



# Good practices Integrated Country Approach (ICA) for boosting decent jobs for youth in the agrifood system

**Youth-inclusive policymaking: The National Strategy for Youth Employment in Agriculture (NSYEA) of Uganda**

## Introduction

This good practice describes the successful example of a youth-inclusive policymaking process supported in Uganda between 2015 and 2022 under the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Integrated Country Approach (ICA) for boosting decent jobs for youth in the agrifood system. The document describes the different steps that led to the adoption of a youth-targeted strategy for employment in the agricultural sector in 2017 and the institutional mechanisms set to guarantee the active engagement of multiple stakeholders in the process, starting from the youth themselves. Specific success factors and lessons learned are also emphasized, including the role of FAO as neutral facilitator, the empowerment and active engagement of youth organizations and the need for adequate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of policy frameworks and commitments. Finally, the documents suggests step-by-step tips for youth-inclusive policymaking around agrifood systems development that emerged from the Uganda experience, but are considered globally relevant and highly replicable.



## The situation:

In Uganda, the agricultural sector offers many employment and livelihoods opportunities, with several of them still untapped. The sector already employs approximately 38 percent of youth aged 18–30 years old (UBOS, 2018). The Government has prioritized agriculture in its National Development Plan (NDPIII), through the Agro-Industrialization programme, as one of the key economic sectors in the country's transition into a middle-income country and has emphasized the importance of value addition, commercialization, and building resilience to climate change. Both domestic and regional demand for agriculture commodities is rising, notably for more processed food and protein due to the rapidly increasing urban population (WB, 2018). By 2050, about 90 million people will live in Uganda (UNDESA, 2019), providing massive opportunities for the country's agrifood system. Already, food processing represents 40 percent of manufacturing activity and diverse agribusinesses, particularly along the dairy, maize and coffee value chains, have developed in recent years, linking farmers to inputs, markets and finance (WB, 2018).

Nevertheless, Ugandan youth, who represents one third of the population, face several challenges that limit their potential for productively engaging in the agricultural sector. This is due to the overall high levels of informality, low remuneration and returns, poor working conditions, limited access to land and other productive resources, limited business development services and affordable financing for agribusiness start-ups, compounded with

specific age-related challenges for being a marginalized and resource-poor group. Over 13 percent of youth are unemployed and a much bigger share (40.7 percent) are Neither in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), which is inflated by the 31 percent of youth engaging exclusively in subsistence agriculture, most of which are not studying and are not considered economically active (UBOS, 2018).

Considering the above and the evidence of limited programmatic coherence between different youth interventions in the country (FAO, 2017), it is crucial to strengthen the policy and programmatic response and coordination around youth employment in agrifood systems, while engaging youth representatives in policymaking, as well as in programme implementation and monitoring.

### How the issues were addressed:

Since 2015, FAO through its Integrated Country Approach (ICA) for boosting decent jobs for youth in the agrifood system, primarily funded by Sweden, has committed to strengthen the programmatic response around youth employment in agriculture in Uganda. In particular, FAO fostered a multi-sectoral and youth-inclusive approach for policy making and programming.

Building on the evidence generated through multiple assessments,<sup>1</sup> FAO supported the Ugandan Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) in the development of the National Strategy for Youth Employment in Agriculture (NSYEA), adopted in 2017 for the period 2017–2022 (see Box 1).

As first step, a **multi-stakeholder Technical Working Group (TWG)** was established to guide the vision, strategic objectives and implementation arrangements of the NSYEA. The TWG, which is still active to date, has formal Terms of Reference and engages around 20 stakeholders,<sup>2</sup> including Ministries of agriculture and labour, United Nations (UN) agencies, national planning and investment authorities, the Uganda Development Bank, farmers' organizations and youth organizations. The active engagement of youth organizations - namely the **Young Farmers Champions Network (YOFCHAN)** and the **Young Farmers' Federation of Uganda (UNYFA)** - was one of the driving characteristics of the process in order to enable youth representatives to bring their voices to the table and act as future "guardians"

<sup>1</sup> The studies conducted include: i. a legal assessment of the application of international labour standards in agriculture and rural areas with a focus on rural youth (unpublished); (ii) a study on the employment status of young adolescents aged 14–17 in agriculture; (link available here) and (iii) an analysis of existing approaches for youth in agriculture in Uganda (link available here).

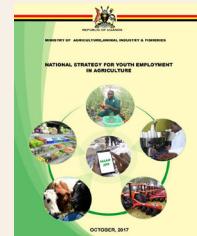
<sup>2</sup> Members of the TWG include: Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF), the National Farmers Leadership Centre (NFLC), Uganda Development Bank (UDB), National Planning Authority (NPA), Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), Uganda Investment Authority (UIA), Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS)/Directorate of Agriculture and Environment Statistics, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)/Diaspora Department, Office of Prime Minister (OPM), Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC), Makerere University, CURAD, Uganda Industrial Research Institute (URI), Farmer Organizations and Youth Organizations (UNFFE, YOFCHAN and UNYFA), FAO and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

of the Strategy implementation and related commitments. In addition, **regional stakeholder consultations** with youth farmers and organizations, as well as a national validation workshop, were organized to guarantee a more informed and participatory process.

