



**PROMOTING YOUTH
ENGAGEMENT AND
EMPLOYMENT IN
AGRICULTURE AND
FOOD SYSTEMS**

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Promoting youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems

A report by the
High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition,
science-policy interface of the CFS

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Project team leader: Hannah Wittman

Project Team



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Team Members: Indika Arulingam, Jim Leandro Cano, Mariaelena Huambachano, Anna Korzenszky, Catherine Mungai, Ben White, Paola Termine (Secretariat)

Research support: Evan Bowness

Introduction and context

Confluence of economic, socio-ecological & public health crises:

- Youth unemployment three times higher than adults'
- Food systems jobs among the most vulnerable
- 1/3 of the global population affected by at least one form of malnutrition
- Food and agricultural systems are a significant driver of climate change
- Significant inequities in access to resources and sustainable livelihoods across regions, gender, ethnicity, and class

Our collective challenge is to envision **new pathways for sustainable food systems** with youth leading as **agents of change**

Orienting questions

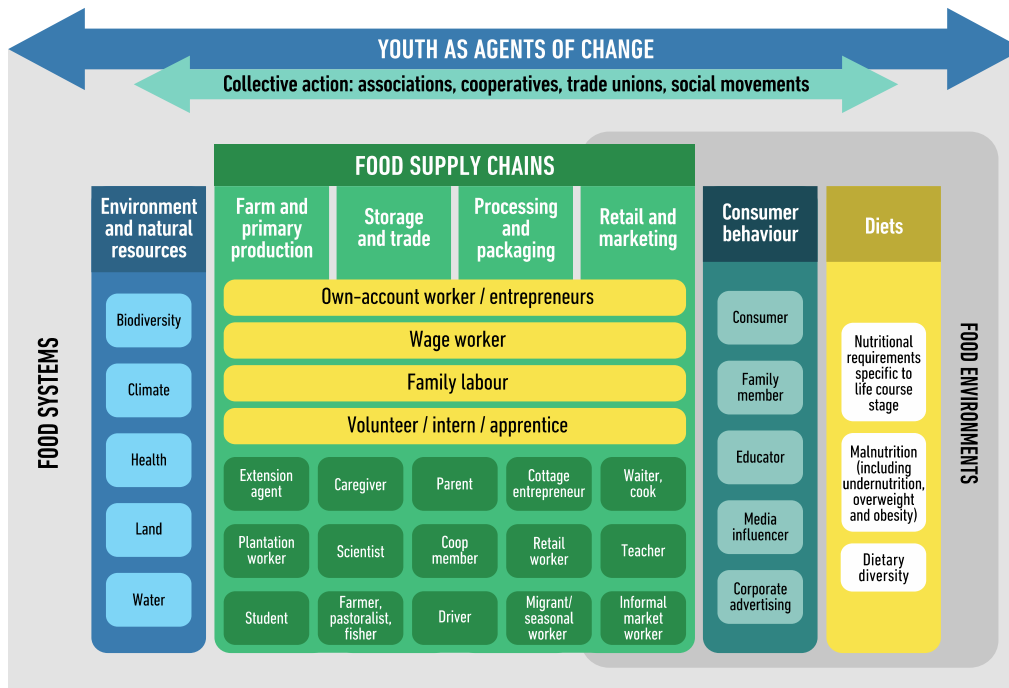
- What is the **status of current youth engagement and employment** in agriculture and food systems in **different contexts**?
- What are the primary **constraints and challenges** that limit the engagement and employment of youth in agriculture and food systems?
- What could a **global agenda that supports youth as active agents of change** in agriculture and food systems look like?

