



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

MUSC

YOUTH EDITION

FIELD STORIES
FROM AFRICA

Youth, the key actor
for change from the field

Urban to rural: Leaving the
bustling city for entrepreneurial
passion in agriculture

Engaging youth in shaping
the future for agriculture





YOUTH EDITION

NWJS

FIELD STORIES
FROM AFRICA



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Foreword

IN AFRICA, 60 percent of the continent's 1.2 billion people are young people.

In the race to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and attain the aspirations of the Agenda 2063 and the 2025 Malabo Goals of the African Union, these young men and women are the key drivers in our combined efforts to reach the finish line on time.

The 2014 AU Malabo Summit reconfirmed that agricultural transformation should remain high on the development agenda of the continent, emphasizing its instrumentality for an inclusive growth. The youth play important roles in promoting economic growth and shared prosperity in their communities and countries. Their energy, resourcefulness and optimism are powerful catalysts for them to be important contributors of change and development.

Yet, there are a number of challenges to be met in order for them to play these roles and realize their potentials.

This maiden issue of *NUUS, Field Stories from Africa*, highlights some of the stories on youths' successes and their ability to navigate fluidly through challenges. These narratives come from across the region, and they are powerful testimonies of what great ideas and hard work can accomplish.

We are proud to share these stories, such as the experience of Alvina of Gabon. Through FAO's assistance, she uncovered a passion for breeding domestic animals, which gave her the opportunity for a full-time job. Similarly, a Kenyan youth, Purity, discovered a promising future in farming through FAO's training. While in the Sahel, a Burkinabe young microbiologist, Barkissa, believes that microbiology is key to making degraded land green and productive again, and she is carrying out research to prove it.

These are a few of the many stories coming from the field, bringing a lot of hope and optimism in our efforts to make sustainable agriculture and the rural milieu viable options to create decent jobs and employment opportunities for the youth. Undoubtedly, there are millions of young people across the continent with similar success stories, who, if given the opportunity, would gladly share their experiences. *NUUS* aspires to provide them with that needed space.

We are confident that these stories will bring hope and optimism to the efforts towards achieving the SDGs.

Abebe Haile-Gabriel
Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Africa



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Editor's notes

In a **COMPLEX** and **CHALLENGING** continent, one common thread across 47 sub-Saharan countries that mends its way across the diverse landscape is the vision of hope and dreams of young people. By 2035, about 220 million young people will enter the labour market, and 10 to 12 million new jobs will have to be created annually.

While limited opportunities for employment abound for the growing population, the youth are by nature programmed to be organic innovators. All across Africa, we find many stories of young people finding their space under the warm sub-Saharan sun, and making a meaningful difference in their lives and communities. From chickens to watermelons, we see a number of young people discovering their connection to the land and invigorating a passion towards their roots. They are the modern vectors of change and it is a delight to see how they are blossoming and thriving in the agricultural sector, and how their raw spirit and boundless energy bring vitality to the rural economy and beyond.

These stories illustrate that given the right tools and capacity, such as the projects and programmes of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the youth has the amazing potential to change the destinies of their family, their communities, their continent, and the world. And FAO is at the forefront of watching the vectors of change create rippling effects across Africa.

Harvesting stories of the youth from the ground and witnessing their transformation into productive members of their community is an honor for FAO staff in the field. And we would like to thank the partners of the vectors of change for their ceaseless work in making Africa a region of Zero Hunger. From the Sahelian zone to the tropical savannas of Eastern Africa, the rain forests of Central Africa, the mountain systems of Southern Africa, FAO is there. And we are proud to be part of the story.



Daisy Diamante Leoncio, Senior/Regional Communication Officer; Mikaila Issa-Abramane, West Africa; Leonard Makombe, Southern Africa; Tezeta Meshesha Hailemeskel, Eastern Africa; Levy Bouassa Central Africa; Ki Jung Min, Editorial Project Manager. ©FAO





FOCUS .

YOUTH,
the KEY ACTOR for
CHANGE from
the FIELD



YOUTHFUL FARMER REAPS BENEFITS



from **TAKING
FARMING**
as a BUSINESS

DESIRE SIBANDA, 29, exudes confidence as he speaks to guests who had visited his home in Kwekwe district in Zimbabwe, about 300 kilometers from the capital, Harare. He proudly shows his recently completed house, a deep well with a submersible pump and reservoir tank, a flourishing garden and orchard, flush with lush maize, sorghum and sweet potato crops, with several chickens pecking on the ground.



I have heard people say that farming is for poor people. I agree but we must add the statement that it is for poor people so that they get rich . I can safely say that I am rich as I can afford to feed myself and my wife throughout the year. I also get a balanced diet as I produce most of what I need. LFSP has taught us to eat healthy and we are following that.

Desire Sibanda

For the young farmer, the decision to join the Zimbabwe Livelihoods and Food Security Programme (LFSP) in 2015 has been a game changer.



The energetic and eloquent farmer said farming had become his source of employment and had intentions to employ other people in the future.

“I know there are people who say there are no jobs. I, myself, have also tried getting formal employment as I possess a class two driver’s license. However, I have realized that agriculture is the key to a better life. I will continue expanding my business and start my own shop where I will sell some of my farm produces. I will also create employment as I will need other people to assist me with the business,” said Desire.

The 2016/17 farming season was very successful for the farmer who grew maize and sweet potatoes. After selling the surplus last season, Desire managed to buy a submersible pump, a generator, and a storage tank to ensure uninterrupted water supply for his crops. He used part of the money to drill a 30-metre deep borehole which is used to water the vegetables as well as provide clean and safe water for a number of households within his village.



Desire

Since becoming a member of LFSP, my fowl enterprise improved greatly with a new structure plan that I got for the fowl run. My chickens and guinea fowls are multiplying faster and growing much quicker. Previously, I was using an ordinary open space with trees prior to the new structure, and now I feel that my birds are a lot more secure than before. I used about USD 120 for the structure and it was a very wise decision and worth the investment.