### BOX 1: THE NSYEA IN

#### A NUTSHELL

**Vision statement** - Economically empowered youth from gainful employment in agriculture



**Mission statement** - Enhancing youth employment by reducing deterrents to decent and gainful employment

**Goal** - Increased and sustainable youth employment in the agriculture sector at various levels of the value chain

#### NSYEA Thematic areas:

1. Ensuring an enabling environment for youth employment in agriculture.
2. Supporting youth oriented agricultural extension.
3. Improving youth education and learning.
4. Supporting youth entrepreneurship.
5. Adaptation to and mitigation of agribusiness risk and uncertainties.

Following the launch of the NSYEA in 2017, under the leadership of MAAIF, and with FAO's support, the **TWG continued to facilitate consultations and partnerships on youth employment in agriculture during the NSYEA implementation**. Being empowered as agents of change, youth representatives and organizations played a leading role in several programmes aligned with the NSYEA and actively participated in related policy dialogues.

In 2020, to monitor the NSYEA progress and inform the overall debate around youth in agrifood systems, FAO supported a mid-term assessment of the NSYEA implementation, undertaken in partnership with the Consortium for enhancing University Responsiveness to Agribusiness Development Limited (CURAD), the Uganda National Farmers Federation (UNFFE) and youth organizations. Results from this assessment include an estimation of the jobs created in 2020–2021 by the interventions linked to the NSYEA (as presented in the next section on impact), as well as evidence of geographical, gender, age and thematic concentration, which showed in particular the underrepresentation of young women among the beneficiaries (only 21.4 percent being female compared to 78.6 percent male).<sup>3</sup> An interactive public online database to map NSYEA

<sup>3</sup> The NSYEA mid-term assessment observed that Eastern Uganda had the highest concentration of interventions at 41.5 percent, followed by Southwest at 28 percent, Midwest at 19 percent, Central at 6 percent, and West Nile and North at 3 percent. As for the nature of the support offered, the results indicate that most of the interventions supported youth with technical agricultural production skills (13.4 percent) followed by agri-entrepreneurship skills (11.2 percent), with the least supported areas being access to legal services, natural resources, Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) and other decent work related aspects (all at 0.4 percent). In terms of beneficiaries, 78.6 percent of the beneficiaries were male while 21.4 percent were female; 90 percent were older youth 18–35 years and only 10 percent younger youth 15–17 years.

interventions was developed by Ensibuuko, a Uganda-based software company, as well as an **Accelerated Action plan 2022–2023** focused on those areas of the NSYEA that are lagging behind, such as youth access to productive resources and decent work. The Accelerated Action Plan covers the last year of the original NSYEA timeframe (2022), as well as a bridging year (2023), which should be dedicated to the formulation of a renewed strategy for youth engagement in the sector.

#### Impact and success factors:

Today, Uganda has a **dedicated strategy** and a youth-inclusive institutionalized coordination mechanism around youth employment in agriculture, through the multi-stakeholder NSYEA TWG, which supports the programmatic coordination and monitoring around NSYEA implementation. Further, an **Accelerated Action Plan has been developed**, as mentioned above, to accompany the bridging phase that should lead to the formulation of a renewed youth strategy after 2022. In addition, the NSYEA TWG guided the mainstreaming of youth priorities in broader agricultural development processes, such as the Uganda's National Development Plan (NDP III) Agro-Industrialization programme. As assessed by FAO during the 2021 mid-term review of the ICA project, the youth representation in policy dialogues has increased, thanks to the visibility gained through the NSYEA process, as well as the coordination and synergies between different ministries and institutions, farmers and youth organizations.

The NSYEA continues to be the reference document for different actors when planning youth interventions and MAAIF is encouraging stakeholders to refer in particular to the NSYEA Accelerated Action Plan to fill gaps in areas that are lagging behind. In line with the Strategy, multiple youth-targeted initiative linked to the NSYEA have been initiated, contributing to make the agricultural sector more attractive for young people and giving more visibility to the role of youth in the agrifood system among financial institutions, local partners, and policy makers. A total of 40 major interventions were mapped in the NSYEA progress assessment conducted by FAO and UNFFE in 2020, of which 15 are supported by the Government of Uganda, 22 by development partners, and 3 by the private sector. While the overall actual budget contribution to the NSYEA could not be confirmed, for 2020–2021, the NSYEA progress assessment estimated the job creation effect of the major interventions mapped in the NSYEA database at around 120 000 jobs, while cooperatives and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) contributed more than 1 and 2 million jobs, respectively.<sup>4</sup> While this represents a significant contribution, additional efforts seems needed

to achieve the expected NDP III targets of creating around 150 000 new jobs per year in the agriculture sector until 2025, in a country with a working population of 15 million people and where 700 000 people enter the labour market every year (NPA, 2020).

