

Job opportunities for youth in Africa's agricultural transformation

Youth comprise an increasingly high portion of Africa's population. Yet a large part of Africa's youth are currently unemployed. Policy emphasis is on youth employment creation in agriculture, for which agribusiness is [increasingly highlighted](#) as a catalyst to promote jobs for youth. However, agriculture does not have a favourable image among youth, who move to urban areas to find jobs instead. In Nigeria, Malawi and Uganda, for instance, youth are [less engaged in agriculture](#) than older generations. This issue was raised in 2015 by the African Development Bank (ADB) through the [Ministerial dialogue: youths in agribusiness](#) and the [Feeding Africa concept note](#). Accordingly, the overarching challenge is hence to make agriculture attractive to youth along the value chain, in both urban and rural areas. This attractiveness depends on policy responses to long-term challenges. The [Food & Business Knowledge Platform](#) exploration map provides an overview of successful initiatives to deal with these barriers. This policy brief outlines the challenges in making agriculture attractive to youth, as well as the main policy suggestions.

- **Improve access to markets.** Improving market access is essential to provide young smallholder farmers with better incomes and improved labour conditions. Lack of market access can decrease the price and quantity of the products that farmers can sell, and it can also negatively impact on farm productivity when the right inputs cannot be bought for the right price. There are four main possibilities for improvement. First, [ICT innovations](#) can provide farmers with market information, as shown in the case of [banana value chains in Uganda](#). Second, farmers can organize themselves into cooperatives to obtain better bargaining positions. Third, jobs for youth need to be found within the whole value chain by [diversifying and specializing](#) production. Apart from creating new jobs within Africa, this diversification can also improve market access through inclusion of smallholders in different stages of production. Finally, international political institutions should consider their role (e.g. through [revising trade regulations](#)) in preventing youth from accessing markets, both in terms of providing a favourable export climate and affordable inputs for production.
- **Improve access to knowledge, information and education.** The [2014 World Bank report on youth employment](#) stresses that although African youth are becoming more educated they do not have the skills required to match current employment opportunities. To provide this access [two recommendations stand out](#): high-quality and demand-driven extension services (covering information and skills on agricultural entrepreneurship) need to be provided, as well as rapid improvements to education systems in rural areas to ensure access to long-term quality education. Training programmes are most effective when they are [comprehensive](#), e.g. combining skills training with advisory services and access to finance. Earlier education (e.g. integrating agriculture into school curricula) can improve knowledge and encourage youth. These interventions can also help to [destigmatize](#) youth in agriculture.
- **Improve access to land.** Due to land scarcity and land market restrictions, youth seldom have sufficient access to land to set up or expand agricultural businesses. This lack of access can lead youth to abandon both agriculture and rural areas, such as in [Ethiopia](#). Land scarcity can be overcome by increasing agricultural productivity, but land market restrictions require

multiple interventions. Effective land registration systems, transaction systems and intergenerational land transfer programmes are key. A few [promising examples](#) of interventions are [land transfer and tenure security programmes](#) in Malawi and South Africa; social welfare programmes to entice land transfers from the retired to youth in [Mexico](#); and reform laws to counter biases against youth land rights in [Ethiopia](#).

- **Improve access to financial services.** Youth often [lack the financial means](#) to start or improve agribusiness. Financial service providers (FSPs) [do not tailor](#) their products to the needs of youth, who are seen as risky partners given their lack of financial means and experience. Moreover, banks are [reluctant to invest](#) in agribusinesses in general. To improve this access, national and international governments can develop suitable credit and finance facilities for youth in agribusinesses specifically. Further, youth can be organized into farmer cooperatives in rural areas to improve their image with FSPs as suitable investment partners. These FSPs, in turn, need to be incentivized to identify the needs and wants of young entrepreneurs and design specific products accordingly.
- **Improve access to 'green' jobs.** [Most opportunities](#) within agribusiness lie in jobs that preserve or restore environmental quality, particularly as the ADB outlined the transformation of agriculture into a productive and sustainable sector as a [key challenge](#). As involving youth in agribusiness is another key challenge, sustainable agriculture programmes need to become youth-inclusive. [Developing skills](#) for this transition to green jobs is essential and should be established through formal, informal and on-the-job education. Green activities such as ecotourism, waste management or water conservation can be mainstreamed into existing programmes. These training programmes need to be complemented by increased investment in agricultural science to green existing technologies or enhance green innovations.
- **Improve private sector involvement in promoting youth employment.** Currently, the private sector plays [a limited role](#) in youth employment programmes due to a lack of trust between employers, employees and partners such as FSPs. Particularly, the fear of educating potential competitors prevents firms from participating. To build trust, public-private partnerships are essential. [These can be improved by focusing on](#) making programmes demand-driven by including firms in all stages of the intervention; on forming training consortia of multiple firms to facilitate trust; and on eliminating barriers for the informal sector to participate (e.g. formalization).
- **Improve the political and social dialogue.** An important part of [decent employment](#) for youth is the engagement in social and political dialogue. Youth are underrepresented in unions, employer organizations and political decision-making bodies in general. When represented, youth are [often seen](#) as 'uninformed', 'indecisive' and 'troublemakers'. Consequently, national policies often do not meet the needs of youth. Therefore, increased participation of youth in dialogues is essential, particularly regarding access to land, where youth involvement has led to renewed land laws and policies, such as in the [Philippines](#) and [Togo](#). Organization into [cooperatives](#) can lead to improved trust and cooperation between youth and public and private partners. Foremost, a focus on youth should be mainstreamed in all interventions and strategies for agribusiness, which includes involving youth in all stages of their design and implementation.

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