PROPER PLANNING PAYS OFF

According to Desire, farming is not about grappling in the dark but one has to undertake a serious analysis before venturing into a crop. This, the farmer said, was emphasised in the trainings that they attended under LFSP. The result is that they plan on the type of crop, the quantities and the timing so that they get maximum returns. They also do simple analyses to calculate the gross margins, to inform choice of

crop for the next season. The young farmer keeps record of all farm activities, another lesson learnt from the trainings under LFSP.

Desire recently married and used proceeds from his farming business to finance the wedding. Chickens which were consumed on the wedding were all from his farm. The couple was recently blessed with a baby whom Desire plans to take care with the proceeds from the farming business.

The chickens and some guinea fowls serve dual purposes: meeting the family's dietary needs and generating extra income. "We slaughter some of the birds for consumption for the family. A single bird is enough for one meal for the entire family. We now eat meat once or twice weekly, alternating between the guinea fowls, chickens, and sometimes turkeys or goats," added Desire who lives with nine other family members.



©FAO/Desmond Kwande

YOUNG FARMERS EMULATING DESIRE

Other young farmers from his village have emulated Desire with equally impressive results. One such farmer is Abigail Nyoni, who is also a mother. Abigail said she was able to provide better care for her children thanks to the information she got from the study circle.

She added that her wish was to grow her business and buy livestock as a safety cushion, should anything bad happen to her tomato farming.

Desire and the fellow young farmers use the study circle approach to discuss their farming businesses. The study circle approach was introduced by a consortium of partners under LFSP.

The story of Desire Sibanda demonstrates how young people can be productively engaged in agriculture, generate income for themselves, and contribute to the national economy. This is particularly important for Zimbabwe with a high rate of youth unemployment.

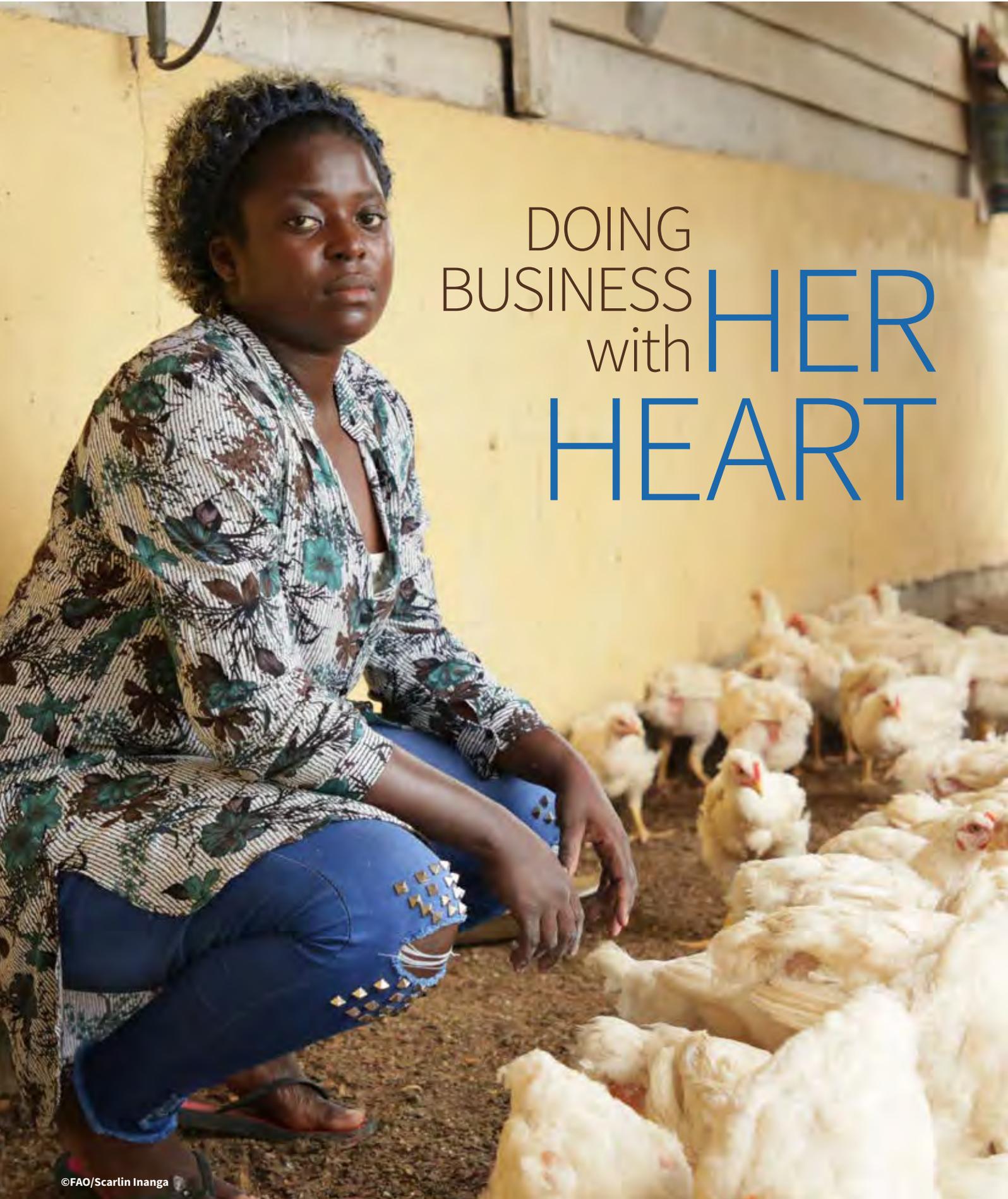
The Livelihoods and Food Security Programme funded by UKAid's DFID, and managed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as well as Palladium, is a suitable vehicle for youth engagement in agriculture since it addresses farmer training and extension, access to diverse and nutritious foods, access to rural finance as well as markets for inputs and outputs. The innovative and labour saving technologies promoted by LFSP makes agriculture attractive to the youths, who can choose lucrative value chains to pursue. The programme is contributing to employment generation and economic empowerment for rural youths. ■

I decided to join the study circle after I realized that I would benefit from the information shared through the group. I have used this information to make decisions on what to plant and how to market when I grew tomatoes last year. The proceeds from the sale of tomatoes has enabled me to send my children to school and buy other things they need.



