



Sustaining the impact of capacity development initiatives for African youth in agriculture

Background

This document summarizes the online discussion *Sustaining the impact of capacity development initiatives for African youth in agriculture*, which was held on the FAO Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition in Africa (FSN Forum Africa) from 25 October to 17 November 2017.

The online discussion was organized under the Regional Initiative on Sustainable Production Intensification and Value Chain Development in Africa of the FAO Regional Office for Africa (RAF), in partnership with the Capacity Development Unit (DPSC) of the Partnerships and South-South Cooperation Division (DPS) of FAO, the Songhai Centre, the African Agribusiness Incubators Network (AAIN), the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) and the Young Professionals' Platform for Agricultural Research for Development (YPARD).

The aim was to solicit opinions on capacity development sustainability initiatives for young agripreneurs in Africa, and to contribute to identifying challenges and opportunities related to sustaining the impact of all interventions (existing and future ones) aimed at developing capacities and engaging youth in agriculture.

The discussion was facilitated by Justin Chisenga from FAO and supported by the following subject matter experts: Eyawassou Baya (Songhai Centre), Alex Ariho (AAIN), Tony Nsanganira (FAO-RAF), Nawsheen Hosenally (AgriBusiness TV, Burkina Faso), Msekiwa Matsimbe (YPARD Malawi) and Ken Lohento (CTA).

Over the three weeks of discussion, participants from 25 countries shared 98 contributions. The topic introduction and the questions proposed, as well as the contributions received, are available on the discussion page: www.fao.org/fsnforum/activities/discussions/youth-in-agriculture

The summary follows the structure and order of the questions proposed.

1. What are the biggest challenges youth in Africa face after going through youth-specific capacity development initiatives in agriculture?

Despite the great potential of agriculture in Africa and the need to involve the younger generation, many capacity development initiatives aimed at supporting youth engagement in agriculture are not yielding the expected results.

Contributors listed numerous challenges that youth face after capacity development (CD) initiatives have finished, both related to the way the initiatives are set up, organized and promoted, and to the general institutional and socio-economic context of agriculture in the region.

► Lack of appropriate targeting of participants for CD initiatives and lack of interest of youth in agriculture

Some initiatives do not target youth appropriately because they don't consider the differences among youth and the context in which youth should work and develop their business in agriculture. In other instances, CD initiatives involve beneficiaries that are not truly interested in agriculture.

Lack of interest and motivation is a challenge. Beneficiaries who have taken part in appropriate CD initiatives get out of the agriculture/agribusiness sector very quickly, especially when they fail to obtain financing for their ventures.

► Lack of business skills training

Many initiatives provide good technical training but poor training on business skills, project management, finance and accounting. This ends up weakening the performance of the agriculture venture after the CD initiative ends.

"The majority of agribusiness failures are direct results of a failure of business skills and NOT of agriculture skills." (Ololade Adesola, Nigeria)

► Short duration of CD initiatives

The nature or duration of some CD interventions targeting youth was also raised as an issue. Many of them are short: after just a few weeks participants graduate without the skills they need, and therefore fail when engaging in business.

► Lack of follow-up (mentorship and supervision) by organizations on their CD initiatives/projects

Once the CD initiatives end, in most cases there is no follow-up with the trained participants, or monitoring that could help to implement the recommendations made during the training. The crucial importance of mentorship and fellowship, follow-up and empowerment is often underestimated.

A few contributors mentioned that the effects of climate change constitute a CD area that has not been considered by most academic curricula for agriculture.

Other challenges are related to the broader agriculture and economic context in which youth must operate after the CD initiative:

► Lack of or inadequate access to finance to set up and develop agribusinesses

This was an oft-cited issue. Financial service providers – banks and microfinance institutions – are reluctant to provide credit, savings and insurance to rural youth, due to their lack of collateral, the high risk of the agricultural sector, and the lack of financial literacy exhibited by many youth. Banks and lending institutions lack favourable loans that are tailored to different agricultural ventures. Furthermore, even when funds are available, lending rates in most African countries are too high for young investors.

