

Reaction Gijs Paaimans, Heifer Nederland

Both the quickscan report and Mr. Sumberg's presentation provide a welcome reality check for all of us involved in youth inclusion in agriculture in one way or another. The quickscan confronts us with the practical difficulties of developing and implementing effective and responsive policies, while Sumberg challenges some of the more fundamental assumptions underlying the current debate.

Hearing these challenges, it is tempting to ask why we even bother. But before we answer that question, we should also realize that there aren't many alternatives. Yes, the agricultural sector in its current state won't provide decent, attractive, wealth creating jobs for all unemployed youth. The problem is that other sectors are even less likely to do so. The World Bank estimates that on a short term less than 25% of youths in Africa will find salaried positions, and only a fraction of them will be in the formal sector. Meanwhile, the IMF estimates that agriculture has a potential to absorb 38% of the 'youth bulge'. This means we really can't afford stepping away from agriculture as a solution to youth unemployment. So without ignoring other sectors, let's make the best of that reality.

One problem we often hear is that youth themselves are not attracted to agriculture. They consider it hard, dirty and risky work with little reward. The solution that comes up is to introduce new technologies that will make agriculture more appealing. But if we just add cool technologies to the current system, without transforming the system itself, we are luring youth into a future that still won't benefit them. If we want youth to be attracted to agriculture, we should transform the sector in a way that truly makes it more attractive, because it is providing demonstrable livelihood opportunities to them. Successful youth role models will probably be the best marketing. The role of technology is important, but its focus should be on making farming easier and more profitable, not just more appealing.

At Heifer, we are convinced that this transformation is possible. We also agree with the conclusion of the quick scan that this requires a holistic approach, involving all stakeholders: government, the private sector, civil society, etc. But we must not forget the role youth themselves can play. If we want to change the sector in favor of youth, we should make sure youth have a voice in this, either by working with existing youth groups and organizations, or by supporting their establishment.

That does not mean we should put the burden of solving the employment problem on youth's shoulders. I strongly agree with Mr. Sumberg that we should approach youth not as isolated individuals, but as embedded members of societies. We should create a supportive environment of parents, teachers, local leaders, etc., and enable youth to participate in social structures. This also requires a broader approach to vocational training: for youth to fully engage in this society, their social and life skills are as important as their technical skills.

An example of how Heifer puts these ideas in practice is the [East Africa Youth Inclusion Program](#). This program is a spin-off from an ongoing program, the [East Africa Dairy Development Program](#). Through this program over 200,000 farmers have become members of dairy associations who run business-hubs: centers for milk bulking, cooling, processing and selling, which also serve as one-stop-shops for inputs, services, information and training. These centers give a boost to local employment as they create a range of low and high skill, formal, informal and mixed, on- and off farm, entrepreneurial and wage labor opportunities.

After evaluation we discovered that youth participation was lower than expected. We learned that youth were facing particular challenges, including difficult access to capital and land, mismatch between skills and requirements, and lack of decision-making power in hub management structures. With that in mind we did a gender disaggregated mapping of challenges and opportunities. This informed the design of the EAYIP program. This 5 year program, with support from the Mastercard Foundation, directly targets 25,000 youth (and an additional 75,000 indirectly). The strategy combines expansion of existing hubs and formation of new youth hubs. In addition to dairy, the hubs will expand with more “quick and easy” value chains (poultry, vegetables, staple crops) that generate jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities for youth.

The theory of change integrates 4 elements:

- **Knowledge:** life and vocational skills trainings, apprenticeships, mentorships, etc.
- **Access:** to inputs, finance, etc.;
- **Influence:** on decision making processes, through existing and new youth platforms;
- **Social capital:** e.g. self-help groups, youth associations, linkages between hubs and other stakeholders.

The methodology is differentiated by age:

- **15-18 yo:** “On board” cohort. Focus on social capital, life skills, sensitization.
- **19-24 yo:** “Equip and launch” cohort: life skills, social capital, on-&off-farm vocational training, entrepreneurship skills, access to finance, etc.
- **After that:** Apprenticeship or mentorship, =>hub membership.

We believe this project addresses several of the challenges mentioned: it uses an integral multi-stakeholder approach, it acknowledges and embraces youth diversity; it builds on a proven model, an existing infrastructure and established relations with governments, companies and communities; it is market led and demand driven; it combines quick wins with long term perspectives; and it aims to embed youth in communities, while also creating safe spaces for youth.

This project is a learning experience for us, through which we hope to answer questions like:

- In what types of opportunities are youth best positioned to succeed? (which pockets, what pathways, what is the required capital);
- How does EAYIP influence the long-run socio-economic trajectory of youth? (conditions of participants, policies, correlation between profitability and attraction/retention of youth)
- How do context and ecosystem factors affect youth in EAYIP? (role of technology, factors for attraction and active engagement).

The project started in March 2015. It is in an early stage, but we are very interested to exchange lessons and experiences with others, and invite everyone to share their ideas and feedback.