



Food and Agriculture  
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# Making extension and advisory services work for youth



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The global youth population has reached the unprecedented figure of 1.2 billion. This exceptional number has enormous potential: with farming populations ageing across the world, the agricultural sector needs to attract youth to ensure generational turnover and foster competitiveness. With their energy, ability to learn and innovative attitudes, youth can accelerate the transition to more sustainable agrifood systems that can feed the world's growing population.

For this to happen, important push factors are needed, including education and skills, access to productive resources and services (especially land, finance, and business development services), connectivity, and youth agency. But more is needed. Rural youth often operate in contexts where decent employment and entrepreneurial opportunities remain limited. Pull factors are thus also essential: private sector development, more demand for youth labour and products in value chains, improved working conditions and business enabling environments in rural areas. Integrated, multi-stakeholder approaches are needed to empower youth within agrifood systems. In this regard, extension and advisory services (EAS) are key, not only to enhance skills and access to information and support, but also to facilitate innovation, and act as brokers of employment opportunities in rural areas.

Sadly, most EAS providers are not prepared for these tasks. Their design and delivery results in them reaching mostly wealthier and already established farmers. While public EAS providers are often short of resources, private providers may be less interested in serving youth, who are often perceived as a more 'risky' clientele. The advice EAS offer is neither tailored nor provided in youth-friendly formats. Which is why youth must be involved in EAS not only as clients, but also as providers.

## What does this mean in practice?

- National plans and policies are developed for and with youth, and support EAS in helping young farmers and agripreneurs, also involving them as EAS providers.
- Youth-oriented services provide targeted technical and entrepreneurship advice, mentorship and training opportunities, and link rural youth to markets and food value chain.
- Young people access more productive and decent jobs in the agrifood sector, create thriving businesses and harness their innovative energy to regenerate the sector.
- Migration becomes a voluntary and informed choice, not a necessity.
- Productivity is increased, alleviating poverty and food insecurity.

## Pre-conditions for success

Recognition of the importance of the rural youth.

Governmental commitment to making farming a professional and rewarding activity.

## Making it happen

The following recommendations are often interdependent and may occur simultaneously. Priorities will vary depending on local contexts.

### Promote a youth-inclusive enabling environment

While young people are in need of concrete support on the ground, youth-inclusive policies and regulatory frameworks are key.

- Sensitize policy-makers to importance of rural youth and define, together with youth and advocate for dedicated policies or strategies.
- Review regulatory frameworks and foster policy coherence to include provisions conducive to youth engagement in the agrifood system: relax age limits for bank accounts, registering businesses and land titles, tax exemptions for start-ups, membership in organizations etc. Be also aware of indirect barriers, like land ownership.
- Raise awareness about young people's potential among value chain actors, and help them integrate rural youth and adopt youth-friendly solutions.
- Work with universities and technical training institutes to adjust their curricula (both for farmers and EAS providers) to the needs of rural young women and men, making agricultural and EAS courses more accessible for youth (e.g. reduced fees, student loans, partnerships with youth organizations.)
- Regularly collect sex and age disaggregated data related to rural youth (socio-demographic, economic, youth in EAS).



### Remember!

Ensure that youth participate in policy review processes and give them a voice, rather than just adding a few 'youth-friendly' sentences. Involve rural youth networks.

Trust issues are common, as microcredit and producer organizations, vendors, and older farmers often consider young people unreliable and inexperienced, while youth are often disillusioned by the broken promises of those in power. Hence, mediating to overcome conflicts and facilitate collaboration between youth and decision-makers is key.



### Example

In Uganda, FAO supported the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) to develop a **National Strategy for Youth Employment in Agriculture** (NSYEA, 2017). The NSYEA prioritizes areas where EAS are crucial, such as enabling environments for youth employment; youth-oriented EAS, education, youth entrepreneurship and addressing agribusiness risks. Youth were actively involved through regional dialogues and represented in the multi-stakeholder NSYEA Technical Working Group. They also helped generate evidence in the process, including on legal barriers for youth employment in agriculture, occupational safety and health risks and the concerns of adolescent youth (15-17 years old).

## Rejuvenate services and delivery modalities

Young people are a heterogeneous group with diverse needs. Relevant and effective EAS need to factor this in, provide demand-driven and tailored support, and engage youth in EAS provision.