"It is believed that farming is no longer a tradition, but rather a business. For any business to ignite one has to ensure that money is adequately set up for the business." (Musa Usman Musa, Nigeria)

"The capacity building initiative is a brilliant idea but no matter how great the idea is, if there is no access to funding, then the exercise won't have much impact." (Michael Ige, Ghana)

► Lack of access to land

Most capacity development activities, especially trainings, are premised on land being available; unfortunately, youth are constrained by problems of access to land. On the one hand, many land tenure systems in Africa do not support land ownership by youth, and young women in particular are affected by inheritance laws and customs that make transfer of land even more problematic. On the other hand, land markets are poorly developed and there is no advertising about opportunities to rent land.

► Access to markets

The lack of ready markets for agricultural produce and low prices scares many away. Weak linkages to markets discourage youth from engaging in agricultural activities and challenge the sustainability of their initiatives. Often the trainings do not connect participants with buyers and do not help them engage the right networks to roll out their products and services into markets. Some participants also pointed out that access to markets for youth is becoming more difficult, due to the growing international influence of supermarkets and the rigorous standards of international supply chains.

► Reality gap

This was also identified as a big challenge in postcapacity development initiatives for youth. Once the training is over, the trainees are often faced with a reality on the ground that is different from what they expected.

Other challenges identified include **lack of infrastructure** (especially for post-harvest handling of agricultural produce, but also for road networks, standard farm

structures and modern tools, irrigation schemes and supply of electricity); **poor prices for agricultural products** and **low returns on investment**, especially for small-scale enterprises; **lack of easy access to institutions** (especially relevant government agencies) in the agriculture sector that could help youth in their agribusiness ventures; and **absence of platforms or associations** to support youth after the CD initiatives have ended.

Under the project "**Engaging Youth in Agribusiness: Mechanization**", 100 youth were trained in Nigeria on the business of owning and maintaining a fleet of smart tractors. They were then given support in creating cooperatives after one year of successful training. However, the price of tractors increased because of unfavourable loan conditions (e.g. high interest rates, equity contributions, etc.) and this led to trainees dropping out and protesting. (Gerwin Jansen, the Netherlands)

2. What are the examples of existing postcapacity development sustainability initiatives for youth in agriculture in Africa? What works and what does not? Are there any success stories and good practices that can be shared?

Many examples were mentioned, including the following:

Cameroon

The **Programme de Promotion de l'Entrepreneuriat Agropastoral des Jeunes** empowers youth for three months with training on good agricultural practices, management, and how to write a project. At the end of the programme, participants present a project to be financed as follows: 50 percent from government, 10 percent from youth, and 40 percent from a microfinance institute loan.

The Gambia

The **Food Safety and Quality Authority of the Gambia** trains youth on good agricultural and hygienic practices, focusing on the cassava food value chain, but also on fish processing and poultry farming. The aim is to enable trainees to access export markets; however, more capacity building and resources are needed for them to comply with safety requirements of international markets.

Ghana

The **Kosmos Innovation Centre (KIC) AgriTech Challenge** in Ghana offers a comprehensive approach to supporting youth, including training in business, teambuilding and other relevant soft skills to establish and manage their business in the agricultural technology sector. Awards are given to business ideas that solve real agriculture problems; among

the winners is Trotro Tractor Ltd, a platform linking farmers to tractor operators.

The **Next Generation Cocoa Youth Program (MASO)** project, funded by MasterCard Foundation's Youth Forward Initiative and implemented by Solidaridad and Ashesi University, has shown that guidance and direction for youth help bring about excellent results. Youth in rural areas who have little knowledge of business are enrolled in a business academy to acquire skills and knowledge to identify business opportunities in their environment. Coaches and mentors share their experiences in starting new businesses in order to motivate them and build their confidence. Following this experience, young people have established successful businesses in their communities.

