

Policy recommendations

PROMOTING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

IN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS
FOR FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

with a core focus on:



Contributes to SDGs 3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 & 17

Young people are key to promoting sustainable food systems, ensuring renewal in the agricultural sector, and contributing to the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, particularly in developing countries, where a large proportion of the population are youth, including in rural areas. There is potential to improve livelihoods and expand equal opportunities of employment and entrepreneurship in agriculture¹ and food systems, which are a significant source of socio-economic advancement for youth in rural and urban areas. Yet agriculture and food systems often do not provide decent work and dignified livelihoods, nor promote a balance between the needs of different generations. Additionally, many

young women and men have limited access to, and control over land, natural resources, infrastructure, markets, insurance, finance, technology, knowledge and skills.

These challenges, along with limited participation in decision-making processes, poor remuneration, income uncertainty, conflicts, protracted crises, climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation, exposure to risks, difficult manual labour and low social recognition for agricultural and food workers, turn many youth away from agriculture and rural areas. As a result, many are forced or feel that they have no alternative than to migrate, either to urban areas or abroad. Actions are needed to make agriculture and food systems more attractive, profitable and rewarding for young people, and to increase

their capacity to generate decent work and dignified livelihoods, especially in the current and post COVID-19 context.

Investing in young people and strengthening their participation in decision-making processes, is key to contributing to food security and nutrition, poverty eradication, employment generation, sustainability and resilience of agriculture and food systems, including through their diversification, as needed, management of natural resources, preservation of Indigenous Peoples', and local knowledge systems, as well as peace and socio-political stability. Further, multiple interlinkages exist with gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, including through efforts to eliminate child labour in agriculture, harnessing rural-

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■ 1 Agriculture includes crops, forestry, fisheries, livestock and aquaculture. UNGA Resolution A/RES/74/242. Paragraph 20.

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urban linkages and fostering inclusive innovative practices and technologies, including new uses of data, digital tools and knowledge-sharing platforms.

Existing gender norms often lead to policies that are not inclusive of all youth and further limit young persons' access to decision-making and use of productive resources, and expose them to all forms of discrimination, violence and harassment in agriculture and food systems, especially young women. Child, early and forced marriage is a harmful practice that disproportionately affects women and girls globally, preventing them from living their lives free from all forms of violence, and undermines young persons' progressive realization of human rights and decreases young women's health, autonomy and agricultural productivity over time. Lack of affordable elder and childcare options also compels many young women to leave the labour force.

The engagement and continued participation of young people in sustainable agriculture and food systems is a key driver to fostering the competitiveness, resilience, inclusivity and vitality

of these sectors. To guarantee generational renewal, it is essential to develop systems, legal frameworks, policies, and programmes that engage more youth in agriculture and food systems and associated professions and that enable them to enjoy universal human rights by addressing the structural inequalities and all forms of discrimination that negatively affect them, while improving overall service provision and well-being in rural and urban areas.

The following policy recommendations complement existing CFS policy products and are primarily addressed to Governments (relevant ministries, national, regional and local authorities and institutions, as appropriate) to implement in consultation with other relevant stakeholders. These include: i) intergovernmental and international organizations; ii) women's, youth's, producers', farmers', and smallholders' organizations; iii) agricultural cooperatives; iv) workers' unions; v) the private sector (including micro, small and medium as well as larger-scale enterprises); vi) research organizations, vi) Indigenous Peoples; vii) local communities; viii) civil society, especially

young people themselves and their organizations. These policy recommendations are voluntary and non-binding. They should be interpreted and applied consistently with existing obligations under national and international law, and with due regard to voluntary commitments under applicable regional and international instruments and in accordance with national legal systems and their institutions.

These policy recommendations are informed by the CFS High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE)² report "Promoting youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems" (2021). They are envisioned as an ambitious, focused and action-oriented tool that will encourage public policies to foster enabling environments capable of nurturing the energy and skills of youth to make agriculture and food systems more sustainable and promote improved food security and nutrition outcomes. In working towards this aim, the aspirations, needs and experiences of youth across the globe should be recognized.