As for the success factors, the role of FAO as neutral facilitator of analysis, discussions and partnerships is considered key to the success of the NSYEA process. Further, the presence of the National Planning Authority (NPA) and key Ministries such as MAAIF and Ministry of Gender Labor and Social Development (MGLSD) in the TWG facilitated the mainstreaming of youth and related employment issues into critical policy process, such as the NDP III Agro-Industrialization programme or the National Veterinary Drug Policy. Finally, the presence of empowered youth organizations guaranteed adequate reflection of youth needs and aspirations, as well as their own visibility as actors of change.

#### Lessons learned, sustainability and replicability:

**Adequate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of policy frameworks and commitments**, such as the NSYEA, is critical and should actively engage the main target group, youth in this case, as "guardians". Facilitation of those processes by development partners such as UN Agencies is critical, since it can provide a neutral forum for analysis and discussion. A simplified and realistic M&E framework is also critical. In 2021, a revision was made by the TWG of the original NSYEA M&E Framework (2017), reducing the number of indicators from 74 to 23 and establishing an online NSYEA database for the monitoring of progress.

The **empowerment and active engagement of youth organizations** has contributed to increase their ownership of the policy process, and will contribute to the **sustainability** of the NSYEA interventions. Engaging youth organizations as services providers in development programmes was particularly successful, especially in activities related to peer-to-peer training, extension, awareness raising activities, data collection and facilitation of policy dialogues.

Further **engaging the private sector and investors in the TWG and related policy discussions** remains a pending priority. Overall, additional efforts are needed to engage the private sector more systematically in multi-stakeholder mechanisms around youth employment. While farmers' organizations and individual youth agripreneurs were systematically involved in the NSYEA TWG, the engagement of major investors and medium to large-scale firms was limited. In 2022, FAO led exchanges with the Private Sector Foundation Uganda (PSFU), the apex body for the private sector, as well as the Uganda Export Promotions Board for potential linkages, networks and collaboration on enhanced market access and access to services such as finance and agro inputs. In future, additional efforts should be made, especially in the frame of inclusive value chain development programmes,

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that development interventions and private sector employment contributions have only been "mapped" against the NSYEA and its pillars. While the existence of the NSYEA is considered to have contributed to increased awareness and guidance to stakeholders for expanding youth-targeted interventions in the sector, the direct contribution of the NSYEA itself to the decision of initiating a youth-targeted intervention was not assessed.

to facilitate public-private partnerships around youth-inclusive business models.

**Maintaining dedicated TWGs for specific policy processes might not be a sustainable option in the medium term, in the absence of external funding.** As for the NSYEA TWG, it will integrate the National Government-led Coordination Mechanism (NCM) for youth programmes, established in 2021, under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), to continue leading the coordination and monitoring of agrifood interventions targeting youth across the country.

In terms of **replicability**, the youth-inclusive NSYEA process is considered a very replicable and adaptable good practice for youth-inclusive policymaking.

The NSYEA approach translates into a clear and flexible step-by-step process (see Box 2), designed to respond to local needs. The initial assessment of youth organizations' needs and capacities, together with the setup of monitoring systems to systematically improve and adjust the process, facilitates the tailoring of the approach to different contexts or beneficiaries. Furthermore, the active engagement and empowerment of youth organizations boosts local ownership, making the initiative sustainable in the long-term.

## BOX 2: TIPS FOR YOUTH-INCLUSIVE POLICYMAKING AROUND AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT

- Identify existing youth organizations, champions and leaders active in the agrifood system and assess their capacities to actively engage in policy dialogue
- Support the identified youth organizations, champions and leaders in enhancing their leadership and representation capacities and facilitate regular opportunities for them to get visibility and engage
- Engage formally youth representatives and organizations active in the agrifood system, by giving them at least one seat in technical working groups or related mechanisms
- Make sure there is the necessary financial commitment to youth participation, which can be costly especially to integrate the views of more vulnerable rural youth both (in presence or digitally)
- Set up systems for reviewing and continuously improving the process, including to accompany youth organizations in assessing their inclusiveness of more vulnerable groups of rural youth, such as young women, youth with disabilities, Indigenous youth or less educated youth
- Engage youth organizations in the selection of indicators of youth employment strategies and programmes
- Train youth organizations in qualitative and quantitative research methods to collect data to monitor and evaluate strategies and programmes



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