Kenya

Greenfarm International helps young farmers develop contract farming to collect fodder and sell it to the organization. Greenfarm finances all purchases, transport and storage.

Agriterra is building capacities of youth throughout the whole value chain to enable them to be part of agricultural cooperatives. The project helps youth to join Youth Councils that bring together producers, cooperatives and other actors interested in agriculture. This arrangement makes it possible for youth to access finance (loans), based on the produce or savings from the cooperatives. Peer-to-peer exchange among young farmers is also promoted.

Nigeria

The **IITA Youth Agripreneurs** initiative equips young agripreneurs with skills in production processes and business management to help them become both agriculturists and people who understand how the business world operates.

The **National Institute for Freshwater Fisheries Research** runs an undergraduate programme, the **Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme**, which provides work experience to students trained in aquaculture and fishery. Over 2 500 students have been trained so far, and many declare that the work experience changed their perspective and gave them confidence in their training choice.

The **Triming Project** (2003–2011) of the Kano State Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (KNARDA) worked with farmer groups (in which 70 percent of the members were youth). The project trained farmers in good agricultural practices and marketing strategies in maize production using the Farmer Field and Business School (FFBS) extension strategy, and also provided agricultural inputs at a subsidized rate.

The Nigerian Government is developing business centres like the **Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agencies of Nigerian (SMEDIAN)** in some states of the country to provide basic training on how to do business, how to raise finance and how to manage their personal resources, which are proving to be effective.

The **Youth Empowerment in Agriculture Programme (YEAP)** has provided postcapacity development training on management skills development in agribusiness to agricultural graduates who then have become employers. The success stories of the agricultural graduates were a result of the fact that participants were taught how to write business proposals and how to access loan/grants for agribusiness and that technical training was complemented by management skills training.



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Togo

The NGO **Entreprises Territoires et Développement (ETD)** has set up a fund – CIDEA (Capital Investissement pour le Développement d'Entreprises dans le secteur Agricole) – to finance agrifood enterprises, and a business incubation and promotion centre to support young people in the agrifood sector (and later in other sectors). This initiative includes an introduction to the trainees to commercial banks and microfinance institutions, and follows them for three years during the implementation of their business plan.

In Togo there are also financial measures which target youth interested in rural entrepreneurship, such as: the Fonds d'Appui aux Initiatives Economiques des Jeunes (FAIEJ), for technical and financial support to promote entrepreneurship among youth; the Fonds National de la Finance Inclusive (FNFI), an institution for refinancing to facilitate access to credit for the most marginalized segment of the population; and the Programme d'Appui à l'Insertion Economique des Jeunes dans les Secteurs Porteurs (PAIEJ SP).

Uganda

FAO and the **Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF)** are promoting the **Youth Champions in Agriculture** initiative, which identifies young entrepreneurs who have developed cutting-edge innovations in agricultural value chains to act as role models to inspire and build the capacity of their fellow youth. The approach uses "nuclear youth champions" as hubs: other youth can form groups around these champions for continuous learning/knowledge-sharing, collective bargaining and negotiating for better policies, among others. Sustainability is ensured because the nuclear champions are passionate about working in groups and supporting communities.



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3. What postcapacity development support do youth need? What can youth do to support each other in developing their skills and capacities?

In general, training and postcapacity development go hand in hand, and a general call was raised throughout the online discussion to focus more attention on following up in terms of technical backstopping, coaching and mentoring, and youth-to-youth support.

Indeed, lack of follow-up means that African youth are in many cases left on their own to face the many difficulties of the agriculture sector.

► Integrated sustainable training programmes

Capacity development initiatives targeting youth in agriculture should offer a complete package including knowledge, skills, financial and inputs support.