■ 2 The HLPE is the science-policy interface of CFS and provides a structured evidence base to inform CFS policy discussions drawing on existing research and knowledge, experiences, and policies at different scales and in different contexts. HLPE's reports are not formally agreed to by Members and, therefore, may not reflect their views.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Provide an enabling environment for youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems

a) Contribute to the realization of human rights of young persons without any discrimination, by implementing existing global policy and human rights instruments³ that are relevant to their engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems, as applicable, by supporting relevant policy processes and programmes, while creating accountability mechanisms for youth as right holders; (*#Rights*)

b) Develop and support youth-oriented gender responsive and transformative policies and programmes that engage youth in their design, implementation and monitoring and take into account the diverse realities of all youth in diverse situations and conditions, intergenerational relationships, succession planning and hierarchies.

Focus significant efforts on improving equity and enhancing distribution of knowledge and resources across generations, gender, socio-economic status ethnicity, race, class, levels of education and citizenship and disability status with specific attention to youth in vulnerable and marginalized situations; (*#Diversity and representation*)

c) Enhance youth's standards of living and contribute to the realization of the human rights of young persons, including the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, by improving their access to quality education, health, water, sanitation, hygiene, healthy diets through sustainable food systems, adequate housing, safe and decent working conditions. Reduce present and future situations of vulnerability of youth by ensuring their access to necessary infrastructure and services and by designing and implementing context-specific social protection systems that are responsive to specific needs of youth, including food and nutrition, with specific attention

towards girls and young women; (*#Social protection*)

d) Develop and strengthen policies that create and safeguard decent work opportunities for young people in agriculture and food systems with adequate remuneration based on the concept of equal pay for equal work⁴ to support their well-being. Provide income support, as appropriate, to young people in situations of vulnerability and marginalization, especially young women, whose livelihoods have been disrupted as a result of shocks, conflicts and other crises⁵; (*#Social protection*)

e) Support and encourage equal, non-discriminatory and meaningful youth participation and leadership in organizations related to agriculture and food systems, including through civil society and private sector organizations, as well as in governance mechanisms and decision-making fora at all levels, such as CFS, parliaments, unions and other national and local policy-making spaces, as appropriate, and promote youth-

■ 3 These policy recommendations are intended to be applied consistent with the following instruments, as far as each of these instruments are relevant and applicable and as far as they have been agreed, acknowledged and/or endorsed by respective Member States: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); the UN Security Council Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security (UNSCR 2535); the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP); and the eight fundamental Conventions of the ILO.

■ 4 See e.g. Universal Declaration on the Human Rights, article 23.2.

■ 5 CFS Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises (CFS-FFA). 2015.



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led organizations and initiatives;
(#Participation and governance)

f) Strengthen collection of sex- and age-disaggregated labour market information and statistics, in accordance with data protection and privacy, to capture the diverse realities of all youth in diverse situations and conditions, their employment status and working conditions in agriculture and food systems, access to social protection and other services, education, migration and mobility patterns, working time devoted to different paid and unpaid activities and their overall living conditions⁶; (#Data collection)

g) Improve data collection and the documentation and learning from different forms of youth engagement in agriculture and food systems, including social, economic and environmental dimensions, by combining quantitative and qualitative methods and youth-led and youth-focused participatory research, with due regard to data privacy and safety, to better understand youth needs, experiences, aspirations and behaviours and to inform decision making in support of the 2030 Agenda. (#Data collection)

2 Secure dignified, attractive and rewarding livelihoods for youth

a) Develop and support social protection, employment and labour market policies and labour demand public policies and programmes, as well as investments and private sector development strategies partnering with young people, with emphasis on youth in situations of vulnerability and marginalization, providing opportunities for decent work and dignified livelihoods with occupational and professional advancement opportunities, including through adequate living wages, for youth in agriculture and food systems; (#Partner with youth)

b) Implement comprehensive labour market policies to and accompany youth-led initiatives that increase the employability of youth of legal working age in agriculture and food systems through actions across rural and urban areas, and across public and private sector and civil society, as a key feature of the enabling environment, such as: job search assistance, employment services, culturally-appropriate and relevant vocational

programmes, skills development and apprenticeship, job matching, mentorship programming, entrepreneurship coaching, business education, business incubation services, management consulting, succession planning, and promoting the development of and recognition for ecosystem services; (#Labour market policies)

c) Implement labour demand-side measures for youth to promote more inclusive, resilient and sustainable food systems through investments that fully respect international labour standards⁷ and that are consistent with all relevant CFS policy products⁸; (#Labour market policies)

d) Establish and promote gender responsive and transformative programmes to facilitate school to work transition and by promoting education programmes based on subnational, national and regional agriculture and food systems from the earliest education levels. Additionally, ensure equitable access to such programmes across generations, gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, class, levels of education and citizenship status and disability status with specific

■ 6 The 2020 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI): <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2020-MPI>.

