

S.9. Empowering youth as innovators and change makers for sustainable food systems

1. What, in brief, is the solution?

Harnessing the demographic dividend of developing countries is paramount. Of the global youth population (15-24 years old), which reached the unprecedented figure of 1.2 billion, almost 85 per cent live in developing regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, many of them in rural areas. The inclusion of young people in food systems development and productive activities (wage or self-employment, in and off farm) is key to increase the generational turnover, foster the sector competitiveness and the vitality of rural areas, and ultimately addressing the significant untapped potential of this sizeable and growing demographic.

Young people are indeed best placed to rejuvenate the sector, acquire the knowledge and skills needed to innovate, uptake new technologies, and spearhead the digital transformation. With their ability to learn fast and their innovative spirit, the youth can drive change and accelerate the transition to more sustainable production and consumption patterns that are needed to achieve the goals of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and feed the world's growing population.

Empowering youth through training, mentorship, dedicated services and incentives is a powerful solution to enable them to innovate and introduce greener and more sustainable practices into agri-food system. Moreover, giving visibility to youth champions leading change in the sector has proven inspiring for fellow youth and the older generations alike. Young women, together with other vulnerable youth groups such as indigenous youth, young migrants and youth with disabilities, need specific attention and targeted solutions to unlock their potential. Supporting a conducive environment and boosting youth agency to actively participate in food systems and their governance mechanisms (policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) is of central importance and demands mainstreaming of youth as crosscutting priority.

2. What was/were the source(s) from which this solution emerged?

This solution emerged from broad and compelling evidence about, on the one hand, the potential and existing commitment of youth for agri-food systems transformation, and, on the other hand, although their evident key role, the recognition of their higher vulnerability and exclusion compared to adults from the governance mechanisms that shape food systems transformation.

Key documents in this regard include:

- FAO, CTA, IFAD. 2014, [Youth in Agriculture: Key challenges and concrete solutions](#)
- IFAD 2019 Rural Poverty report - [Creating opportunities for the rural youth](#)
- UN Strategy for Youth <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/youth-un/>
- FAO Rural Youth Action Plan <http://www.fao.org/3/nd385en/nd385en.pdf>
- IFAD Rural youth action plan <https://www.ifad.org/en/document-detail/asset/41190893>
- Several youth declarations and strategies showing youth commitment and priorities, such as:
 - PR Food systems summit 2021, [Youth movement leads the charge worldwide for food systems transformation ahead of UN summit](#)
 - 2017, [Rome statement on the contribution of indigenous youth towards a world without hunger](#)
 - 2017, [Plan de Acción Regional dirigido a la Juventud Rural en los países del SICA](#)

- 2016, [Agenda Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Juventudes Rurales - Directrices de política pública para las juventudes rurales de la agricultura familiar, campesina e indígena](#)

3. What problem is it trying to address within food systems?

Despite impressive reductions in poverty globally and steady growth in several middle and low-income countries, socio-economic inequality is increasing, and rural areas are lagging behind. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, progress towards SDG 1 had slowed down, and the world was not on track to ending extreme poverty by 2030, with rural inhabitants and agriculture and food systems workers overrepresented among the poorest, and the underemployed, especially youth. The above persisting challenges show that the ongoing processes of rural and food systems' transformation have to become more inclusive and equitable to truly enable rural people, especially the younger generations, to capitalize on emerging opportunities, such as the expanding food demand, rather than be further marginalized by them.

Most of the world's young people live in Africa and South Asia, and these two regions will continue to have the highest concentration of young people in the years to come. Globally, this process will go hand in hand with an increase in urbanization and the ageing of the population, a process that has already started also in developing countries. Urbanization and per capita income growth offers significant new opportunities and jobs in the food system beyond the farm level. While the employment share in farming tends to decline as per capita incomes rise, the share in food manufacturing and services tends to increase. Inclusion of women and youth into food system jobs can raise productivity and improve social peace, making migration a choice and not a necessity (WB, 2017).

These trends will generate new opportunities driven by increasing food demand and dietary changes, but could also jeopardize food security and nutrition in many developing countries and generate excessive pressure on urban labour markets if older people are left behind in rural areas while adults and youth move to cities looking for jobs (FAO, 2017[1]).

