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GREEN JOBS IN AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS: SUPPORTING YOUTH IN DRIVING TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

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Addressing the root causes of biodiversity loss and environmental challenges in agri-food systems, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its recovery, must include not only environmental sustainability and protection of natural resources, but also access to environmentally-friendly employment for present and future generations, paving the way for intergenerational transformative change in our society.

Agri-food systems must tackle socio-economic and environmental impacts while meeting the demands of a growing world population. Should the world fail to address this, young people will be particularly affected in the short and long term. In 2019, nearly 68 million youth are identified as unemployed and unemployed young women outnumber young men two to one. Youth are among those whose livelihoods are most vulnerable to global crises, including biodiversity loss and the COVID-19 pandemic³. Young workers are often the first to be let go⁴, with COVID-19 likely to exacerbate unemployment, job insecurity, unequal pay and access to land and financial resources. Concurrently, youth is driving international debates about climate change, environmental protection, or natural resources' sustainable use. Green and resilient agri-food systems contribute to food security, creating employment and sustaining livelihoods. They produce nutritious food with more socio-economic benefits and less environmental harm⁵. As transformative change to fight biodiversity loss requires an inclusive approach and greening agricultural value chains, youth empowerment in this sector will help reach the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

DID YOU KNOW?

Today's youth generation is the largest in history?¹ In 2019, 1.2 billion people were aged between 15 and 24 and an estimated 1 billion of this age group reside in developing countries. 88% of the latter live in rural areas². In Africa, three-quarters of the population is below 35.

Cover photo
Young person holding a "Green jobs" board at a demonstration.

1. FROM POLICY TO IMPLEMENTATION

INTEGRATION OF YOUTH IN GLOBAL PROCESSES

Young people increasingly recognize the centrality of environmental challenges and their implications for climate, human health and food systems and are in the frontline of advocacy for them. Youth-led campaigns, including the ‘School Strikes for Climate’, ‘Fridays for Future’ and ‘Youth4Nature’, have mobilized millions to demand more ambitious policies, strategies, programmes, and their proper implementation⁶. International networks such as the Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPARD) or the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN) advocate for opportunities that strengthen youth’s contribution to achieving sustainable food systems globally.

Nevertheless, youth voices are yet to receive adequate attention in policymaking and implementation, particularly in agricultural and food policy dialogues. Rural youth are significantly affected by environmental disruptions, as most of them rely on agriculture, one of the sectors most vulnerable to climate change and degradation of natural resources. At the same time, youth, especially young women, are often invisible in debates on emerging issues and solutions. Bridging the gap between acknowledging young people’s voices and concrete youth-oriented policies and actions – from education to job market reform and empowerment – will be instrumental in reversing these trends.

The integration of youth in global and national governance will better reflect the aspirations of present and future generations and cultivate the innovative ideas and solutions they bring. Now is the time that youth be empowered, including them in national delegations and giving them space to express their ambitions. Support should be provided to the development of youth capacities to effectively engage in policy platforms, including accompanying the coordination of views by youth themselves and their organizations. Rural youth can be further engaged and empowered through collaborative action and networking at local or community levels. It is worth to recognize that digital civil engagement is another viable option to increase youth participation in policy dialogues.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND GREEN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

A survey conducted in the European Union shows that youth identified a shortcoming of existing education about climate change, environment, and eco-friendly behaviours⁷. Around 30,000 students from 400 higher educational institutions started a movement for “ecological awakening”⁸. They envision a world where economic activities recognize planetary limits and environmental health. Following

observations of an increasing skills mismatch in the labour market, the students advocate for focused professional training and employment. Training opportunities that enhance readiness to engage in environmentally conscious employment and activities after graduation are desired, and responding to this aspiration can drive a Green economic shift.

Investments in environment-positive actions must be accompanied skills-training for the younger generation, to equip them to rise to the challenges of the future of work. Technical and vocational education and training meeting emerging environmental challenges must be developed and strengthened, for instance by integrating thematic courses and learning modules into existing curricula.

“ONLY IF WE ADDRESS THE SYSTEMIC INEQUALITIES BETWEEN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS, BETWEEN THE GLOBAL NORTH AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH, CAN WE CREATE GREEN JOBS FOR YOUTH AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.”

Melina Sakyama, co-Founder, Global Youth Biodiversity Network

In rural areas, capacity development for green innovation can accompany farmers, especially younger ones, to take up climate-smart and biodiversity-friendly agricultural practices. Such type of trainings can be conducted through Farmer Field Schools and extension and advisory services. Meanwhile, environmental education and skills development can be accelerated by participative and inclusive digital tools and technologies, including e-learning programmes, online information sharing and knowledge exchange, and Information and communications technology (ICT). Innovative extension services should be considered when such tools, technologies or platforms are not available, especially for rural young women and men.