In this sense a one-off training is not enough for young potential farmers/agripreneurs, considering their high mobility and dynamism on the one hand and the challenges of the agriculture sector on the other. After the CD initiative is finished, training should continue to help young entrepreneurs remain focused and to equip them with additional up-to-date skills and information, such as: market development strategies, investment opportunities in the sector, modern practices of agricultural product transformation, and other knowledge and competences in the adding of value. Post-CD training should also help to refine the business model and to map business opportunities.

The young farmers that succeed after the CD initiative should then become role models and mentors to others interested in agriculture, using a "youth-to-youth" approach (Y2Y).

► Strengthening business incubators and creating new ones

Even though incubation is seen as a means of creating youth-led SMEs, the actual production of sustainable and highly profitable SMEs that can thrive in the market is hindered by the operation of incubators in isolation, and the mismatch between youth expectations and the handholding capacity of the incubators.

This capacity is not only limited by level of expertise and infrastructure but also by shortfalls in funding, as well as limited efforts to merge scattered funds into tailor-made financing models for incubators and youth-led SMEs.

To date, investors and smaller groups with the aim of starting incubation services have also found it hard to get involved due to limitations in financing and expertise needed to implement successful incubation models at the level of anchor (larger size) incubators.

The **African Agribusiness Incubators Network (AAIN)** is currently working with its partners to reinforce expertise for agribusiness incubation. To answer the need for infrastructural and handholding capacity, partners such as FAO are working with AAIN to bridge the post-incubation gap for mentorship and upscaling. These and other partners in finance are working towards even more tailor-made financing models through the African Agribusiness Incubation Fund (AAIF). They are also building a more extensive knowledge-sharing and peer-to-peer network for incubation centres across Africa under the Africa Agribusiness Incubation Programme (AAIP) with the AU and other partners, in order to eliminate operations in isolation and use collective input for continent-wide impact. To address the limitations in setup of incubators to reach even more youth, AAIN has designed and introduced the concept of the Small-Scale Agribusiness Incubator Hubs. Furthermore, to ensure quality and high-impact service delivery, AAIN has introduced the Agribusiness Incubator Accreditation for Africa, which pre-qualifies incubators for support in the form of financing and expertise.

► Systems of rewards and incentives for youth involved in agriculture

Incentives, contests, prizes and recognition systems can complement other initiatives, motivating youth already working in agriculture and attracting new ones. More broadly, this kind of initiative can help create an enabling environment for agriculture entrepreneurship and support a more positive image of this sector in society.

Work on **mindset change and empowerment** was also mentioned: in particular, one participant stressed that to promote the sustained effect of capacity development initiatives for young Africans, training by specialists should be carried out in a framework that is first psychological before it is entrepreneurial.

In Togo in 2015, the government organized a sustainable development forum in which the ten best green projects were supported technically and with funds. For example, the technical and financial support received by Nardy Green Planet enabled them to develop a start-up specializing in the production of seedlings of species having great environmental value, and to support farmers in establishing agroforestry and agro-ecological plots.

To support and learn from each other, youth should:

► **Create cooperatives**

Youth can support each other by forming local cooperatives to generate and manage funds, creating agromarkets (online and on site), forming local working groups for mentorship, and embracing the advantages of information and communications technology (ICT). Forming groups may prove to be particularly important to support postproduction activities and to enable the creation of functional value chains.

► **Create networks**

Youth networks including online networks are very useful, and can also serve as a link between young agripreneurs and government authorities and agencies.

Examples of existing networks are YPARD and YALI:

The **YALI Network** (Young African Leaders Initiative) offers online courses on various topics (environment, business, leadership, etc). In addition, the members in the network come from all across Africa and have the opportunity to share expertise among themselves. The network also selects young candidates to participate in the Mandela Washington Fellowship whereby they study business and entrepreneurship.

