

Creating Agri-food Work Opportunities for Young People in Africa

CABI youth team in Africa: Deogratus Magero, Linda Likoko, Harrison Rware, Florence Chege, Mary Bundi, Monica Kansime, Joseph Mulema, Christine Alokit, Caroline Aliamo, Lilian Owembabazi, Dora Shimbwambwa, Mariam Kadzamira

Writing and analysis support: Duncan Sones, Dannie Romney



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Word from the youth desk

Young women and men's engagement in agriculture offers a multifaceted range of benefits for various stakeholders. For the youth, participation in agriculture provides opportunities for economic empowerment through agribusiness ventures. Governments can benefit from young people's engagement involvement in agricultural service provision and input supply through enhanced farmer access to quality, effective advisory services with improved traceability of agricultural inputs. The enthusiasm and knowledge of young women and men enable them to act as local champions for change, promoting sustainable agricultural practices while supporting farmers to adopt modern technologies including digital tools. Society can reap the rewards of reduced unemployment, strengthen community development, and increase social cohesion through youth engagement in agriculture.

CABI's bold ambition for young women and men is to empower them as agents of agricultural transformation. Our youth engagement initiatives focus on enhancing their technical, entrepreneurial, and leadership skills to foster agribusiness success and strengthen youth-led & youth-serving agricultural organizations; facilitating access to critical resources such as finance and expanding market opportunities for youth-produced goods and services; leveraging digital technologies in empowering youth to lead change and innovation in the sector while strengthening their advocacy and communication skills. We continuously aim to build strategic partnerships that amplify youth voices in advocacy for policies and investments that support their meaningful engagement and influence in agriculture while fostering a positive perception of the sector.

Over the last two years, CABI has forged strategic partnerships with farmer cooperatives, government entities, private sector agribusinesses, and off-takers to facilitate meaningful youth engagement in agriculture in Africa, starting with Kenya, Uganda and Zambia. These collaborations have played a crucial role in providing youth with opportunities for training, mentorship, linkages for input and market access as well as resource mobilization. Under the PlantwisePlus program, our youth engagement initiatives have focused on empowering youth in agricultural service provision. Over 370 young people have received training and support to establish and run their own agribusinesses, offering valuable advisory, pest management and input supply services to farmers.

To facilitate ongoing learning and remote support for youth in agribusiness, we have recently launched an Entrepreneurship Course in Agribusiness on the CABI Academy, our online learning platform. We are looking forward to learning how young people can effectively engage with all the self-study modules in the Academy and how it can be used as part of our scaling strategy.



In this publication, we share with you our innovative approaches to youth engagement, findings from a survey of 40% of the young people who have participated in our programmes over the past two years and success stories from a few, as a testament of our growing impact on youth in agriculture and of the young people involved. Our programmes have enabled them to enhance their livelihoods, contribute to sustainable agriculture, and become leaders in their communities.

Enjoy the reading!

Deogratius J. Magero
Youth Engagement Manager, CABI

Executive summary

Youth agri-enterprise development

This document showcases the transformative potential of targeted agricultural training and business support for young people in lower- and middle- income economies. Since 2022, CABI has engaged youth in agribusiness projects in Kenya, Uganda and Zambia aiming to:

- Provide young women and men with essential training in technical, business, and financial literacy for agribusiness development
- Introduce them to significant roles within priority agricultural value chains to provide agricultural services to farmers
- Facilitate social capital building to enable the young people to access critical resources such as finance and markets, allowing them to establish micro-enterprises with potential for growth
- Support local farming communities with access to advice, farm inputs and farm services which help farmers to grow more, better and safer crops in line with market expectations

Approach to support agri-enterprise development

- Scoping of market needs and niche opportunities
- Co-creation with the young people, local communities, farmer cooperatives and exiting agribusinesses to tailor services and training methods
- Skills development in technical, business and financial areas
- Linkages support, connecting young people to markets, mentorship and financial resources
- Continuous self-paced learning through the CABI Academy

Results

A survey of 146 program participants from Kenya and Uganda showed that 85% were economically active of which 39% were earning more than \$96/month. Many of the young participants are now running successful micro-enterprises, accessing paid employment and playing increasing roles in civil society. The 146 young people providing feedback had provided mentoring support in agribusiness and production to over nine hundred other young men and women.