Abigail

DOING
BUSINESS
with **HER**
HEART



25-YEAR-OLD Alvina Doris Ntsame Akono lives in Oyem, situated in the Woleu-Ntem province of northern Gabon. After dropping out of high school for financial reasons, she learned about the breeding profession from a friend who was already in the field. Within a few months, she uncovered a passion for breeding domestic animals. She soon became entrusted with a farm of 15 pigs, which allowed her to turn her passion into a reality and a full-time job.



Like Alvina

, the inhabitants of Oyem are mostly small-scale farmers and breeders. The soil is fertile, and the demand for poultry and pork meat is steadily increasing. However, most farmers have little access to seeds or animal feed. In addition to this, there is a lack of tools and knowledge about good practices for food production and modern livestock management. The high cost of feed also poses major obstacles to livestock development and income stability for smallholder breeders.

COLLECTIVE EFFORTS FOR IMPROVED QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF MEAT

Alvina, together with 250 other farmers, was selected to participate in a training on cooperative management and feed production. The latter, requested by the Government of Gabon, consisted of evaluating the potential of raw material available for the production of animal feed and has helped boost the livestock sector's activity and increased production of quality meat products at competitive market prices.

After having provided theoretical and practical training on feed manufacturing and the operation and

management of a cooperative, FAO built a feed mill for the breeders. This was a turning point for Alvina; she decided to increase her production and raise 500 chickens.

GROWING AND EVOLVING DREAMS

“Today, with efficient and affordable animal feed manufacturing, which has helped to reduce production costs, I produce an average of 500 chickens every 8 weeks. I sold all of my first production on the local market because in Oyem, chicken is a very popular meat during family ceremonies and in the two months that followed, I raised even more chickens. It was unbelievable!” says Alvina enthusiastically.

The members of Alvina's cooperative are active and have diversified their activities by producing vegetables and fruits to sell at the market. They use the organic material resulting from the breeding to fertilize these plants.

“Business has always been important to me, but I did not have the capital or the skills. And, beyond that, I lacked the confidence to get started. During the training, we were encouraged to become entrepreneurs and given the means to do so,” explains Alvina.

Despite some initial difficulties, such as the inconsistent supply of low-cost raw materials, and the strong competition from imported poultry products, the young businesswomen is living her dream and remains optimistic about the evolution of her business. Just outside of her farm, she has started the very first chicken market in Oyem.

Improving people's livelihoods through capacity building is essential for reducing poverty and hunger, especially in rural areas. In Gabon, FAO supports agricultural social protection programmes that enable rural farmers to build their capacity to manage risks, carry out more productive activities and create a future with #ZeroHunger. ■

“Gradually, my business is growing and my products are more and more in demand. My ambition is to increase my production to 5 000 chickens within two years and employ fellow young Gabonese!” says Alvina with a smile.

YOUNG CENTRAL AFRICANS:

VECTORS of CHANGE for ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT



With adolescents and youth representing almost half of the whole population in Central African Republic, young people face post-crisis unemployment issues, having 80 percent of job seekers younger than 35 years old. Since the means of liberating their potential and securing their future are limited, young people can be easily exposed to engage in crimes.



In order to re-route the energy of the youth populations, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in collaboration with UNFPA, UNICEF, and UNDP, are implementing the youth / EZINGO Joint Project “Support for Youth Participation in the Stabilization and Reconciliation Process of Communities and for the Promotion of Peace” in Central African Republic. With each UN agency contributing their technical inputs, FAO is offering young women and men at risk (aged 15 to 35) economic opportunities, setting up microenterprises in the agricultural sector to bring economic empowerment to the beneficiaries.

Over a period of 18 months, from January 2018 to June 2019, FAO is reaching out to 500 young people from the cities of Bangui, Bambari, Bossangoa, and Bouar to train and sensitize them with production and

management skills of vegetable crops and small livestock, and the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts to promote social cohesion. The idea is to strengthen the economic empowerment through agricultural practices for the Central African youth and in particular for youth that are directly affected by conflict, ie ex-combatants, victims of gender-based violence, orphans, widows and young people at risk. The agricultural sector is essential in CAR as it substantially contributes to the national economy and offers key solution to the stabilization of the country in a sustainable manner.

Throughout the project, it is estimated for beneficiaries to produce 300 kg of farming products per person and generate income. This allows young people to be sufficiently independent, to provide for their daily needs and those of their families, and also earn more income through selling production surplus to the markets. This will make it

easier for young people to be able to access credit and save more income. Moreover, savings and loan initiative enable them to invest in their activities and undertake the transformation and enhancement of their products, while strengthening the implementation of good practices that has been acquired.

MAKE YOUNG CENTRAL AFRICANS, VECTORS OF CHANGE

The active participation of these vulnerable young people in the process of reconciliation and stabilization of their communities remains one of FAO’s priorities through this project.

To encourage more communication amongst young people, FAO is promoting Dimitra listeners’ clubs that are groups of women, men and young people – mixed or not – who decide to organize themselves to work together to bring about changes in their communities. The trained youth meet regularly to discuss the challenges that they face in their daily lives, make decisions, and take action to resolve their problems.

FAO’s youth / EZINGO project aims to reduce the socio-economic vulnerability of young people and improve food and nutrition security at the household and community levels. It offers hope to young Central Africans of a possible long-term empowerment through agricultural entrepreneurship and strongly contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. ■



AN ORPHAN

FINDING HIS ROOTS

IN AGRICULTURE



GRACILIANO SAMBO WILI

A 19-year-old Guinean–Ecuadorian who lives in the Basupu Village, has become passionate in agriculture after he first experienced his first harvest of watermelon through FAO’s farmer field school programme.