The **YPARD Ghana** chapter recently organized an Agribusiness Networking Cocktail to bring together various companies and organizations in agriculture and agribusiness. The event is part of a programme called Farmers Connect under the Future Farmers Initiative (FFI), designed by YPARD Ghana and its partners. All drinks, meat and event items were sourced locally from young agripreneurs. During the cocktail, Goat Master was given the opportunity to serve his goat kebab to the staff of BEIGE, one of the leading investment companies in Ghana.



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Networking should be pursued also by attending agricultural days, workshops, seminars and conferences.

Other initiatives for youth to support each other include:

- **Young farmers forums:** for knowledge-sharing awareness campaigns and creating partnerships through Young Farmers Clubs (YFCs).
- **Peer-to-peer youth technical advisory clubs and associations:** to encourage youth to join forces in common interest groups based on their area of interest (livestock, crop farming, etc.) in order to help create "accountability partners" among themselves.
- **Study tours:** to develop youth-driven solutions to meet the needs of agribusiness value chain actors and those of their peer groups. The solutions can include capacity development, technology pipelining, business development, enterprise development, and input and output market development, as well as business modelling.
- **Peer-to-peer saving and investment clubs:** to kick-start enterprises with high potential for growth and development. This will attract joint investment options, equity, credit and thus increase the bankability of youth-related enterprises, leading to more employment opportunities.

4. What enabling environment is needed to ensure sustainability of youth in agriculture capacity development initiatives?

Many of the challenges and suggestions shared by participants have to do with the social, economic and cultural context encountered by agriculture in Africa.

"The greatest challenge youth face after going through youth in agriculture capacity development is finding a place to anchor their interventions." (James Aucha, Kenya)

The elements that can combine to create an enabling environment to ensure sustainability of initiatives of youth in agriculture are the following:

- **Government policies:** These should remove obstacles to youth participation and investment in the entire agriculture value chain, by promoting youth agripreneurs and allowing SMEs in agriculture to grow; by granting youth access to markets and agro-inputs; and by making it easy for youth to participate in decision-making, planning and implementation processes.
- **A favourable financial and institutional environment:** This should be favoured by government guarantees that enable youth to access financial services, especially

for small start-ups and young smallholders. It was suggested that appropriate funds be developed for youth in agriculture that consider the specificities and challenges of the sector, and also that taxes be reduced for agro-inputs for youth starting out in agriculture.

- ▶ **Infrastructure development**, including development of rural areas to facilitate easy access to markets and to areas where agricultural production is taking place.
- ▶ **Listening to the voices of youth:** Youth should be involved in policy dialogue and in agricultural consultations and related decisions that affect them. Too often young people's voices are not heard during the policy process, and so their complex and multifaceted needs are not met. Policies often fail to account for the heterogeneity of youth, and so do not provide them with effective support.

"It is just unfortunate that Africa's youth are virtually left out of these policy and programme considerations in the agriculture sector by their country leaders." (Denye Ronald, Uganda)

- ▶ It was also suggested to develop guidelines and indicators for **monitoring youth involvement** in agriculture in order to document impacts and lessons learned.

▶ **More mentors and role models**

"To engage more youth in agriculture and to ensure sustainability of CD initiatives, we need to have more mentors and role models in agriculture who can inspire the younger generation to stay in agriculture." (Innocent Chamisa, Italy)

- ▶ **Improving the image of agriculture:** In most of African society, agriculture is perceived as second-class compared with the white-collar job sector, thus discouraging youth from getting involved in practical agriculture. Improving the image of agriculture will depend on the cultural and social environment for youth in rural areas. Young farmers and agripreneurs should be socially, intellectually and financially engaged with other farmers, processors, distributors, vendors, researchers, restaurateurs, and all food chain actors; they cannot be perceived as isolated people hidden in rural locales.

"A strategy paper drawn by the Ministry of Agriculture (Kenya Youth Agribusiness Strategy 2017–2021) launched in July identifies 'youth negative perception' towards agriculture as the biggest impediment to implementing agribusiness in Kenya." (Shadrack Agaki, Kenya)

5. Is there a role for modern technologies, including information and communication technology, in sustaining capacity development initiatives?

