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## Youth employment in agriculture as a solid solution to ending hunger and poverty in Africa

### About this document

This document summarizes the online discussion *Youth employment in agriculture as a solid solution to ending hunger and poverty in Africa*, which was held on the FAO Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum) from 16 July to 10 August 2018.

The discussion was organized to gather views in advance of the 20–21 August regional conference “Youth Employment in Agriculture as a Solid Solution to Ending Hunger and Poverty in Africa: Engaging through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Entrepreneurship” in Kigali, Rwanda.

The major thematic areas of the conference focused on youth and entrepreneurship, digital innovation, and the future of work in the rural economy. The FSN Forum online discussion provided an opportunity for young people engaged in agriculture and rural development across Africa to share related experiences, successes stories, lessons learned, and good practices, and to raise issues/questions that could be addressed at the Kigali conference.

Over four weeks of discussion, participants from 33 countries shared 90 contributions. The introduction, the questions proposed, and the contributions received are available on the discussion page:

[www.fao.org/fsnforum/activities/discussions/youth-in-agriculture-in-africa](http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/activities/discussions/youth-in-agriculture-in-africa)



## Context

Africa is a young and vibrant continent in search of new opportunities. Over sixty percent of Africa's estimated 1.2 billion people are under the age of 25. Most of them live in rural areas where there are few job prospects and where agriculture remains an essential driver of economic development. These challenges lie at the heart of the questions posed to participants in this FSN Forum online discussion. Specifically, contributors were asked to keep the following questions in mind:

### 1. Experience as a youth in the agriculture sector

How would you describe your experience as an Africa youth engaged in the agriculture sector in your country? What motivated you to engage into the agriculture sector?

### 2. Major achievements and success stories

What have been your major achievements? Do you have any experience or innovative ways that have helped you in your work that you would want to share? Do you have a success story – either your own or any other that you are aware of – of youth engaged in agriculture in your country? What is the story?

### 3. What the Rwanda youth conference should address

If given an opportunity, what question would you ask the experts at the Rwanda youth conference on each of the three sub-themes: a) youth employment and entrepreneurship; b) digital innovation to overcome agriculture value-chain constraints; c) future of work in the rural economy?

## Youth in agriculture

### Agriculture's image problem

The agriculture sector in Africa needs young people but it continues to suffer from an image problem among them. Contributors to the online discussion say there is a need for successful role models or references which attract young people to agriculture and encourage them to stay in the sector. They also emphasize the need for appropriate and relevant training, knowledge-sharing and guidance to help young people to prepare better for opportunities in agriculture and agribusiness.

While they have often been exposed to agriculture in their childhood, many young people are reluctant to engage in agriculture as they see this sector as being laborious and backward, causing agriculture to be dominated by the older part of the population. (Aimé Kazika, DRC; Justin Loga Zrango, Liberia)

I have realized that the farming age of my country lies greatly between 40-65 or 70. There is no vigorous development and continuity in the growth and development of this sector. (Justin Loga Zrango, Liberia)

Educational curricula help to shape this perception by highlighting the appeal of salaried labor in urban areas as representing economic stability and social prestige. (Aimé Kazika, DRC; Baboucarr Kebbeh, Gambia)

### Concerns about rural services and facilities

Many youths, especially those with some skills or education qualifications, are concerned about the quality of health clinics, distance to hospitals and quality of education in rural

areas. It is critical to take this into account when considering the goals and aspirations of young families. (Kevin Gallagher, Mongolia)

### Lack of information about opportunities in agriculture

It is important to create awareness that agriculture is not only equated to farming but also includes many opportunities for entrepreneurship, including production, processing, value addition, branding and marketing. (Mahesh Chander, India)

### No single solution

It is however important to recognize that youth are a very heterogeneous group and the local conditions need to be carefully taken into account when devising any initiative aimed at facilitating young people's participation into agriculture and agribusiness. (Donald Houessou, Benin)



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## Perspectives: a chicken farmer in Burundi

Since my childhood, I was very interested in rearing small animals like chickens and goats so that I could help my parents pay for my needs like school fees.

However, my parents and neighbours discouraged me saying that the only way to get to success is going to school, graduating and finding a job. I agreed with them but after my graduation at university, to find a job was not easy for me. The only way to come out of the situation was going back to the land and starting to farm. (Prosper Niyonkuru, Burundi)



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## Opportunities and challenges

Contributors emphasized the potential that young people can bring to agriculture and rural livelihoods. However, it was also noted that youth needed greater guidance, knowledge and logistical support as they engaged in what can be an extremely challenging endeavour.