CREATING GREEN JOBS IN AGRI-FOOD SYSTEM

In 2019, FAO launched a four-and-a-half-year global project targeting 600 rural and urban youth in Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, and Timor Leste. It will provide them with capacity development in green agriculture, green energy, and green waste management sectors; and other transferrable soft skills. The youth participants will then identify a local issue and propose green solutions that can be applied to address the problem while benefitting employment and creating small enterprises. Participants with selected proposals will be offered a 2-year business start-up opportunity with seed money or participate in Public Employment Programmes. Project results will be used to develop national (and possibly regional) strategies for youth employment, agricultural and rural development, and transition models to the Green Economy.



Green jobs also are part of youth claims and mobilization for environment.

⁹ UNEP (2011) Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication. <https://cutt.ly/lhHHfJE>

¹⁰ Read Mobilization of Business (#15) <https://cutt.ly/ejWRO6N>

¹¹ Around 40% of global employment, 80% of these are in agriculture, 5% in forestry and fishing, and 6% in food, drink and tobacco. ILO (2018) Greening with Jobs. World Employment Social Outlook. <https://cutt.ly/ehHHxZW>

¹² UNEP (2008) Green Jobs: Towards decent work in a sustainable, low-carbon world. <https://cutt.ly/pjIUXdU>

¹³ UNEP (2011) Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication. <https://cutt.ly/lhHHfJE>

¹⁴ <https://cutt.ly/zIEfbHA>

¹⁵ UNEP (2008) Green Jobs: Towards decent work in a sustainable, low-carbon world. <https://cutt.ly/FhHDLNF>

¹⁶ ILO (2018) Greening with Jobs. World Employment Social Outlook. <https://cutt.ly/ehHHxZW>

¹⁷ Read Expertise on Mainstreaming (soon available). <https://cutt.ly/WjWTWX7>

Nowadays the society is becoming more conscious about the need to transition to a Green Economy that improves human well-being and social equity while significantly reducing environmental risks and considering ecological scarcity⁹. ‘Green jobs’ profiles are increasing, and more and more considered as cornerstones of future workplaces and employment pools¹⁰. In 2014, around 1.2 billion jobs were directly dependent on ecosystem services¹¹. The sustainable management and conservation of ecosystem and biodiversity has high potential to create employment in the areas of land rehabilitation, forest restoration, combating soil erosion, and promotion of eco-tourism and agroforestry, etc. Sectors like agriculture and forestry, with a more direct integrative relationship with nature, are proved to generate more jobs in a Green paradigm than business-as-usual¹². Creating green jobs in agri-food systems is particularly necessary as it can provide diverse economic opportunities while investing in the natural capital that many poor rural communities depend on. Green jobs in agriculture are expected to yield a 52-59% increase in primary-sector employment and a 20%¹³ increase in global Gross Domestic Product by 2050¹⁴. The forestry sector alone can generate more than 86 million green jobs¹⁵.

Agriculture-related green jobs increase productivity while consuming fewer natural resources, with limited negative impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems. Green jobs can not only be generated in food systems, but also other economic sectors and industries associated with production, processing, packaging, distribution, transportation, and provision of specific inputs¹⁵.

A green job is a role in agriculture, manufacturing, research and development, administrative, and service activities that contribute substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality. Agriculture-related green jobs encompass food production through, e.g., organic farming, conservation agriculture, agroforestry, livestock management, and aquaculture. But they also mobilize the sectors including: composting of food waste and agro-processing; energy production from renewable sources (production of biogas from animal manure or crop residues); certification and eco-labeling; landscape maintenance and biodiversity management and protection; and others such as eco-/agri-tourism.

Besides wage employment, green jobs also represent innovative business opportunities, grouped into two main categories:

- + Enterprises producing environmental goods and services, e.g., ecosystem services and clean energy;
- + Enterprises greening their activities by changing their products and/or processes to achieve environmental sustainability (e.g., organic food products).

A growing number of young “agripreneurs” are identifying local food system challenges and offer green solutions, for instance, youth-led organic farms and eco-/agri-tourism enterprises.

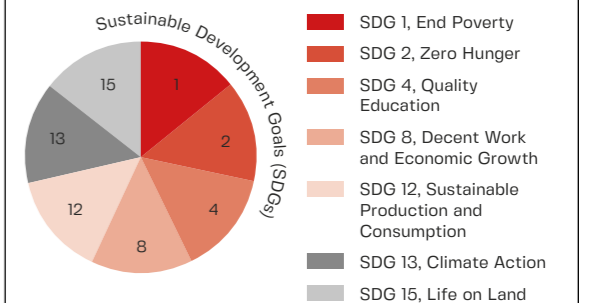
Youth Enterprise Services (YES) Malawi supports young graduates in establishing climate smart small and medium agri-entreprises (SMEs). Since 2012, 250 graduates have been accompanied with mentorship and business support services. One example is that of Rowland Kasewentha who set up RoRiKA enterprise, specialized in rearing local chickens; and hatching day-old chicks. His 720-egg incubator and hatcher uses homemade brooders, which consume 52% less energy than conventional infrared-bulb brooders. His vision is to expand to a 5000-egg incubator capable of producing 1000 day-old-chicks weekly. The poultry droppings are composted and used in vegetable production. These vegetables are sold to community members – with Rowland, and one youth whom he employs, making deliveries by foot or bicycle. During the COVID-19 pandemic, RoRiKA moved to digital advertising and e-payments.