Nearly 1 billion of the world's 1.2 billion youth aged 15-24 years reside in developing countries and their numbers are growing more rapidly in lower income countries than in higher income countries, particularly in rural areas. With the objective of Leaving No One Behind (LNOB), specific attention needs to be given to youth that are unemployed or not in education, employment or training (NEET), young women, younger youth between 15 and 17, less educated youth, youth from poor or extremely poor rural families, indigenous youth, migrant youth, and youth working in the informal economy.

4. Why is addressing that problem important for achieving the goal of your working group?

As future managers of our eco- and agri-food systems, youth need to be explicitly targeted to ensure inclusive socio-economic development that is resilient to future crises and shocks and contributes to the realization of the SDGs.

This solution contributes to all the three work streams of AT4, namely:

- "Strengthening Agency" by supporting youth to raise their voices and actively contribute to shaping food systems' transformation
- "Inclusive Policies" by supporting inclusive process and practices to end age-based discrimination and promote fairness and justice within food systems

- “Multi-dimensional Welfare and Access” by directly building more equitable value distribution and empowering young people, as essential players in the agricultural value chains and food systems as a whole

5. How can this solution address that problem (theory of change)?

Through empowering youth as innovators and change makers for sustainable food systems transformation, this solution will lead to better employment and economic opportunities, reduced inequalities and more successful transitions for youth in the labour market, while directly contributing to rejuvenating the sector and reducing the rural exodus.

Key Outputs to achieve such results include:

- Making agri-food systems and rural areas attractive to youth by supporting governments to enable a youth-sensitive structural transformation of the sector that makes it more remunerative and youth friendly, and by facilitating the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and resources, such as land; promoting agricultural and rural livelihoods in school curricula; giving visibility to youth champions in the sector for peer-to-peer learning and attitudinal change towards engagement in agriculture.
- Strengthening rural youth capacities for innovation in food and agriculture, by equipping them with the skills needed to uptake new and innovative technologies, greener practices, and spearhead the digital transformation.
- Boosting productive youth wage employment and entrepreneurship, by systematically mainstreaming youth wage employment/entrepreneurship needs in food systems investments, sharing knowledge and information on successful and sustainable approaches (including youth-led solutions to food systems challenges), promoting youth-to youth mentorship and investments, advocating for national and regional funds or windows in support of youth agripreneurship; Support should ensure to be adequately tailored to the differing needs and realities of Youth in agripreneurship as self-employed workers, and youth in agriworkforces as waged workers.
- Supporting youth-led organizations and networks for quality youth engagement in food systems policy and governance mechanisms, including by supporting a conducive environment and enhancing youth capacity to actively participate in policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Supporting education and training centres, producers’ organizations and service providers in responding to the needs of youth, paying special attention to the needs, constraints and opportunities of rural young women and other vulnerable groups of youth, such as younger youth, migrant youth, indigenous youth, youth with disabilities, etc.

Main assumptions include:

- Youth stand ready to further engage in agri-foods systems when they are provided with the right incentives and enabling environment.
- Food demand and value chain development will continue to increase in developing regions, offering additional opportunities for youth productive engagement in the sector.

- Governments recognize the urgent need to further engage the youth, to guarantee the rejuvenation of agriculture and food systems, as well as to address the daunting unemployment and underemployment challenges faced by a burgeoning youth population in rural areas.

6. Why does this solution align to the definition and criteria for a ‘game changing solution’ developed by the Summit?

Empowering youth to become innovations and change makers is a feasible action, for which successful examples are already in place in several country or regional contexts as well as exceptional momentum, but which demands increased global commitment and investment to truly shift the operational models, incentives, and structures that shape food systems.

- Impact potential at scale: The initiative will be global, implemented across developing regions and countries. Considering the demographics of youth and the presence of a “youth bulge” that has the strong potential to turn into a "dividend", this solution has impact potential at scale.
- Actionability: By building on and connecting existing initiatives, partnerships and networks, this initiative would need a light management structure and could easily support the replication and upscaling of successful initiatives.
- Sustainability: The initiative will deliver to 2030 and beyond. By harnessing the innovation and entrepreneurial potential and commitment of key actors in society (the youth), this solution will have positive effects on ensuring equitable livelihood opportunities, while promoting more inclusive food systems transformations.

7. Existing evidence supporting the argument that this solution will work, or at least achieve the initial outcomes

Evidence from implementation programmes as well as from research show the innovation and entrepreneurial potential of youth when they are empowered and supported to effectively contribute to agriculture and food systems development.