Future direction

- Explore effective measures of success, including progress towards a living wage for young people in rural settings
- Scale up successful interventions and enhance technical, agribusiness and financial literacy training through digital platforms, including CABI Academy, with content designed for young entrepreneurs
- Launch of CABI's Youth Engagement Strategy 2024/2027: Empowering Youth as Agents of Agricultural Transformation

Background

Young women and men in Africa

The youth population in Africa is vast, with nearly a billion people under the age of 35 from a total of 1.4 billion in 2020. Despite a growing GDP, economic growth across Sub-Saharan Africa, including 8% growth in Rwanda, is not sufficient to absorb the young labour force entering the market each year. A quarter of young people remain not engaged in education, employment, or training and only half are employed. Despite common misconceptions, educated youths are increasingly attracted to agriculture due to opportunities in smart farming and value-added activities. Governments, education and training providers, and financial institutions need to support these opportunities with appropriate policies, education, and financing options. Together this can help ensure young people's opportunities grow together with the agri-food sector.

Key statistics on agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa

- 14% of the GDP¹ is derived from agriculture
- Over 60% of Africa's population live in rural areas and are dependent on smallholder or family farming²
- Rapid urbanization is shaping the future of food demand and agricultural market structures across the continent³
- Sub-Saharan Africa imports about \$15 billion in food crops annually, mainly from Asia & South America⁴

Concerted action is needed for effective policy changes to significantly enhance youth engagement in agriculture:

- Governments need to create policies that foster job creation and support economic diversification
- Education and training providers need to offer diverse and high-quality agricultural training tailored to market demand
- Financial institutions should facilitate access to credit, recognizing the challenges young people face in securing loans

¹ <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/reports/agriculture-in-africa-2021-focus-report-crr>

² <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/reports/agriculture-in-africa-2021-focus-report-crr>

³ <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/knowledge/-/publication/the-future-of-agriculture-in-sub-saharan-africa>

⁴ <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/agriculture/our-insights/winning-in-africas-agricultural-market>

Our approach

The agri-food sector offers opportunities to create livelihoods for young people. Our youth engagement strategy for agribusiness development involves several key steps:

- **Market Scoping:** This involves assessing the needs and niche opportunities in local markets to tailor services effectively
- **Co-creation with Local Groups:** Working with farmer cooperatives and youth groups to co-develop projects that address specific local needs and interests
- **Skills Development Programmes:** Offering training in technical, business, and financial skills, supplemented with mentoring and soft skills like communication to enhance youth capacity
- **Creating Linkages:** Facilitating connections between young people and farmers, markets, financial services, and established agribusinesses
- **Build capacity of youth as peer mentors:** Offering a sub-set of trainees training as mentors to support scaling of skills and opportunities in agribusiness

The process also emphasizes safeguarding participants against risks and considering the unique challenges of different group members, including young women, those with disabilities and from marginalized backgrounds. To support the growth of youth-led agri-micro-enterprises, CABI is establishing partnerships to facilitate access to critical resources such as inputs and financing in form of small grants and loans, acknowledging the difficulties young people face in securing larger loans due to lack of collateral.

Early lessons and findings

Since 2022, activities have been taking place in Africa to enhance agricultural training and agribusiness development support for over 370 young men and women. These initiatives in Kenya, Uganda and Zambia, focus on integrating young people into significant roles within the agri-food sector. By combining technical plant health knowledge with business, and financial literacy training, and facilitating access to markets for their services and produce, we aim to empower youth to start micro-enterprises and support smallholder farmers. In 2024, 146 of the participants completed an online survey designed to understand the scale and diversity of the income generation activities, and the reach and impact the young people were having on local farmers. The survey provides a snapshot of activities in a month and income generated from all sources related to the training, with the caveat that the month in which data was recorded may not have been typical.