Outline of the report

1. Positioning **youth as agents of change** in a sustainable food systems network
2. **Understanding youth** in food systems
3. **Youth employment and the right to work** in agriculture and food systems
4. **Access to resources**
5. **Knowledge, biocultural heritage and intergenerational learning**
6. **Innovation and technology**
7. **Conclusion and policy recommendations**

Chap. 1: Youth as agents of change

Figure 1: Roles and spaces for youth engagement and employment in food systems



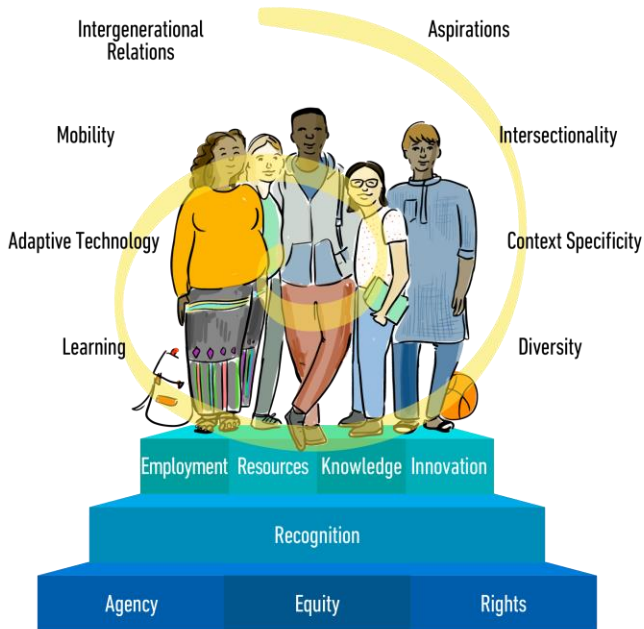
Source: Elaborated by authors based on HLPE 2017, 2020a

Dynamics of youth engagement and employment in food systems

SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS

ECONOMIES OF WELL-BEING
Dignified livelihoods, healthy environments
and food sovereignty

SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS



OUTCOMES



DYNAMIC
STRUCTURES
AND PROCESSES

KEY POLICY THEMES

FOUNDATIONS

Source: Elaborated by
authors with illustration by
Sam Bradd

The 4 fundamental “pillars”

for youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems

- **Agency:** young people are a potentially powerful political, social and economic force in the shift towards more sustainable food systems
- **Equity:** redistributive measures are needed to overcome persistent and increasing inequalities within and between societies
- **Rights:** youth are both rights-holders (to protection, non-discrimination and participation) and bearers of responsibility
- **Recognition:** youth’s agency, rights, voice and diverse, intersectional, and context-specific aspirations must be accorded space in policy generation and implementation

Defining youth in relational terms

UN: childhood = ages 0-17

& youth = ages 15-24

- Mexico: Youth begins at 12
- Bolivia: Youth begins at 18
- United Kingdom: Youth ends at 19
- Tanzania: Youth ends at 35
- Malaysia: Youth ends at 40