- Get to know rural youth. Engage with their associations, as well as actors working with them to understand who young men and women are, map their characteristics and needs, demands and challenges, especially of indigenous youth, migrants, younger youth in working age, those in school-to-work transition or young women and mothers, who often face additional constraints due to legal and social norms.
- Remember that young people often have to seek alternatives, as they do not own land, assets or capital to start traditional agricultural activity. Advise on niche markets, emerging value chains and off-farm employment along the entire value chain. Link young people to training in post-harvest and processing techniques, and agricultural practices that do not require land and big upfront investments. Advise them on safe labour migration opportunities.
- Innovate EAS delivery and adopt youth-friendly formats, using digital tools (e.g. social media and instant chat services like WhatsApp) to increase outreach and facilitate interactions. Provide mentoring rather than traditional advice – by trusted actors, lead farmers, skilled EAS agents and youth champions.
- Provide business development services, including start-up support, entrepreneurship and marketing advice, and innovation and business incubation platforms. Support for youth to create their space in value chain and to make farming a rewarding activity is key to rebranding the sector and attracting young people.
- Promote 'green' skills that allow youth to access existing and emerging green jobs.
- Engage with microfinance institutions to ensure targeted and accessible credit solutions and promote financial literacy.
- Link rural young women and men to legal advice (e.g. on land ownership, membership in organizations, business registering).
- Have the private sector engage with young people to allow them to develop skills and facilitate market access through internships and apprenticeship in agribusiness, input companies, and EAS organizations. Provide incentives for employing youth.



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### Remember!

While some youth aim to start or boost their own farming business, others may seek opportunities to enter wage employment in agrifood systems.

Invest in EAS providers' capacities to provide services for youth, including technical knowledge in relevant disciplines, digital EAS and soft skills.

EAS should also facilitate inter-generational dialogue and ensure smooth knowledge transfer (e.g. of land, business), i.e. generational renewal.



### Example

**WHYFARM (We Help Youth Farm)**, founded by Alpha Sennon, is a non-governmental organization in Trinidad and Tobago that promotes sustainable agriculture among children and youth through hands-on approaches. The key to success is tailored support for young people to farm professionally (e.g. value addition, packaging, online marketing, hydroponics for the landless etc.), as well as innovative delivery modes: videos and online tools, engaging language, poetry, and even a comic featuring the superhero Agriman.

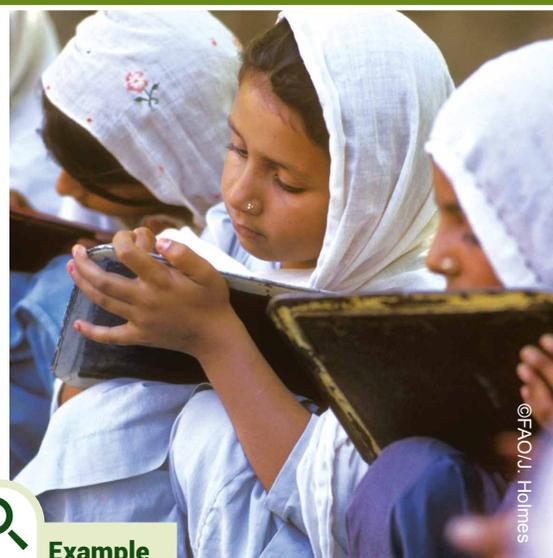


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## Empower and engage youth

Young people need to be supported and empowered to make their voices heard and own their (and our) future.

- Strengthen formal and informal associations (including dedicated young women and indigenous youth associations), but also empower young members of non-youth organizations to participate in decision-making.
- Equip youth with skills in leadership, negotiation, self-confidence, communication, public speaking etc. Raise awareness of gender to help avoid gender-based discrimination in younger generations.
- Engage youth as EAS service providers. This is an excellent opportunity for professional growth, making EAS more relevant and also rejuvenating the EAS system. Peer-to-peer learning and mentoring among youth is effective as a motivational driver and encouragement for the adoption of new practices.
- Promote role models and youth champions to show that agricultural livelihoods can be viable and rewarding.



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### Example

The Syngenta Foundation in India and Tata Trusts through the Agri Entrepreneur Growth Foundation (AEGF) create jobs for rural youth by helping them become EAS providers/ agri-entrepreneurs (AE). They are trained in technical, soft and financial skills (in-class and 'on the job'). The AEs assist smallholder farmers in 4-5 villages, act as a one-stop source of agricultural advice, provide quality inputs, and facilitate access to markets and credit. Their income comes from service provision, while AEGF links them to credit and governmental schemes to launch their activity. Since 2015, the programme has trained 2 700 AEs. They have periodic meetings where all stakeholders can share their experience. Major success factors are considered to be broad partnerships, including with the public sector who support the programme and certify the AEs.



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### Useful resources

FAO. N.d. Decent Rural Employment and Youth employment [webpage]. In: FAO [online]. <http://www.fao.org/rural-employment/work-areas/youthemployment/en>

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