■ 7 These include the relevant ILO Conventions as far as they have been ratified by respective Member States.

■ 8 Such as the CFS Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (CFS-RAI).



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attention to youth in vulnerable and marginalized situations and supporting the range of aspirations of youth which may include teaching in Indigenous languages; (*#Labour market policies*)

e) Promote youth involvement and leadership in cooperativism and cooperatives as effective mechanisms for reducing social and economic inequalities, for strengthening family farming⁹ and supporting smallholders, food security and nutrition, entrepreneurial leadership and sustainable development; (*#Cooperatives*)

f) Develop, adapt, adopt and implement labour laws, policies and regulations and, where possible, allocate adequate budgets, to enable wages that provide an adequate standard of living and decent work for youth in agriculture and food systems, with particular attention to youth of legal working age, rural youth migrants, marginalized groups and young people with disabilities. This implies, among others, educating workers and employers on labour laws and related matters, strengthening occupational safety and health, reducing exposures to hazards, addressing gender

based violence in the work place, providing appropriate personal protective equipment, adequate working hours, non-discrimination, adequate access to social security, and education; (*#Employment legislation and governance*)

g) Recognize, compensate and redistribute, as appropriate, unpaid work performed by youth in agriculture and food systems, including care and domestic work by young women, including by developing universal social protection programmes that foster sustainable economies and by promoting youth employment and women economic empowerment, including through equitable access to: childcare, elder care, public transportation, education on gender-based discrimination, essential health care, maternity care, parental leave and community services; (*#Social protection*)

h) Prevent and eliminate labour rights violations, including child labour, by ensuring labour inspection systems in sectors and occupations related to agriculture and food systems, where young people are prevalent, and develop and support community-level

monitoring of compliance to labour legislation; (*#Employment legislation and governance*)

i) Establish monitoring mechanisms and create enabling environments to foster, where desired by youth, with attention to removing bureaucratic and financial and other barriers to youth inclusion, the progressive transition to formalization of enterprises in informal economies that employ or are led by youth in agriculture and food systems, for businesses and employees to secure decent work and dignified livelihood for all including through formal social and labour coverage, as well as access to financial and other support; (*#Formalization*)

j) Support and promote, in line with all relevant CFS policy products¹⁰, agroecological and other innovative approaches for inclusive, resilient and sustainable agriculture and food systems to generate decent work opportunities for youth. And, in doing so, support the financial, management and technical capacity of youth to contribute to applying adaptation and mitigation solutions, including their co-benefits, to tackle the impacts of climate change on food systems and to sustainably

■ 9 See the global action plan for the UN Decade on Family Farming (2019-2028).

■ 10 Such as the CFS Policy Recommendations on Agroecological and Other Innovative Approaches for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems that Enhance Food Security and Nutrition.



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use, conserve or restore biodiversity, land, soils and the environment and promoting healthy diets; (*#Incentives and social finance*)

3 Increase equitable access of youth to resources, infrastructure and markets

a) Recognize and respect all legitimate tenure right holders and their rights and support youth equitable access, sustainable use, conservation and protection of land, natural resources, water, seeds and biodiversity, fisheries and forests by adopting appropriate policies, legal measures and programmes at the national level, redistributive reforms, where appropriate, consistent with the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests (CFS-VGGT) and other relevant frameworks; (*#Natural resources*)

b) Develop legal measures, policies and regulations to facilitate and encourage gender-equal inter-generational sharing of knowledge and transfer of land, natural and productive resources and enterprises, with a focus on specific measures that promote transfer to young women, by supporting programmes that connect retiring farmers with youth who do not have access to