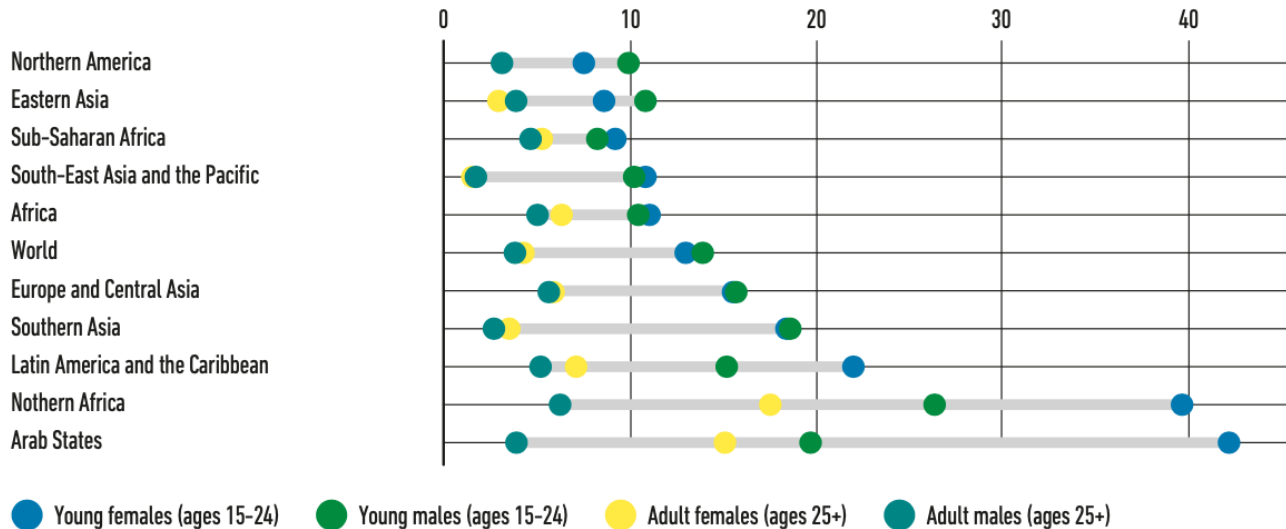
This report recognizes childhood and youth in relational terms, **defined by their position in intergenerational relations and across the life course**. When citing data, generally youth are defined as persons between 15 and 24 years of age, unless specified otherwise.

Aspirations are context-specific, diverse, intersectional and dynamic!



Young people's envisioned futures in food systems cannot be separated from **geographic, political, economic and social contexts, social and cultural norms**, the influence of **family members and peers, gender, class, education and media, migration and pluri-mobility**, and many other factors that shape their livelihoods.

Youth unemployment rates in 2019, by age, gender and region



Food systems jobs are vulnerable jobs

Table 3: Jobs and livelihoods at risk in food systems, all ages (millions)

	Food systems		COVID-19*			
	Jobs	Livelihoods	At-risk-jobs	% of food systems jobs	At-risk-livelihoods	% of food systems livelihoods
Primary production	716.77	2,023.80	152.35	21%	404.76	20%
Food processing	200.73	484.54	120.44	60%	290.72	60%
Food services	168.97	339.44	101.38	60%	203.66	60%
Distribution services	96.34	241.48	57.81	60%	144.89	60%
Transportation services	41.61	101.05	16.64	40%	40.42	40%
Machinery	6.51	13.18	1.72	26%	3.48	26%
Inputs	4.89	11.06	1.29	26%	2.92	26%
R&D	0.13	0.29	0.02	15%	0.03	10%
Total	1,280.93	3,214.84	451.64	35%	1,090.89	34%

Enhancing demand for youth labour in food systems

- An exclusive supply-side focus on enhancing skills and employability alone does not solve the issue of insufficient demand for youth's work
- Increasing youth employment in food systems requires policies and interventions to boost demand and create jobs
- Investment in food systems infrastructure, public employment programmes and wage subsidies for actors in sustainable food supply chains can provide opportunities for better and more secure jobs for youth.

What resources are necessary for sustainable food systems livelihoods?

- Access to land, water, fish stocks and forests
- Knowledge and extension
- Credit and innovative financing
- Supportive markets
- Innovative models of resource sharing and intergenerational transfer

Supporting diverse knowledge networks

- **Traditional ecological and local community** knowledge exchange
- Horizontal grassroots **youth and farmer-to-farmer networks**
- **Sustainable food systems education** in primary, secondary, and university curricula
- **Diversified TVET innovation** to all food systems sectors
- **Addressing the gender gap in** agricultural and food systems research

Innovation as assemblages of old and new practices and processes

- Technological **innovation** has the potential to both **destroy and create jobs**
- **Digital divides** can deepen inequities in youth access to resources for food systems engagement and employment.
- Digitalization of agriculture and food systems must address **diversity, co-creation and sharing of knowledge, and recognize data sovereignty**

Conclusions

- **Food systems are the largest employer of young people**, particularly in the Global South, yet they often **do not provide decent and meaningful work or adequate livelihood opportunities**.
- Approaches and policies to strengthen youth engagement and employment in food systems need to be based on the pillars of **rights, equity, agency and recognition**.
- **Youth require support** to access land, water, forests, labour, knowledge, information, agricultural extension, finance, credit, markets, technology and supporting institutions **for sustainable food systems transformation**.