### Opportunities

- ▶ By stimulating and supporting their drive for economic independence and innovation, youth will drive agricultural development. (Mary Odusegun, Nigeria; Christy Songola, Malawi)
- ▶ Young farmers who set up small farms of their own create employment for themselves and for others and can become entrepreneurs, greatly benefitting local economy and food security. (Chonyui Duna, Cameroon; Kafui Agbe, Ghana)
- ▶ Youth involvement can increase the sustainability of the business as they are searching the way to improve their welfare and build their financial lives. (Ernestine Umuhoza, Rwanda).

### Challenges

- ▶ Agriculture requires patience, persistence and consistency which is at odds with the expectation of earning money quickly and easily in the cities. City life is more attractive for the youth of today, with technologies, transport and telecommunications being more widespread than in rural areas. (Alphonse Francis Obonyo, Uganda; Chonyui Duna, Cameroon; Ednah Karamagi, Uganda; Mahesh Chander, India; Henry Machina, Zambia)

## Three youthful enterprises

In Ghana, Michael Sakyi founded SM Golden Bee, an agribusiness company engaged in beekeeping and production of soap, creams made with honey, wax and propolis. He also offers practical training for other youth especially in rural areas. He hopes his work will help to protect the ecosystem by preserving bees for increased plant pollination. (Kafui Agbe, Ghana)

In Malawi, social entrepreneur Clara Kamlomo uses her horticultural skills to train rural farmers in mushroom seed-making and cultivation. Kamlomo has harnessed the technology of social media applications like the WhatsApp platform to reach out to and educate those who cannot participate in on-site training. (Christy Songola, Malawi)

In Burkina Faso, Nawsheen Hosenally co-founded Agribusiness TV and since its launch has produced over 100 videos in 12 African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mauritius, Niger, Senegal and Togo highlighting success stories youth entrepreneurs in agriculture. The videos, accessed on Agribusiness TV website and YouTube channel, have been viewed over 7 million times. The Agribusiness TV network of young entrepreneurs and youth in agriculture has over 174 000 fans on Facebook, 13 000 subscribers on YouTube. (Nawsheen Hosenally, Burkina Faso)



- ▶ Young farmers face difficulties in accessing land, which at times is allocated through personal ties and political connections, which they lack. (Lazarous Ng`ambi, Zambia)
- ▶ The absence or lack of access to capital and incentives is one of the challenges young farmers face when launching and sustaining their businesses in the early stages. In fact, the allocation of fiscal incentives is subject to the generation of a turnover by far exceeding the capacities of a new business led by youth with limited amount of capital. This shows that a policy initially designed to support agribusiness development can inadvertently discriminate against youth and prevented them from sustaining their business (Yannick Fiedler, Italy; Mary Odusegun, Nigeria; Tang Erasmus Nchuaji, Cameroon; Mkulima Online, Kenya; Alhassan Sesay, Sierra Leone)
- ▶ Distance from the cities means that rural areas are often the last to receive new technologies. (Aklilu Nigusie, Ethiopia)

### Support, knowledge and technologies needed

- ▶ Training, organization and support of the youth by the authorities, could improve the efficiency of individual activities while preserving natural resources from uncontrolled pressures. (Ervé Marcel Ouedraogo, Burkina Faso)
- ▶ Young people need to be able to add value to agriculture produce, connect to the urban market to adopt sustainable agriculture technologies and increase access to capital. Without these linkages, agriculture cannot transcend subsistence and become attractive to young people. (Alfred Adjabeng, Ghana)



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## Why agriculture?

Young participants were asked to share their personal stories of what motivated them to get involved in agriculture and describe some of their experiences.

## An unexpected vocation

I never wanted to take part in anything related to farming. This is because my parents, friends and relatives raised me to think that the only way to survive and succeed in life was to read books, get a degree and...get a good job. It is not until I was facing challenges with tuition, accommodation at university and living expenses that I realized I needed something else to do. The most obvious solution was engaging in agriculture. Starting was easy. I used my parents land in the village to plant groundnuts and maize. With help from my relatives, planting, maintenance and harvesting was not a problem. Once I was able to transport the produce to Kampala the real hustle begun. The market was flooded with produce. Being always late made some of my produce get rotten and I was always discouraged. Most of all, having (varieties of) produce that was not marketable was also a problem. I actually gave up for some time but later realized that it only required consistency, regardless of the low returns...and...engaging in growing a variety of crops at the same time...to meet the demands of the market. Today I am happily a distributor of maize and rice to schools. I even sell pumpkins. (Alphonse Francis Obonyo, Uganda).