Of those completing the survey, 85% were economically active, and the data below is based on this group, with the exception of data on offering training to others where young people who were not economically active were heavily involved in supporting others.

Who identifies as a youth/young man or young woman?

The programme targets young people aged 18-35, aligning with the African Union Youth Charter but expanding the UN's typical age range of 15-24. The programme noted that married individuals or those with children often do not self-identify as youth. Recognizing the diversity within this age group, which varies by gender, social background, urban or rural location, education and skills level, the need for tailored communication was clear, with creatively named interventions to engage all eligible participants effectively. This approach aims to address the unique circumstances of each subgroup within the youth demographic.

Segmenting the young agripreneurs

One way the survey data can be segmented is by level of education. Women participants in particular were more likely to have undergone further education.

Level of education reached	Male participants	Female participants
University	16%	29%
Technical vocational school	34%	38%
High school	48%	30%
Primary school	2%	3%

Definitions of success

Young people often define successful engagement with enterprise programmes differently to the designers. Engagement in an agri-food enterprise programme may be driven by an interest in working in the sector long-term. It may be a means to facilitate funding for further education or training. It may result in access to full-time employment (due to their increased employability and confidence), or it may result in a transition to a non-agri-food business.

One way of evaluating the success of the youth programme is to consider progress towards achieving a rural or urban living wage. This can be a concrete metric to assess the impact of interventions on economic stability for young participants.

The Global Living Wage Coalition's⁵ 2023 figures suggest a rural living wage of approximately \$218 per month in Kenya and \$228 in Uganda. With inflation at 5% in May 2024, \$238 was considered an appropriate figure for an East African rural living wage. This measure reflects the necessary income to maintain a reasonable standard of living and withstand financial shocks.

Towards a living wage

Of the 85% respondents that were economically active, 19% are already earning over \$238/month. 39% of trainees are already earning over \$96/month

In contrast, a 2022 Shujaaz⁶ survey in Kenya found the average monthly income for full-time young entrepreneurs in all sectors, was around \$96/month

Earnings category ⁷	% of those reporting	% by gender	% by education level	% from each country	Sales as % of income by gender	
Thriving (>\$250/month)	18%	17% Female 18% Male	25% University 18% Technical/ Vocational 15% High school	10% Kenya 17% Uganda	53% Female 44% Male	
Striving (\$150-250/month)	10%	14% Female 9% Male	16% University 14% Technical/ Vocational 6% High school	6% Kenya 13% Uganda	63% Female 56% Male	
Surviving/ contributing to family budget \$75-149/month	23%	28% Female 21% Male	24% University 8% Technical/ Vocational 23% High school 50% Primary	10% Kenya 32% Uganda	41% Female 40% Male	
Struggling/ contributing to family budget	\$ 50-74/ month	12%	17% Female 10% Male	16% University 11% Technical/ Vocational 9% High school 50% Primary	14% Kenya 11% Uganda	15% Female 38% Male
	\$1-49/ month	37%	25% Female 42% Male	20% University 34% Technical/ Vocational 47% High school 1% Primary	49% Kenya 22% Uganda	15% Female 09% Male

Future Direction: These results are promising for early-stage micro-enterprises and the programme will explore further “progress towards a living wage” as an impact indicator.

⁵ <https://www.globallivingwage.org/living-wage-benchmarks/living-wage-for-rural-kericho-kenya/>

⁶ <https://kenyanyouthtrends.shujaazinc.com/income-and-work>

⁷ Categories proposed by D Sones

Agribusiness portfolio development

Specific agricultural services and inputs are associated with specific parts of the production cycle. To succeed in getting a year-round income, the young men and women need to develop a portfolio of services. More than 60% of respondents said they provided 4 or more services.