Policy recommendations

1. Providing an enabling environment for youth as agents of change
2. Securing dignified and rewarding livelihoods
3. Increasing equity and rights to resources
4. Enhancing knowledge, education and skills
5. Fostering sustainable innovation

1. Provide an enabling environment for youth as agents of change



1. Provide an enabling environment for youth as agents of change

- **Rights:** ensure the realization of the human right to food and the right to work in safe and healthy working conditions, and create accountability mechanisms
- **Participation and governance:** recognize the diverse voices that young people can bring to sustainable food systems transformations, and guarantee and encourage active participation of youth in formal governance mechanisms and rural-urban organizations
- **Policy instruments and regulations:** youth-oriented policies should take an intersectoral approach to youth education, engagement, and employment
- **Infrastructure and social protection:** ensure youth have access to basic infrastructure and safety nets to reduce vulnerability

2. Securing dignified and rewarding livelihoods



2. Securing dignified and rewarding livelihoods

- **Labour market policies:** strengthen social and physical infrastructure, facilitate the transition from school to work, and ensure that public employment programmes explicitly target young people.
- **Employment legislation and governance:** improve labour regulations and monitoring to protect workers; recognize young people's paid contributions to food systems
- **Incentives and social finance:** support youth entrepreneurship in both individual and collective enterprises to generate new, decent jobs

3. Increasing equity and rights to resources



3. Increasing equity and rights to resources

- **Access to natural and productive resources:** enhance **rights and land tenure security** through **collective and community ownership**, indigenous land rights, agrarian reform, intergenerational succession and land matching programs, and cooperatives.
- **Access to finance:** promote the development and availability of **affordable, flexible and inclusive financial** and **advisory** services tailored to the needs of youth in food systems; provide support and insurance for collective and **social impact investment** for youth-led enterprises.
- **Access to markets:** improve **shared public infrastructure** to support short food supply chains, including food hubs and incubators, digital infrastructure, and enhance **public procurement** and other forms of **structured and mediated markets**.

4. Enhancing knowledge, education and skills



4. Enhancing knowledge, education and skills

- **Training and vocational programmes:** update curricula to focus on professions in food systems that require a **wide range of skills** in **areas of interest to youth** (agroecological production, nutrition and dietetics, value chains, marketing, and food systems education)
- **Sustainable foods systems education:** begin training for **food systems thinking** in primary and secondary education (incl. through **experiential education, intergeneration mentorship** and peer-to-peer engagement)
- **Strengthen research:** involve youth in **community-based research partnerships** that integrate diverse ways of knowing and communicating
- Improve **resilience of agriculture, farming systems and food systems** to environmental and social shocks by encouraging youth to practice **agroecology** and other **context-specific** sustainable innovations

5. Fostering Sustainable Innovation



5. Fostering Sustainable Innovation

- Provide opportunities for **social innovation that recognizes and shares intergenerational and indigenous knowledge** and stimulates **research**
- Support the provision of youth-sensitive and youth-specific **rural and urban advisory and extension services** through new information platforms
- Develop the **skills and capacities of young workers** in sustainable and innovative approaches for urban, peri-urban and rural agriculture, including to help **transition from school to work**
- Invest in **digital infrastructure and complementary nondigital infrastructure** in rural and remote areas to ensure rural connectivity, digitize the activities of public agricultural bodies, and build the digital skills of public sector workers to support change.

Thank you!



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*High Level
Panel of Experts*

For more information:
www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe
CFS-HLPE@fao.org