Growing up

as an orphan, with his father leaving him when he was four months old and mother passing away due to yellow fever, Sambo Wili is living with his grandparents, receiving love and care for his education and personal development. Sambo Wili first got into agriculture by helping his grandmother in her garden since he was six years old. However, it wasn't until recently that his love for agriculture developed when his grandmother was selected as a beneficiary for the farmer field school project. After spending his morning time in school, he joined his grandmother to learn about agricultural practices at the farmer field school.

According to him, the part that fascinates him most about the processes of agricultural production is the harvest, since it fills him with satisfaction.

Throughout the town Sambo Wili has been the only young man of his generation who was interested in the agricultural sector during the farmer field schools training. It is an integrated training within the framework of the Urban and

When I grow up, I have my plans to dedicate myself to agriculture," said Graciliano. He also added "Here in the town of Basupu, young people like me refuse to get involved in field work. They consider me as boring and think that it is a punishment for me to have to go support my grandparents in the garden. They supposed it was a punishment from my tutors, but in fact it was not like that, I did it for pleasure.

Graciliano Sambo Wili

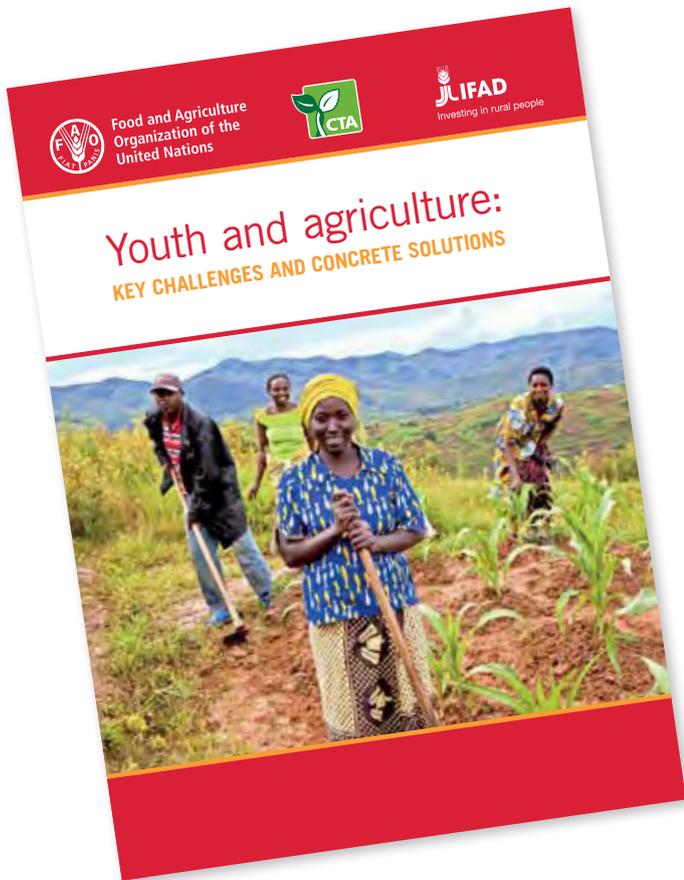
Peri-urban Horticulture project, rolled out in Basupu, Baloeri and Batoicopo and supported by FAO.

Throughout the project "Reinforcement of food security in the urban environment of Central Africa, thanks to a better availability of locally produced food" beneficiaries also learned new practices for land treaty, production, and marketing to strengthen the food and nutrition security of their family and obtain great agricultural benefits.

When Sambo Wili was first given watermelon seeds and it bore fruit, it pleased and encouraged him to understand that as a young person you can love agricultural activity; Since then, his favorite fruit in his grandmother's garden is watermelon.

On top of his love for family farming, Sambo Wili also has big dreams of commercial farming, playing basketball, becoming a soccer player or a film actor, and having fun with his friends.





FAO AND RURAL YOUTH

Rural youth is the future of food security, according to the publication of "Youth and Agriculture: Key Challenges and Concrete Solutions". However, around the world, few young people see a future for themselves in agriculture or in rural areas.

Globally, the challenges that young people often face are insufficient access to knowledge, information, and education, limited access to land, inadequate opportunities to financial services, and difficulty to approach green jobs. Furthermore, young people have limited market access and opportunities to participate in policy dialogues.

As it is estimated that the number of people between 15 and 24 years of age looking for work will increase to 1.2 billion by 2050, FAO is closely working with youth to inspire new employment or entrepreneurial opportunities in the rural and agricultural landscape, to make agriculture “cool” and “lucrative”, ultimately achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. ■

...the number of people between **15 and 24** years of age looking for work will increase to **1.2 billion by 2050...**

Graciliano Sambo Wili



Organisation des Nations Unies
pour l'alimentation
et l'agriculture

OBJECTIFS
DE DÉVELOPPEMENT
DURABLE

2 FAIM
«ZÉRO»



**SOYONS
LA GÉNÉRATION**

#FAIMZÉRO

A hand holding a tomato in front of a wall with graffiti. The graffiti includes the word 'nib' in blue and yellow silhouettes of a person and a child. The background is a mix of orange and white.

FOCUS

URBAN TO RURAL:
LEAVING the
BUSTLING CITY
for ENTREPRENEURIAL
PASSION in
AGRICULTURE



KENYAN YOUTH DISCOVER a PROMISING FUTURE in FARMING

PURITY KAREMI didn't plan on becoming a farmer. The 25-year-old went to university in Nairobi to get a degree in procurement and management, and both Purity and her family expected she would stay in the bustling city. But an FAO training changed everything.



