training and building up skills to express their voices and claim their rights to health and education.

Hivos has had success in encouraging particularly women and girls in the coffee production value chain.¹³ 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.

4. Knowledge questions and recommendations for follow-up

To conclude, this exploration has shown that many organizations have started to recognize the important role of youth in agri-food systems 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 agri-food systems.

¹² UNDESA (2010) *World Programme of Action for Youth*. New York

¹³ Hivos (2015) A future in coffee: growing a new generation of coffee professionals. Available at: https://hivos.org/sites/default/files/publications/youth_and_coffee_def_lr.pdf

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.

Knowledge gap

- A better understanding of the constraints for youth in general and in particular for women.
- Limited data available 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 best approaches: focus initiatives on youth as a specific category or throughout existing in development programmes?
- Most policies and programmes on youth agri-entrepreneurship build on the assumption that youth want to become an entrepreneur, but how to include youth without entrepreneurial ambitions?
- A better understanding of what young men and women are already doing to adapt to changing conditions within agriculture and the innovations they are continuously being implemented in agri-food systems.
- Exploring the variety in support needed in the different sectors of agribusiness and stages of the value chain.

Making the connections

- Bridging the disconnect with the private sector from multinational corporations to national companies and local entrepreneurs.
- Identifying the “pull” factor for private sector to engage with youth. 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.
- Supporting long-term benefits better as to avoid a too strong of focus on quick wins only.
- Giving youth a platform at (international) conferences and policy dialogues.
- Creating more publicity on the types of jobs available in agriculture.

This exploration has served as input in a meeting on youth in agriculture on 12 May, organized by the Platform. During discussions, participants shared the thematic foci of their activities and knowledge questions they might have in seeking answers. The event served as a network activity as well to make synergies and share information. [Please read the report on the meeting here.](#) *If you want to stay updated on the activities of the Platform on youth in agriculture, please contact us at babs.ates@knowledge4food.net*