## An interest in nutrition

With my mother's illness when I was in primary school and the doctor's explanations about the need to eat healthy, I was struck by the importance of agroecology for people's lives. So, it naturally followed that when I wanted to create my company, I leaned towards agrobusiness. Today, more and more people are interested in healthy eating. At the beginning, even before the company was registered, many people discouraged us about the success of this project. Most Beninese would not spend more than they usually pay to buy vegetables and fruit grown organically. Today, our visibility is increasing, and we are proposing eco-citizen actions organized in our country. Better still, there is currently a plethora of competitors in the production and delivery of vegetables and fruit from agroecology. It was the example of the Songhaï Centre in Benin that encouraged us and enabled us to move forward. (Houéfa Adido, Benin)

## Knowledge-sharing and networking

My experience as a young African involved in the agricultural sector has been in the promotion of youth in agriculture. Regarding the many possibilities in the farming sector to absorb youth unemployment and also to boost this sector, I have worked to motivate young people to become interested in this area. Through conferences,

visits, communication through supporting networks and by facilitating access to services (technical and financial), many young people today have a promising future in this sector. At the same time, I have launched my personal project by setting up a farm to give an example to other young people. (K. Philippe Akpaki, Benin)

## From study to practice

After my graduation from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where I studied Agricultural Extension, I decided to intern in major agriculture-based organizations mostly international NGOs to understand the work they do, the progress made towards grassroots agricultural development, the effectiveness of various existing federal government interventions in agriculture, the strategies to achieve the SDGs 1 and 2 and challenges limiting our goal of achieving food self-sustainability. This opportunity was one of the best times of my life, being a part of creating a solution to problems facing agriculture. A few years later I decided to get actively involved in food production, to deploy my knowledge, skills and creativity into crop production. I was

making enough profit as a startup, putting healthy food out there and progressing while doing what I love most. There are downsides to this, the expensive agro-inputs, labour, irrigation problems and unpredictable weather conditions, after the first few months I was learning, unlearning and keeping my records to ensure I was making progress. Today, I have added a new staple crop...and as I gain more space I will keep expanding and adding more crops. The benefits of being an agro-entrepreneur, most times, outweigh the disadvantages because agriculture is risk-filled and some of these risks are not under our control, we can avert most of them by adequate planning. (Lilian Umeakunne, Nigeria)

## Innovation in agriculture

Innovation can involve new technologies like ICTs or mechanization, but it can also refer to new ways of thinking about farming, ecology and agrobusiness.

- ▶ The use of ICT has allowed me to join the network of young people active in the agricultural sector and to participate in conferences as well as reporting in social media, in particular the Semaine Scientifique Agricole (Agriculture Science Week) in Kigali; the Forum on cassava in Central Africa, in Yaoundé; and the Training on veterinary education, in Dakar. (Guy Fleury Giramahoro, Burundi)
- ▶ Until Africa as a whole adopts the use of technology in farming, most of its young population will never want to do agriculture or anything related to it. (Samuel Kalu, Nigeria)

## Back from the city

Mathias was often attracted to the computers at our office in Mayuge district. One day I noticed that he was at the computers instead of school, and when I asked, he said that it was due to school fees. As an institution we took on this challenge of his and he obtained a certificate in business administration at a prestigious university in Kampala. When he completed, he was totally drawn to the city life and was looking for a job there. To me, it meant that we were losing yet another farmer to the city life. I enticed him back by giving him a volunteer job at the office, a post he held and upgraded to project office. Today, he manages his own youth farmer's network in rural Mayuge. They produce honey, make candles, shampoo, and other products. (Ednah Karamagi, Uganda)



## ICTs at work: four examples

- ▶ GreenApp is a mobile app and web-based system which helps African youths to engage in farming. It provides specific weather forecasts (including temperature, humidity, rainfall, wind speed and direction), gives information on prices, and offers audio/video advisories on innovative practices and success stories. The app will also allow individuals and registered companies to own online shops and give customers the option of buying and selling by using Visa, MasterCard or MPESA mobile-transfer technology. (Placidius Rwechungura, Tanzania)
- ▶ The youthful team at Trotro Tractor Ltd uses the Internet and technology to change the lives of smallholder farmers through the provision of platforms which makes agricultural mechanization services available, accessible and affordable to enhance productivity, improve efficiency and reduce post-harvest loss (Kafui Agbe, Ghana)
- ▶ Cynthia Aveh founded Trustfarm and Greencredit respectively. Trustfarm is founded on technology to provide a sustainable market for food crops and livestock for smallholder and large farmers. Greencredit leverages blockchain technology and initial coin offerings to raise funds to plant more trees and save the ecosystem through beekeeping. (Kafui Agbe, Ghana)
- ▶ INCLUDE, a knowledge platform on inclusive development policies, brings together African, Dutch and other stakeholders to translate academic findings into inclusive policy practice. For one of the conferences on productive employment, a theme central to INCLUDE's work, a synthesis report was drafted which reviews the state-of-the-art knowledge on youth employment in Africa. (Frank van Kesteren, the Netherlands)