Karimi was enrolled in an FAO training on youth and agribusiness in her home county of Tharaka-Nithi, in Kenya. This training was part of an agribusiness project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The programme targeted youth in the area and prepared them to work in commercial agricultural production. Purity and her peers learned about good agricultural practices, agricultural water management, agribusiness and nutrition knowledge and practices.

Using the allowance she had received from FAO, she bought sweet potato vines.

A few months later, she harvested sweet potatoes, worth almost four times as much as she invested!

Now, Purity has added two new crops to her land: watermelon and capsicum. At the end of 2018, she made her first sale of five tonnes of watermelon to Twiga Foods, a buyer introduced to her

by FAO. Companies like Twiga are introduced to producers because they buy directly from the farmers at competitive prices and, more importantly, pay in a timely manner.

Moreover, she is putting her university education in use: she is keeping records of all expenses and income, meticulously monitoring the profitability of her business. She also employs other youths from her community to help her on the farm.

The training got me really motivated, and I asked my father if he would let me try to farm on some of the family's land...

Purity Karemi

©FAO/Sven G. Simonsen

“When our daughter first started expressing an interest in agriculture, we were not so enthusiastic,” Purity’s father Letton concedes. “We wanted her to do something else. Yet, today I would advise her to work in agriculture because she has clearly found her passion.”

THE START OF ENTREPRENEURIAL DREAMS

Just a few hundred meters from Purity’s watermelon field, Anthony Munene is in action working in his vegetable field. He is an old friend of Purity’s and one of the nine local youths whom Purity has trained and inspired to take up farming as a profession.

In early 2018, Anthony began leasing a plot of land where he planted his first crop cap-sicums. From the beginning, he was using the conservation agriculture methods that Purity had learnt at her trainings.

Despite some initial setbacks, his plants have grown plenty of fruit to sell.

Just like Purity, Anthony is keeping detailed records to keep track of his business.

And for the longer term: “I am saving the money that I am making, to start a farming business”, he says firmly. “This is my future.”

The Increasing Smallholder Productivity and Profitability (ISPP) project aims to strengthen the capacity of smallholder households to manage their farming businesses more reliably. It provides knowledge and skills to stakeholders along the value chains and has boosted household production and productivity in the semi-arid lands of Kenya. ■



DEFYING

the TRADITIONAL MINDSET
to BECOME
a FARMER



LEAVING YOUR GOOD JOB to engage in agriculture is not something really understood by many people particularly in countries like Rwanda, where agriculture still shares the unfair perception of being a burdensome sector with less rewards.



My family and friends didn't understand my decision, when I told them I was going to the rural Rwanda to start farming. They thought I had run mad.

Juliette Yaramba

©FAO Teopista Mutesi

Juliette from Rwanda is challenging this old mindset and she is paving new ways to inspire other young people. Since 2016, she has been farming six varieties of fruits, vegetables, and spices on the family land in Masoro sector in Rulindo District. Her farm products are Boston, Catalogna, Grand Rapids, Lolla Rossa, Mix blend, Prizehead, Speckles, Swiss chard, Romaine, Borage, chervil, Ail-ciboulette, Parsley, Tat soi, radish, Amaranth, Pepper, and Rosemary.

Juliette grew up and studied in France, where she was trained as a technician in electro-technics. In December 2014 she left her job in Lyon, France where she has been working for over four years, to come and engage in agriculture in Rwanda, despite having no prior experience in the sector.

Most young people living in rural areas decide to move to the urban centers to look for a better life with a 'good' job. Some end up doing backbreaking activities like pottery in urban centers when they could actually be more productive with the land back home for agriculture production.



©FAO Teopista Mutesi



Juliette

I relied mostly on the skills of small scale female farmers who had been cultivating the marshland. I also tried do research online on good agricultural practices. It was frustrating because I wasn't getting the production I was targeting.



Currently, Rwanda's youth population accounts for 28 percent majority of which, are aged between 16-30 years and each year above 300 000 Rwandan youth seek to enter the country's workforce, too many of whom without success.

MAKING IT AGAINST ALL ODDS

Although Juliette had the passion and envisioned a profitable business in agriculture, she was taking a great risk to venture into a field she has less experience in.



Juliette is also involved in poultry keeping as well with a stock of over 700 chickens.

Through FAO's capacity development initiative for farmers, Juliette was among ten

farmers sponsored to undertake a three weeks training at Songhai center in Benin to improve their farming activities.

GAINING SKILLS IN INTEGRATED FARMING

At the center, she learnt hands-on ecofriendly agriculture techniques, management skills, bio organic transformation, postharvest handling, among others.

"I learnt that nothing is a garbage on the farm," she says.

By-products generated by animals and dried plants - litter and droppings collected on farms – they are stored until they become composite raw materials. The composite is used to fertile the plants instead of chemical fertilizers.

“We have decided not to use chemicals in our agricultural activities. I aspire to practice a profitable, but sustainable farming, while being competitive,” she says.

EQUIPPING OTHER FARMERS

Through her company –fresh basket – now employs about 60 young farmers and women.

She is transferring everything she learned in farming to her employees to empower them to become modern farmers to tap into the immense wealth in agriculture.

“Agriculture is wealth because people cannot do anything if they don’t eat...everyone needs food,” she says.

FROM FARM TO MARKET

Juliette has set up a market in town for her vegetables and chicken products. Every Monday evening, she takes fresh vegetables and fruits right from her farm to the market to waiting clients.