land, mentorship programmes, educational resources, including on rural family succession, and by supporting gendersensitive and responsive inheritance frameworks and succession planning, start-ups and increased access to retirement and pension system; (*#Natural and productive resources*)

c) Support the establishment and functioning of gender-equitable cooperatives and other organizations to empower youth and facilitate their access to productive assets, markets, technology and services that increase their capacity to sustainably manage agricultural land, water resources and businesses, and that can assist directly with business and cash flow management and planning. Additionally, encourage existing cooperatives and other organizations to establish youth sections; (*#Productive resources*)

d) Promote youth financial literacy and inclusion and, in collaboration with financial service providers, the development and availability of affordable, accessible and inclusive financial services and products that de-risk lending and borrowing costs for banks engaging with young emerging farmers and agricultural SMEs, and that increase young people's resilience and autonomy and protect them from high interest

rates and falling into debt. This includes the transfer and investment of remittances tailored to the needs of youth engaged in agriculture and food systems, taking into account specific challenges faced by some groups (such as young women, youth living in rural areas, Indigenous Peoples, migrants and young people with disabilities); (*#Finance*)

e) Support youth engagement and entrepreneurship in agriculture and food systems, in both individual and collective enterprises. Specific attention should be paid to supporting young women farmers, smallholders, and entrepreneurs, by providing extension and advisory services that respond to the needs and aspirations of youth and their communities and by providing flexible, inclusive and equitable financing programmes. These approaches can include: savings mobilization, access to credit, removing policies that prevent crowdfunding, alternative forms of collateral or collateral-free loans, low interest loans, contract farming and other value chain finance arrangements, warehouse receipts, digital and mobile financial services, insurance, remittances, investment products, improved supply of financial services, provision of seed capital grants, capacity development,



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partnerships with financial institutions, and risk sharing instruments; (*#Finance*)

f) Improve public and private infrastructure to increase gender-equitable access to formal and informal markets and agricultural inputs for youth producers, entrepreneurs, smallholders, traders and promote public policies to empower youth to contribute to: i) better linking urban and rural territories, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities for more sustainable agriculture and food systems; ii) addressing food loss and waste; iii) promoting decent working conditions; iv) improving incomes for small-scale food producers; v) and lowering existing barriers for youth; (*#Infrastructure*)

g) Create enabling conditions for the engagement and leadership of youth to obtain a better income from their production, in line with the guidance provided by the CFS Policy Recommendations on Connecting Smallholders to Markets, through sustainable and resilient food supply chains, including by encouraging community supported agriculture, urban and peri-urban agriculture, food baskets and public procurement programmes in support of markets that reduce the distance between consumers and producers; (*#Markets*)

h) Support the development of effective and targeted business models, business incubators, local food hubs, and other relevant programmes to enable youth entry and engagement in food systems, which may support better returns, decent work and dignified livelihoods for youth while contributing to sustainable agriculture and food systems. Develop capacity building programmes to strengthen youth's connection and access to markets, including direct markets, and support youth's participation therein; (*#Markets*)

i) Support the development of and enhance existing public procurement programmes and other forms of structured and mediated markets in agriculture and food systems, such as farm-to-school, culturally-appropriate school feeding, public programmes that engage youth in food loss and waste reduction and promotion of healthy diets through sustainable food systems and others that engage youth-led enterprises; (*#Markets*)

j) Create partnerships that provide mutual opportunities for meaningful and productive engagement between youth and other agriculture and food systems actors, including governments, financial institutions, family farms, labor unions and cooperatives. They can also strengthen and

streamline the provision of culturally relevant services, which may provide youth with accompaniment and benefits, including farming, financial, and business advice, and can particularly reach young women, youth among Indigenous Peoples, youth in local communities, young food producers, landless youth and agricultural and other food systems entrepreneurs. (*#Meaningful and productive partnerships*)