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## Digital sustainability

ICTs have huge potential to make agriculture more productive and profitable. However, over the years, many applications are being or have been developed through hackathons and other competitions, but very few of them are actually able to go beyond break-even point because their business models are flawed. How do we measure success of the ICT initiatives aimed at agriculture that currently exist? What should be the indicators? Who are those who are still operating without grants and funds from competitions? How did they make it? When it comes to digital solutions, we have to be careful about sustainability, which is currently a huge problem. (Nawsheen Hosenally, Burkina Faso)



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## What should the conference address?

This summary concludes with a look at many of the topics which FSN Forum contributors felt the Rwanda conference should address. They include, but are not limited to, financing, agriculture-friendly curricula, post-harvest losses, region-specific information, rural access to digital solutions, and alternative livelihoods in agricultural/rural areas. The list reflects the perceived need for greater information, support and services for young people who engage in the agriculture sector.

- ▶ Incentives to create employment for youth or empower young people who are already in agriculture.
- ▶ The lack of access to capital by young people in agriculture, especially women. (Andrew Isingoma, Rwanda; Mamadou Djemory Diabate, Côte d'Ivoire; Baboucarr Kebbeh, Gambia; Paschal Nchunda, Tanzania; Franck Makoye, Congo; Moussa Diouf, Senegal)
- ▶ What sustainable digital solutions are available for young people to do business seamlessly across the value chain? (Samuel Kalu, Nigeria; Jonathan Musau, Kenya)
- ▶ How to reach out to youth who resist getting involved in agriculture and family and friends who tend to deprecate the agriculture sector? (Alphonse Francis Obonyo, Uganda)
- ▶ What can be done to awaken the entrepreneurial spirit in youth? (Bienvu Polepole, DRC ; Justin Loga Zrango, Liberia)
- ▶ How can states incorporate agriculture studies in educational curricula to equip youth with skills? (Alphonse Francis Obonyo, Uganda)
- ▶ Isn't it important to incorporate classes in sustainability, agricultural development and entrepreneurship since primary school? (Adebayo Depo, Togo)
- ▶ Educating youth in rural areas on applied agricultural techniques specific to their regions.
- ▶ Post-harvest losses among other threats in Africa, especially Nigeria's goal of achieving food security is a major setback. (Lilian Umeakunne, Nigeria)
- ▶ Mainstreaming access to and ownership of land in government development plans. (Baboucarr Kebbeh, Gambia)
- ▶ Value addition of seasonal foods to capitalize on higher food prices after the season and to reduce losses and waste along the food production and supply chain. (Lilian Umeakunne, Nigeria)
- ▶ Youth employment and entrepreneurship: how to mainstream the youth profile and capacity needs in policies and curricula. (Donald Houessou, Benin)
- ▶ Educating youths in rural areas on applied agricultural techniques specific to their region. (Tang Erasmus Nchuaji, Cameroon)
- ▶ Linking young producers to markets and protecting them from agricultural imports. (Baboucarr Kebbeh, Tang Erasmus Nchuaji, Cameroon)
- ▶ Can agriculture alone lift young people out of poverty? (Aimé Kazika, DRC)
- ▶ How to popularize agricultural innovations in all African countries and make them accessible to young entrepreneurs. (Houéfa Adido, Benin)
- ▶ How to modernize agriculture in Africa while preserving the health of populations. (Houéfa Adido, Benin)
- ▶ Reaching youth in rural areas with digital innovations and addressing issues of access to/affordability of smartphones and internet connections. (Adebayo Depo, Togo; Ednah Karamagi, Uganda)
- ▶ Is entrepreneurship the only or the best solution to boost employment among the youth? (Philippe Akpaki, Benin)
- ▶ What can be done to help policy makers appreciate the work of agriculture experts, especially those engaged in research? (Kelvin Mupeta, Zambia)





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