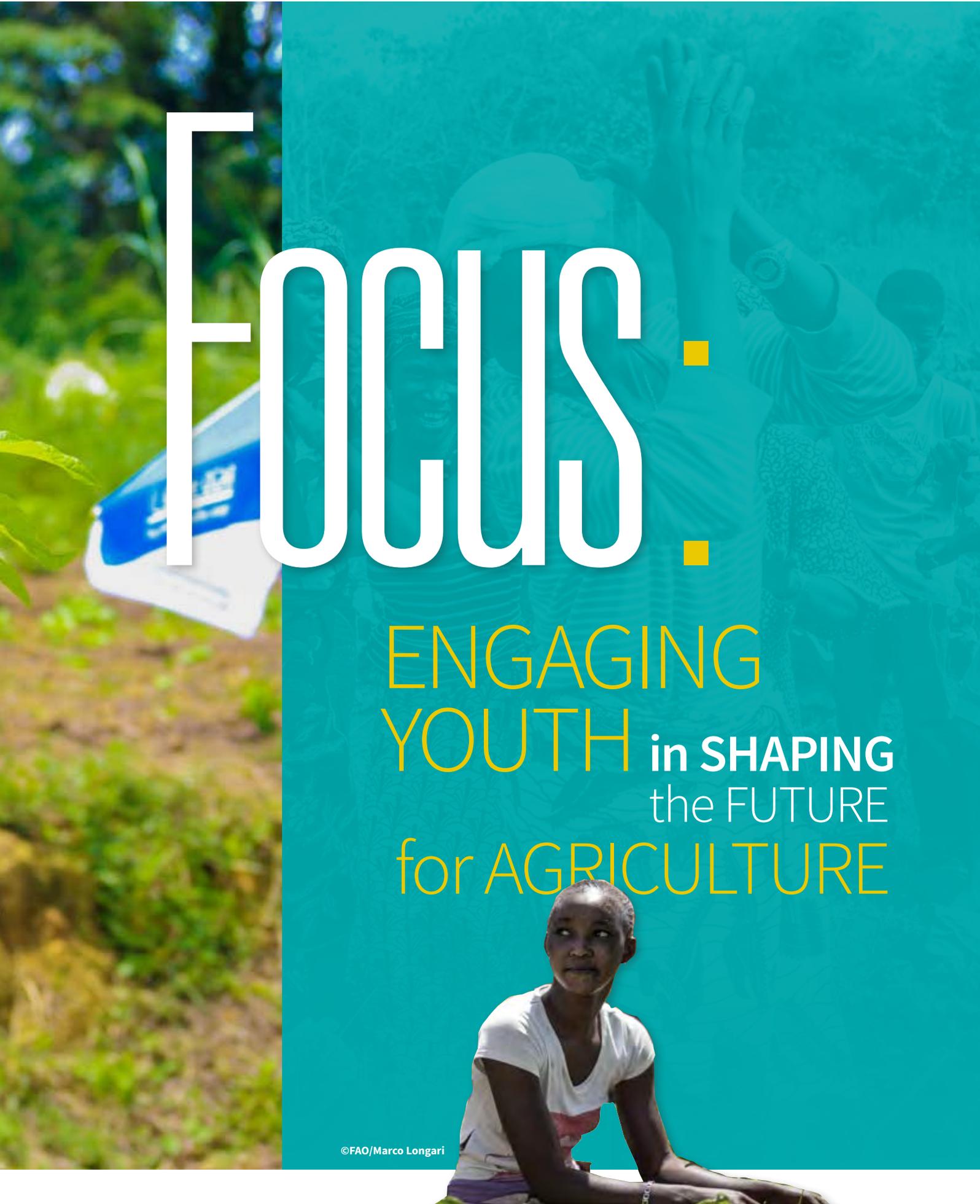
“I have a huge market for my produces. Currently I supply a hotel that cooks food for the national carrier –Rwandair (national carrier) and high-end customers in Kigali,” she said.

She says her products are liked because they are bio-organic.

Her vision is to establish a center to train farmers in integrated and sustainable agriculture. ■





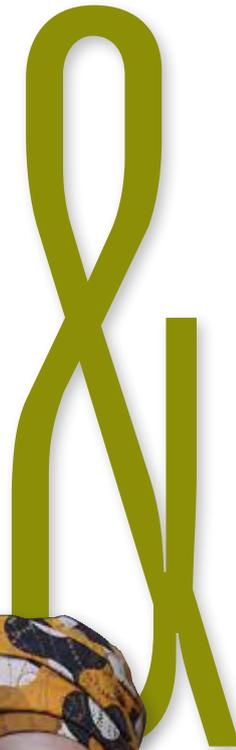


FOCUS

ENGAGING
YOUTH in SHAPING
the FUTURE
for AGRICULTURE

CREATING an ENABLING ENVIRONMENT:

BOOSTING
YOUTH
ENTREPRENEURSHIP



EMPLOYMENT
in the
AGRICULTURAL
SECTOR of
CENTRAL AFRICA



WITH YOUTH POPULATION under 15 years old representing 45 percent of the total population and youth unemployment rate reaching 14.8 percent in the Central African Region, engaging youth in agriculture can be a solution to promote entrepreneurship and create employment opportunities for young people.



In Central Africa, FAO joined hands with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) towards setting up a favourable environment for creating decent jobs for youths in agriculture and agro-business.

In pursuit of this goal, FAO organized an event in Gabon, bringing young entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector from the countries of the sub-regions and participants from ECCAS, African Development Bank, UN agencies, and FAO all together for the first time. This event created a ground for key stakeholders to discuss challenges and opportunities on various strategies and approaches, as well as tools for youth recruitment in agricultural value chains and future benefits in agricultural and rural development policies and programs.

YOUTH LEADING DISCUSSIONS TO EXPLORE SOLUTIONS FOR CHALLENGES

During the event, youth attendees analyzed and suggested possible solutions to overcome the

challenges that youth face in rural areas of Central Africa. With the participants' proactive engagement, specific discussion on how to make the agricultural value chain more promising for young people, for example in terms of business creation, coordination of actors, contracting between different links (suppliers-producers-transformers), regulations and taxation, were discussed, hence the need for an integrated approach proposed by FAO was brought up.