Number of services	0-3	4-6	7-9	10 plus
Number of trainees	53 (36%)	40 (28%)	26 (18%)	26 (18%)

The table below presents seven categories of micro-enterprises and a catchall category for non-agricultural work.

Farming	Farmer services					Other enterprise	
Crop/ livestock production	Input supply	Financial services	Information services	Specialist labour	Market access	Value addition / retail	Non-agribusiness diversification
Enterprise	Can be jobs or enterprises					Enterprise	

Service portfolios developed by the trainees were mainly focused on information, input supply and specialist labour

Pest and disease services (information)	98%
Soil services (information)	65%
Input sales (input supply)	43%
Post harvest (specialist labour)	39%
Seed selection and varieties (information)	27%
Agronomic management practices guidance (information)	21%
Nursery bed management (specialist labour)	13%
Using agricultural equipment (e.g. plough, irrigation) (specialist labour)	12%
Growing local seeds (input supply)	7%

It appears that the trainees are much more likely to develop a wide portfolio of businesses in a community they know, than spread out to wider geographic areas.

How the training empowered young women and men

Agribusiness models for youth

Business opportunities for youth in agriculture were broadly categorised into:

- **Enterprises in production** of commodities/crop/livestock and inputs such as biological control products, organic fertilizers, seeds etc.
- **Enterprises in service provision** to farmers as independent service providers or affiliated with larger agribusinesses. Services include advisory, input supply, spray application, orchard management, IPM etc.
- **Enterprises along value chains post production** such as post-harvest handling, aggregation, agro-processing, packaging, logistics, marketing of produce among others

Young people earn income from service provision in various ways including:

- **Direct payments by farmers:** The trainees build their own clientele amongst farmers and are paid directly, sometimes for work provided, sometimes in the form of a transport fee
- **Payment via affiliated entities:** The trainees are affiliated to farmer cooperatives/groups/businesses where they serve the member farmers and are paid by the cooperative/group/business for services rendered to their members
- **Payment through commissions:** The trained youth earn commission from acting as intermediaries between farmers and businesses. For example, supporting input sales, aggregation of demand for mechanisation and aggregation of produce among others

Economic development

The training programme has empowered young men and women to become entrepreneurs in different agricultural value chains. The trainees are blending advice, service provision, and sales to enhance their incomes. These trainees can receive external validation through job offers and awards, like Bonny Kimmula who won a \$1,340 start-up challenge fund from AVSI Foundation Uganda.

Trainees often offer agricultural advice for a fee, either paid by farmers or the local government. But farmers do not always want to pay for advice. The trainees have a finite amount of their own time they can sell – increasing income further requires shifting the focus of the enterprise to more profitable services or enterprises. Different enterprises suit different segments. Women have often excelled in retail, while men focus on service provision, like spray services, even expanding the market by training others.

Success stories

Successful examples include two University graduates from Nakuru Kenya, Ruth Kabiru (aged 25-29) who became an agrodealer, and another young man aged 30-35, who plans to start a spray service business, leveraging partnerships to support farmer growth. This reflects a market systems approach where trainees create opportunities from market failures. Another example is a young man from Kasese in Uganda with a high school diploma who now buys coffee directly from farmers to sell to cooperatives, enhancing the supply chain efficiency. The successes of some of these enterprises is already starting to crowd in additional providers

Many of the trainees are involved in primary production as well as service provision. The training has led to significant improvements in agricultural production among trainees. One young farmer saw his crop yield increase dramatically post-training, while others diversified into horticulture and livestock (pigs, goats, sheep, poultry and bees), enhancing both income and food security. A male high school graduate aged 18-24, from Mitooma, Uganda, improved his tomato and onion yields by 27%. Meanwhile, a male graduate aged 25-29 from Nakuru, Kenya, doubled his potato production from 4 to 8 tonnes per land unit. Integrating climate-smart practices has further benefitted the trainees that farm.