Modern technologies including ICT have a fundamental role to play in making agriculture sustainable and attractive. Agriculture and educated farmers need them, and this is especially true for young farmers and agripreneurs. ICT can also be used for training and post-CD support.

- ▶ **Support networking:** Modern technologies enable youth agripreneurs to establish online platforms such as mailing lists, Facebook groups, WhatsApp groups and mobile apps to stay in touch with each other and facilitate information/knowledge sharing on modern agricultural technologies, experiences and good practices. Examples include CTA's Web2forDev training and Youth ARDYIS mailing lists.
- ▶ **Platforms for lifelong learning:** Online courses and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) help support personal development.
- ▶ **Mentorship:** Online platforms allow for mentorship and coaching, including virtual interaction with peers and experts.
- ▶ **Access to information:** ICT-based information and e-advisory services (i.e. SMS-based alert systems, mobile apps, etc.) facilitate access to information on outbreaks of pests and diseases, weather information, market information services, financial services, e-extension services, etc.

- ▶ **Access to innovations:** Modern technologies provide easy access to information about research, available agricultural technologies (i.e. new varieties of seeds), and other data and tools that are relevant to youth entrepreneurship initiatives.

- ▶ **Business opportunities:** Modern technologies offer business opportunities to youth agripreneurs and access to distant markets/clients for their products and services.

- ▶ **Support for on-farm activities:** ICT (especially Apps) provides opportunities for on-farm systems to collect and process socio-economic and agronomic data (i.e. daily water requirements, starch content, moisture content, etc.) useful to the running of the business.

- ▶ **Awareness raising:** Modern technologies help mobilize other youths who are not already beneficiaries.

"This discussion is so significant because we are able to deliberate and analyse issues that are affecting everybody across the globe. In this forum we have learned a lot from each other's views and opinions on issues that are discussed here from different country perspectives, and this is possible because of ICT." (Aminata Fatmata, Sierra Leone)

Conclusions

Sustaining the impact of capacity development initiatives for African youth in agriculture will depend on several factors. Foremost among these is how African governments address the challenges preventing youth from having easy access to land, finance and markets, and whether they engage with youth and listen to their input in order to support them effectively. In addition:

- ▶ Governments and development partners should **move away from isolated, one-off CD activities** towards interventions that continue over time, include post-CD support (coaching, mentoring, business incubators, etc.), and integrate **tracking and measuring of the impacts**.
- ▶ Capacity development interventions should be based on real needs identified through **assessment of capacity gaps and needs** of youth already engaged in agriculture or those considering entering the sector, and taking into account the heterogeneity of youth and their complex and multifaceted needs.
- ▶ Capacity development interventions and follow-up support should always include **business skills** training alongside technical training.
- ▶ **Easy and ready access for youth to appropriate knowledge**, information and government services is critical to helping them mitigate the challenges they face after participating in CD activities.

- ▶ Youth participating in CD interventions should be **encouraged to form associations, forums**, etc. to support and help each other.
- ▶ Governments, development partners and youth should fully leverage the opportunities presented by **modern technologies and ICT** to provide and sustain post-CD support to youth in agriculture.
- ▶ Supporting a **positive image of the agriculture sector** is important to making agricultural work attractive and maintaining high motivation after CD initiatives are finished; incentives, contests, prizes and recognition systems can help in this regard.

Several CD initiatives targeting youth in agriculture in Africa have already taken place, and many more are underway. However, the discussion highlighted that documentation on lessons and good practices from these initiatives is largely missing. There is also an absence of a platform or forum for development partners to share information, success stories, lessons learned and good practices on capacity development interventions targeting youth in agriculture in Africa. Establishing such a platform would go a long way towards sustaining the impact of capacity development initiatives for African youth in agriculture.

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