Especially, participants called for more exchanges at the sub-regional and regional levels to learn know-hows of other farmers and moreover inspire governments and organizations. In parallel, they also encourage governments and organizations to become better acquainted with entrepreneurs who are already active in value chains, and to make them more 'visible' and to support their networking. Finally, they recommend that governments put agriculture back to the right place, train and educate young people at an early age on the benefits of agriculture, formulate a sectoral policy for promising sectors and be more youth-friendly.

By running the event in a participatory method, with participants evaluating current situations and identifying solutions, this event provided a stage for youths to share real stories and find practical ways to move forward to bring vibrant energy to the agricultural sector in the Central African Region.

TRANSFORMING AGRICULTURE IN AFRICA THROUGH YOUTH

Towards the end of the event, participants developed concrete action plans to ensure that the discussions they had could be translated into real actions back in their respective countries.

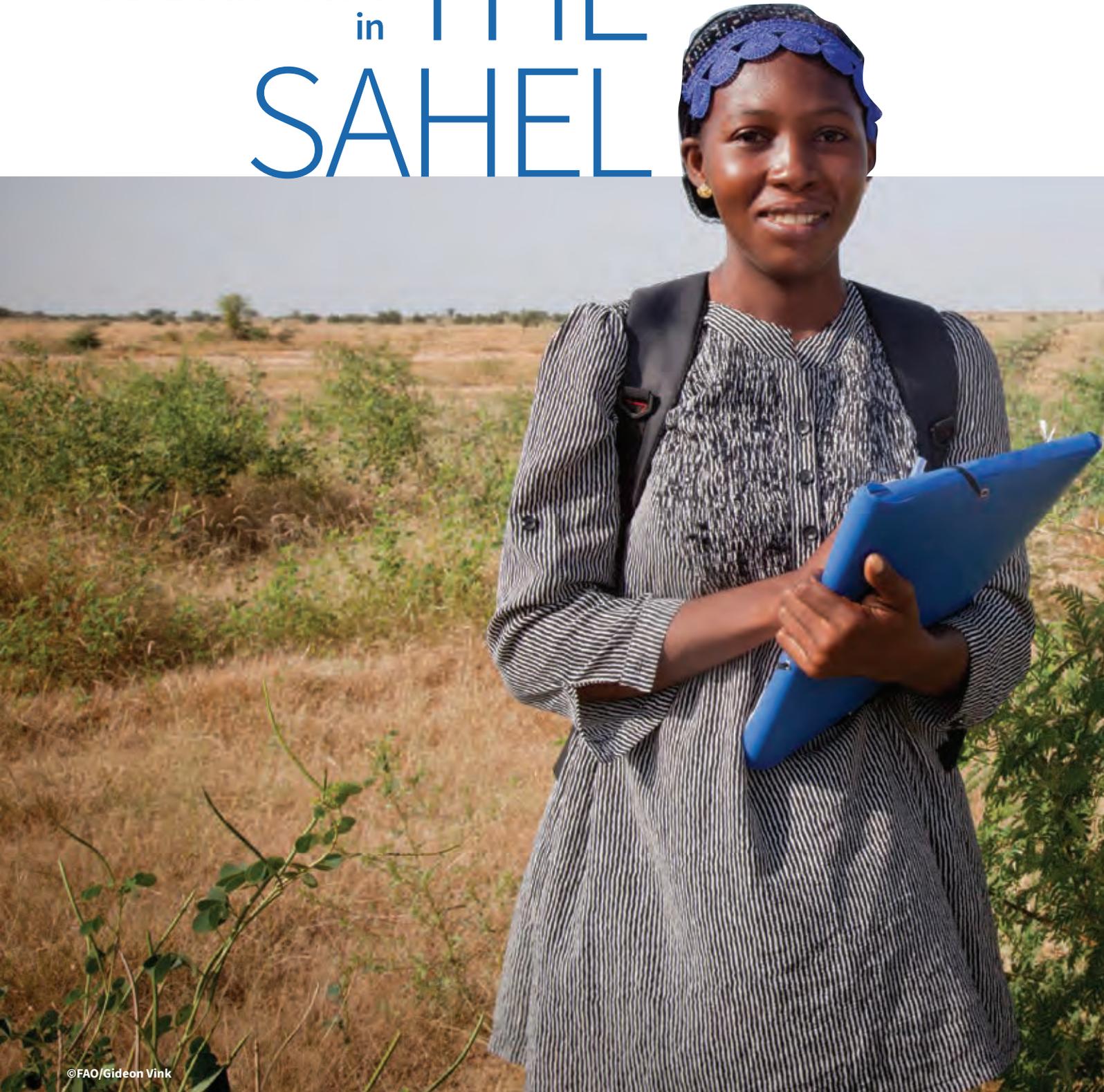
By providing an environment for creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship of young people to harness, the agricultural sectors of agro-forestry-pastoral, and fisheries in Africa can offer unexploited opportunities for youth. Furthermore, such dynamics could create decent jobs in different areas of along the value chain.

It is now a question of accelerating the process of transforming agriculture in Africa in accordance with the commitments of the Malabo Declaration in 2014, the Agenda 2030 of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Agenda 2063 'The Africa we want' by the African Union which prioritize in creating employment opportunities for youth. ■



YOUNG FEMALE MICROBIOLOGIST

COMBATTING
DESERTIFICATION
in **THE**
SAHEL



BARKISSA FOFANA believes that microbiology is key to making degraded land green and productive again, and she is carrying out research to prove it.



Barkissa, a 30-year-old microbiologist at Burkina Faso's Institute for Environmental and Agricultural Research (INERA), is particularly interested in the role of micro-organisms in solving these problems.

Take the example of nitrogen fixation, she says. There are bacteria capable of transforming nitrogen gas in the air into nitrogen compounds that can be used by plants as a natural fertiliser. Some of these bacteria are symbiotic: they enter a plant through its roots and make nitrogen available for the host plant to grow.

The field of Acacia trees is her testing ground. Here she is monitoring the development of these gum-producing trees, which have been inoculated with different natural, symbiotic bacteria and fungi. She wants to find out if, and how, they help the trees to become more resistant to drought, grow better and produce more gum.