Olivia Najjuma from Nakaseke, Uganda noted *“On the farming side, the waste from poultry helped much in the banana and maize plantations.”* Showing how livestock and soil improvement work together.

Future Direction: These success stories and those below underscore the potential for scaled impact across agricultural communities.



Madina Tusingwire secured employment following training

Until 2023, Madina, a former untrained primary school teacher and part-time enumerator, was earning Ugx 200,000/month [\$54]. She has leveraged CABI's training to advance her career significantly. After presenting her new qualifications to Kawacom, a company that aggregates organically produced Robusta coffee for export, hired her. She says *“I was offered a fulltime job as **field officer trainee** where I train farmers on good agronomic practices in coffee production. I get refresher trainings. I earn Ugx 400,000/month [\$107] as salary and 100,000 [\$25] transport facilitation from Kawacom.”*

Her role involves training farmers in good agronomic practices for coffee production. Now earning significantly more, she continues to seek further training and aims to diversify her income by starting an organic vegetable shop.

Madina is also a mentor, guiding 12 groups of young people, in 12 different villages in agribusiness.

Baliruno Yasin supports farmers as an independent service provider

Baliruno, at 33, had a degree in agriculture and community development before the training from CABI.

Leveraging the skills and knowledge from his training, Baliruno began offering technical agricultural advice to local farmers. He started charging a fee that enabled him to invest in his own spray equipment to avoid the contamination risk of using equipment from his neighbours. He used his backyard, in an urban area, to grow tomatoes, cabbages, onions and green pepper, working with the local government extension officer to train others, especially landless youth in his community. This experience bolstered his expertise in disease and pest identification and helped him establish his professional identity as an advisory service provider, collaborating with other service providers including advisors from private sector.

Baliruno is also a community radio host who shares the knowledge he learnt to sensitize farmers on good agricultural practices through their community radio station.



Bonny Kimmula now employs more than 10 people on his farm and won a start-up grant

Bonny Kimmula runs an independent agri-enterprise. He is 29, single and holds a high school diploma. Before the CABI trainings, he was engaged in small-scale agriculture, specifically growing tomatoes and cabbage.

Following the trainings he increased his income. By scaling tomato production. He is now employing more than ten people on the farm. He is a source of advisory and training support often using his farm as a demonstration plot.

He has increased his income and gained a sense of fulfilment from helping others.

Bonny won the start-up challenge fund from AVSI Foundation Uganda worth 5 million UGX (\$1,340).



Anthony Ssenyonga now runs his own agrodealer shop

"The farmers prefer my shop where they are getting a complete package of diagnosis, advice and product at a reasonable cost... I have slowly shifted them from using high risk products using the CABI bio-protection portal as a reference."

As a result of the training, Anthony, a 29 year old agriservice provider in Luwero District, Uganda, had the courage to change the way he traded agri-inputs. He formally registered his company with the name DMAC-Divine Mercy Agro-Connect and applied to become a certified agrodealer.

Other changes he made were:

- Using saving to increase his stocks
- Offering free diagnostic services to farmers which resulted in more sales and safeguarding farmers crops
- Mentoring 2 youth groups and 2 general farmer groups on pest and disease management
- Encouraging safer use and proper handling of agro-chemicals
- His own tomato production improved to export-quality

Anthony has started to use the CABI Bio-protection Portal as a reference to help farmers to migrate from high-risk pesticides to low-risk pesticides to biopesticides.

Improving social capital of young women and men

Participation in the programme has significantly enhanced the social capital of young men and women, enabling them to become key influencers in their communities. Trainees (such as a 25-29-year-old from Luweero, Uganda), are now respected as crop health consultants, which in turn boosts their business prospects. The practical application of their knowledge not only builds trust among local farmers but also opens employment opportunities, as seen with a young women TVET graduate from Ibanda, Uganda, who secured a job due to the trust built from initiating a nursery bed project.