Specific evidence	Source
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<p>Evidence of youth overall interest and commitment towards more sustainable food system development and on supporting their peers in engaging in productive activities as well as policy dialogue around this topic</p>	<p>FAO has been effectively supporting efforts aimed at strengthening youth organizations and networks and their active participation in policy formulation and development around agriculture and food systems. Examples of successful experiences are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rwanda Youth Agribusiness Forum (RYAF) (http://ryaf.rw/). FAO Rwanda has contributed to the establishment of RYAF through a technical cooperation project, for which the Ministry of Agriculture in Rwanda was also awarded the Saouma Award in 2019 http://www.fao.org/fao-awards/conference-awards/edouard-saouma/en/ - RAPEA (https://rapea.africa/) and YOFCHAN (https://www.yofchan.org/) networks in Senegal/Western Africa and Uganda respectively are additional examples. Global networks such as CSAYN and YPARD also already contribute to this solution, yet efforts at country level remain limited.
<p>Evidence of effectiveness of youth champions initiatives, where youth act as role models for other youth, contributing to increase the overall attractiveness of the sector, as well as the identification of successful practices and solutions</p>	<p>FAO supports the identification, visibility and networking of youth champions, like in the case of the Chisparural.GT platform in Guatemala (https://chisparural.gt/) or through multiples initiatives across different countries (see news on Uganda youth champions: http://www.fao.org/uganda/news/detail-events/en/c/1393445/)</p> <p>FAO. 2021. Youth-to-youth mentorship approach in agripreneurship development. Lessons learned from the Youth Inspiring Youth in Agriculture (YIYA) initiative in Uganda;</p> <p>FAO, 2021. Forthcoming. - Case Study -Effectiveness and Duplicability of the Youth Inspiring Youth in Agriculture Initiative (Uganda)</p> <p>Plan International. 2021. Youth voices in youth employment: a roadmap for promoting meaningful youth engagement in youth employment programs; FAO. 2021.</p> <p>Youth Employment Funders Group (YEFNG), 2021. Youth voices in youth employment: A roadmap for promoting meaningful youth engagement in youth employment programs https://www.planusa.org/docs/Youth_Engagement_Manual.pdf</p>

<p>Evidence of youth innovation, greening and entrepreneurship potential</p>	<p>FAO, 2020. Africa’s youth in agrifood systems: Innovation in the context of COVID-19 http://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/1307956/</p> <p>IDRC/MasterCard Foundation. 2015. Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Taking Stock of the Evidence and Knowledge Gaps</p> <p>FAO. 2019. Youth in motion for climate action! - A compilation of youth initiatives in agriculture to address the impacts of climate change. Rome http://www.fao.org/3/ca5746en/ca5746en.pdf.</p> <p>FAO partners with youth agripreneurs to innovate in terms of sustainable solutions for agri-food systems and support their peers through mentorship or investment.</p> <p>See FAO Letter of Intent with youth-led agribusiness JR Farms to establish the GAF Fund (youth-to-youth equity investment), which will become an Academy in 2021. http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1379634/icode/ https://gafafrika.com/background</p>
<p>Evidence of food systems transformation to deliver jobs</p>	<p>World Bank, 2017. Future of Food – Shaping the food system to deliver jobs. http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/406511492528621198/pdf/114394-WP-PUBLIC-18-4-2017-10-56-45-ShapingtheFoodSystemtoDeliverJobs.pdf</p>

8. What is the current and/or likely political support for this idea?

There is currently high political support for initiatives supporting youth and their engagement in achieving the 2030 Agenda, globally (see multiple inclusions of youth indicators and targets in the SDGs), regionally and at national levels.

For instance, the African Union Agenda 2063 made strong commitments to empowering young women and men while promoting more and better jobs for youth in agri-food systems was an urgent priority explicitly acknowledged by Africa’s governments already in 2014, through the African Union Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods. Commitment has been growing in the region, as testified by the 2017 AfDB’s strategy “Jobs for Youth in Africa” and the AU “African Youth Charter”. Pursuant to these initiatives, many African governments and development partners have developed strategies and implemented various interventions to facilitate youth engagement in agri-food systems.

9. Are there certain contexts for which this solution is particularly well suited, or, not well-suited?

The solution applies to food systems at large yet is definitely more urgent and critical for developing regions where more than 80 percent of the youth currently live.

[1] *FAO. 2017. The future of food and agriculture – Trends and challenges. Rome*