FAO'S ACTION AGAINST DESERTIFICATION (AAD)

The restoration plots are part of [FAO's Action Against Desertification \(AAD\)](#) programme supporting the Great Green Wall initiative in Burkina Faso. Barkissa's research, a result of partnership between INERA and

AAD programme, is one example of how the programme is working to make degraded land in the Sahel green and productive again.

In this area, where the challenges posed by climate change and desertification are particularly acute, rainfall hardly exceeds 400 millimeters per year and land is severely degraded. So far, AAD has initiated restoration of over 7 000 hectares in Burkina Faso.

Barkissa's research reinforces AAD's restoration work in this area of the Sahel. More than a year into the experiment Barkissa's measurements are encouraging, and the AAD programme aims to make these useful micro-organisms available to the local population. Efforts are already underway to train them in how to inoculate their seeds and plants.

Asked about her motivation, Barkissa says she opted for studies in agronomy because she is fond of plants and always wanted to work in the countryside. Her parents have supported her from the start. But sometimes, she misses being with her family. It is a long way back home to Bobo-

Dioulasso, Burkina Faso's second largest-city in the south, where her father runs a vulcanization workshop and her mother sells condiments in front of the house.

FUTURE PLANS

Barkissa expects to defend her thesis in early 2020. She is confident that the results of her research can help the Sahel make it to its goal. And she will certainly do her part: "I have always tried to do my best to make things work."

The AAD programme supports rural communities in Africa, as well as in the Caribbean and Pacific, with large-scale restoration of degraded land, stimulating economic growth and development. This programme is a key partner of the Great Green Wall initiative, Africa's flagship project to combat climate change and desertification. This initiative creates productive landscapes across North Africa, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, addressing food insecurity and poverty in the area. By February 2019, the AAD programme will have reached an estimated 500 000 people and restored approximately 50 000 hectares of degraded land. ■

"Something has to be done to tackle the environmental problems caused by climate change, desertification and population growth," says Barkissa from an Acacia field just outside the city of Djibo in Burkina Faso's northern Sahel region.



YOUTH and AGRICULTURE:

**A SOLUTION for
YOUTH EMPLOYMENT
and
ZERO HUNGER in the
DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC
of CONGO**



KINSHASA - Like many young people in Sankuru Province, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Paul Tshisapa was struggling to find a decent job. Difficult access to markets, poor conditions of feeder roads and limited access to resources, especially land, discouraged young people from engaging in agricultural production.



A lot of young people in the village work in informal employment. They generally receive little income, and are employed on a casual or seasonal basis. This precarious situation pushes many of them to migrate to cities. “In order to feed my family, I opened fish ponds and cassava fields. I even thought of going to Mbuji-Mayi to work as a digger in the diamond mines. “

INCREASING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION THROUGH THE FARMER FIELD SCHOOLS (FFS)

Paul’s life has now changed. He works as an FFS facilitator as part of the project “Actions of food security, information, nutrition and environment in Sankuru (Healthy Actions)”.

Funded by the European Union for a period of three years, this project targets 6 000 households, reaching 36 000 people from rural areas. The idea is to reduce food insecurity and malnutrition of children under 5 and pregnant and breastfeeding women in Lomela territory in a sustainable and structural manner.

“The project, which began in November 2017, is based on the ‘Caisses de Résilience’ approach. It focuses on three complementary themes such as the technical aspect for the revival of agricultural production, the social aspect for community mobilization and finally the financial aspect to promote access to credit and savings,” said Aristide Ongone Obame, FAO Representative in the DRC.

To facilitate the monitoring of field activities, FAO has partnered with the Higher Institute of Agronomic

Studies of Mukumari. Paul is one of the 50 young graduates, who has been selected by the project to guide small producers, under the supervision of the officers of the Territorial Inspectorate of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Livestock and FAO experts.

Each young graduate supervises around 20 small producers through the farmer field school. They meet once a week in the field throughout the growing season to discuss good agricultural practices. The farmer field school is a platform for exchanging experiences and expertise by helping farmers to learn by doing, providing them with the tools needed to analyze their practices and to identify solutions to their problems.

“I was selected as a farmer field school trainer. We teach small producers how to identify good



“After my studies at the Higher Institute of Agronomic Studies in Mukumari, I could not find work in the agricultural sector,” says Paul, a young graduate from the village of Tshula Otenga, in Lomela territory.

crops. Farmers in the area used to farm only local varieties which significantly lowered the yield of agricultural production, “says Paul. “Now that we have introduced improved varieties, thanks to FAO, crops are more resistant to plant diseases,” he added.

Paul explains that he and farmers have learned many new things from FAO and its partners, such as working together and respecting seed sowing to increase production. “Before, people used to sow in bulk. Now they have learned to adopt good farming practices. “

A VARIED AND BALANCED DIET

Paul and other community members have also received trainings in good nutritional practices. Through cooking demonstrations, households are encouraged to use a wide variety of local products to prepare meals rich in micronutrients. “In addition to rice, along with the cassava leaves that are the staple of the region, the main meals should include pulses and lots of fruits and vegetables,” explains Paul.

He now has an income to support his family. He can afford basic care for his children and started building his house. Today, Paul prides himself on being able to offer his family a balanced diet of rice, flour, cowpeas, and vegetables.

INVESTING IN YOUTH

In order to ensure the sustainability of projects that offer employment opportunities to youth, FAO envisions to replicate this model of partnership with other Higher Institutes of Agronomic Studies. This would not only provide young graduates with first professional experience, but also better integrate projects in rural communities.

Youth employment in agriculture can be a tangible solution to help end hunger and poverty in Africa. The mobilization of African youth is essential to achieve sustainable development in the continent, which is possible through the creation of jobs in the agricultural sector, especially in rural areas. ■

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36 000 people from rural areas...





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