Different methods have been used to share information including one-to-one advice and/or mentoring or supporting existing (or forming) youth groups. Some have been more imaginative, such as a young man (18-24) TVET graduate from Kayunga, Uganda who said 'I have setup a demonstration garden of coffee plantations'

The technical and business training and additional support in mentoring empowers participants to mentor others, enhancing their leadership roles within the community. This is evident in various ways. In Nakuru, Kenya, a young man (25-29) with a high school diploma became a Community Forest Association's Youth representative, establishing demonstration gardens that serve educational purposes. In Uganda, a male graduate from Sheema said *"We are acting as volunteer agents of mindset change in agriculture as well as information intermediaries."*

From the survey data from 40% of program participants, we can estimate that the combined direct reach of the young people as mentors to other young men and women has been over 2000. Each young person reaching an average of 6 others. Further work is needed to measure the impact as well as the reach of this work.

Income levels in USD (\$)	Number at each income level	Combined outreach totals	Average mentees / participant
0	20	59	3
1-49	47	301	6
50-74	15	289	19
75-149	29	110	4
150-249	13	24	2
250+	22	136	6
Total	146	919	6

Presidential recognition

CABI-trained youth Agri-Service providers were among 18,000 agripreneurs commissioned by H.E William Ruto, President of Kenya. The agripreneurs, representing all 47 counties in Kenya, were commissioned by President Ruto at the 61st Madaraka Day celebrations in Bungoma County to help the country's 7.5 million smallholder farmers increase their livelihoods and the nation's ability to sufficiently feed itself through Agri-Service provision.

"Thanks to CABI's training, I have now gained more knowledge, skills, and expertise in agriculture. I have gained more trust from farmers due to the quality and effectiveness of the services I provide them and have increased my monthly earning. The training prepared me well for this opportunity. I am honoured to be among those feted by the President for this work" – Vincent Wambua, 25, from Makueni County, Kenya, one of the CABI-trained youth feted by the President.

Young people tackling pest & disease control

The training emphasised the importance of Integrated Pest Management and has significantly improved trainees' pest and disease management skills, leading to better use of pesticides and safer farming practices.

Trainees report major successes in controlling pests and increasing crop yields, with some achieving substantial gains in production of high-value crops where farmers have the margins to pay for advice. But trainees also cited 50% to 100% uplifts in maize crops. Often the gains are coupled with pest management protocols that have substantially reduced pesticide use.

The training also enhances their capability to run plant clinics and offer specialized agricultural advice, thereby increasing their income and professional opportunities. Moreover, the advanced skills acquired through the programme have led to new job opportunities, such as working in agrochemical shops or training other farmers, showcasing a direct impact on their professional development and economic status.

A young man (25-29) with a high school diploma from Makueni County in Kenya said *"After receiving training from CABI I was able to know all chemicals well. I know which chemical is good and that which is not good for humans!"*

CABI Academy

The CABI Academy is a digital resource offering online, self-study courses to help individuals in the agricultural sector develop crucial skills. The academy features a range of courses on crop production including crop pest diagnosis, crop pest management, bio-protection products, water management, and soil management.

In August 2024, these have been joined by a new course on entrepreneurship in agribusiness. The content covers fundamental agribusiness concepts and offers tailored learning paths for various levels of experience, preparing learners for effective participation in agricultural value chains.

CABI Academy courses are designed to be accessible offline on smartphones, supporting ongoing training for extension workers, agro-dealers, and other service providers.

Future Direction: CABI's Plantwise modules have been adopted in national curricula and by universities in various countries. Now CABI is also seeking to partner with further universities, agricultural TVETs and other academic institutions so that CABI Academy can help prepare young people for the realities of working in meaningful ways in priority agricultural value chains.

Do you want to partner with CABI on Youth Engagement?

CABI will soon launch its Youth Engagement Strategy 2024/2027: Empowering Youth as Agents of Agricultural Transformation and is actively seeking partners to expand its Youth Agribusiness Development work.

For more information contact
Deogratus J. Magero
d.magero@cabi.org