YES Malawi is working with Rowland, and other innovative youth like him, to help them expand their climate-smart, circular agri-SMEs to promote sustainable youth agri-entrepreneurship and employment. Mariam Kadzamura, Founder - Youth Enterprise Services (YES) Malawi.

2. A FORWARD-LOOKING APPROACH TO EMPLOYMENT, YOUTH AND NATURE

DRIVING TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE THROUGH GREEN JOBS FOR YOUTH

Green Jobs represent one of the few approaches with relevance across social, economic and ecological dimensions to address some of the multiple, interconnected contemporary challenges. Promoting them and their related green skills among youth will contribute to achieving several SDGs:



It is crucial to include and empower young people in green agri-food systems and value chains. They are eager to acquire and uptake green, innovative knowledge, technologies, and solutions, and to develop sustainable agri-business models that will drive transformative outcomes. The strong demand and advocacy for environmental action that young people lead can create a societal movement leading to the transition to sustainable production and consumption¹⁶ patterns, and a greener agri-



According to ILO, 24 million new jobs will be created under the Green economy at global scale by 2030 if the right policies are put in place.

food sector. Green jobs for youth, especially in rural settings, require cross-sectoral policy coherence. Ministries, including those addressing agriculture, the environment, education, youth affairs, finance, planning and health ¹⁷ all hold relevant contributions to this agenda, including via financial and tax incentives and special facilitation with banks for loans. The youth should be encouraged to participate in policymaking, during the design and implementation of green employment support schemes. Holding adequate space and empowering girls and women in this process is essential.

LINKING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES (PEPS) FOR A GREEN RECOVERY

While the COVID-19 pandemic has been exacerbating youth unemployment and job insecurity worldwide, it has also reminded us and given us greater incentives to build readiness and a resilient economy, to support global citizens in coping and responding to change. During the recovery phase and beyond, it is crucial to prioritize policies and investments that stimulate the Green economy. This includes ensuring better workforce preparedness to risks, encompassing biodiversity loss, climate change and natural resource scarcity-related threats. Governments can play a critical role in promoting green skills development and the provision of assistance in terms of access to green technologies, products and equipment.

Skills development alone is not sufficient to achieve significant outcomes for the most disadvantaged groups, among which rural youth. Coherent policies that link skills development, social protection and employment or work placement should be considered. Governments and decision-makers may consider environmental policies, measures and standards within social protection and employment generation strategies, e.g., PEPs, unemployment protection schemes or cash transfer policies, which support workers facing job losses. India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2006 is an example of these combinations. A social protection and livelihood security scheme serving the rural poor was developed to preserve and restore natural resources, including water conservation, irrigation, and land. 3 billion workdays covering 59 million households were generated under a public works programme that guarantees at least 100 days of paid work per year to every household willing to volunteer one adult family member ¹⁸.

STRENGTHENING MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS AND INVESTMENT IN GREEN ECONOMY

Businesses that are more youth-conscious, environmentally friendly and possess innovative and sustainable business models should receive more technical guidance, capacity-building, coaching, incubation, and services. These enterprises will contribute to reaching environmental and sustainable development goals by their shift to Green economy. A proactive and enabling environment where access to land, innovative financing mechanisms (including carbon finance and micro-finance), and other services should be strengthened. Policies that facilitate the development of such businesses and encourage innovations are a key factor in ensuring efforts are successful. The transformation towards sustainable agricultural practices and the creation of green jobs requires significant investments from both public and private sectors. It is estimated that investing USD 100-300 billion per year in green agriculture between 2010 and 2050 ¹⁹ would result in an enhancement of soil fertility and increase in global yields of major crops, an improvement of 10% compared to business-as-usual strategies ²⁰.

Such investments could be enabled by policy and regulation reforms, as well as the facilitation of access to banking systems, green subsidies and tax incentives. Development financial institutions at global and national levels ²² can also play an important role in supporting the growth and establishment of this Green Economy. Meanwhile, investment in research and extension that promote green agricultural technologies and practices should be accelerated, underpinned by a sound understanding of the technology's effects on nature through impact assessment, science-based policies, as well as the integration of all local stakeholders.

Transitioning to a Green Economy in agri-food systems calls for the adoption of a proactive approach for stronger participation of young people in policy and programme implementation, investment in human capital, a greater policy shift towards the creation of green jobs and a strong multi-stakeholder partnership. Youth's vision for a sustainable future and willingness to act will be the cornerstone of a green agri-food sector for Nature and People.

¹⁸ ILO (2011) Information Note: Promoting Decent Work in a Green Economy. <https://cutt.ly/HhHXiTs>
¹⁹ Green Economy Report. <https://cutt.ly/WjIEEmc>
²⁰ UNEP (2011), Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication. <https://cutt.ly/lhHHfjE>
²¹ Read Expertise on Resource Mobilization (#8). <https://cutt.ly/qjWYgTk> and Expertise on greening finance sector (#10): <https://cutt.ly/eIZUeCl>
²² For instance, the International Development Finance Club (IDFC). <https://cutt.ly/WjkBjsJ>

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