4 Enhance equitable access to knowledge, education and skills of youth

a) Promote the right to education, especially for young women and girls, as well as improving infrastructure, introducing child grants and school meals programmes, ensuring free and quality education, as well as its continuity during crises, through access to long-distance learning, communication technology and broadband access, and ensuring a safe and inclusive return to school without discrimination of any kind, and adopting multi-sectoral approaches to implement and enforce policies on girls' school attendance; (*#Education*)

b) Support multidisciplinary and gender-responsive educational curriculum development in

primary and secondary schools that integrate sustainable agriculture and food systems, healthy diets, food security and nutrition, food literacy, and the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, and including leadership skills to prepare young people who wish to pursue agricultural and rural livelihoods, with related technical skills and practical learning; (*#Education*)

c) Finance and promote the development and uptake of training, capacity-building and vocational programmes, including through South-South and Triangular Cooperation, that develop youth's skills for jobs in agriculture and food systems such as nutritionists, food educators, cooks, farm managers, agri-food technicians, veterinary service providers, those trained in agroecology and other innovative approaches, environmental stewards, and extension and advisory service providers, among others, while encouraging youth employment in the aforementioned sectors; (*#Training*)

d) Engage, support and invest in youth-led research based on country-driven policies according

to their respective priorities and capacities related to sustainable agriculture and food systems, sustainable use and conservation of natural resources, biodiversity and the environment, climate change adaptation and mitigation, renewable energy, agroecological and other innovative approaches^{11, 12}, as well as strengthen and develop opportunities for youth to participate in community-based and other research partnerships that recognize diverse forms of knowledge; (*#Research*)

e) Promote inter-generational and intra-generational exchange of information, including community-led exchanges, by recruiting farmers, agricultural professionals and agri-entrepreneurs to engage with youth all the way from primary to vocational education, to tertiary and beyond and through internships, mentorship and peer-to-peer engagement. Additionally, protect knowledge systems and good practices, including by supporting the protection of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge with free, prior and informed consent, as applicable, local knowledge, and traditional knowledge, through appropriate legal frameworks, in particular within the national legal context.

Furthermore, foster international education and practical work-programme exchanges to strengthen international understanding and cooperation and raise the levels of education of the youth in agriculture and food systems; (*#Information and knowledge exchange*)

f) Support subnational, national and regional vocational training, soft skills and leadership development programmes to enhance youth's skills and capacities and expand their opportunities in agricultural enterprises along the value chain to promote sustainable food systems; (*#Targeted training*)

g) Promote legal frameworks that facilitate effective protection and intergenerational transfer of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge with free, prior and informed consent, as applicable. (*#Indigenous knowledge*)

5 Foster sustainable and inclusive innovations for youth

a) Support all forms of sustainable and inclusive innovations that can unlock new, meaningful opportunities for youth to reap financial and other rewards in agriculture and food systems including through

■ 11 Innovative approaches including among others, sustainable intensification, no-till farming, organic agriculture and all other innovations and technologies to promote sustainable agrifood systems (CL 170/4 Rev.1).

■ 12 FAO Ten Elements of Agroecology (2019).

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initiatives to recruit youth into agricultural science and research at tertiary level; (*#Inclusive Innovations*)

b) Promote public policies to empower youth to be part of inclusive innovation, through social and community enterprises, multi-stakeholder innovation platforms, community finance, and institutional innovations to link farmers to markets, acknowledging and utilizing, where appropriate, inter-generational and Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge related to sustainable food systems; (*#Social innovation*)

c) Support the provision of demand-driven, culturally-appropriate, rural and urban extension, advisory services and digital services tailored to youth needs and priorities, while ensuring inclusive access to these services, including to close the gender and digital divides; (*#Extension and digital services*)

d) Develop digital skills of, and create enabling environments for, young farmers, value chain participants, food workers and those transitioning from school to work, to enhance their capacities to safely and effectively operate in digital environments and engage them in co-designing sustainable and inclusive innovations and

digital solutions, facilitating digital knowledge access for and exchange with elders; (*#Digital skills*)

e) Invest in public and private technical and digital infrastructure and promote digital literacy and digitalization to improve connectivity in peri-urban, rural and remote areas as a means of strengthening and diversifying food systems as well as creating employment, job, entrepreneurship and market opportunities for youth; (*#Digital connectivity*)

f) Develop and implement public policies and programmes, as appropriate, that foster youth's access to utilization of, and agency with respect to, tools and data in support of innovation, including digital, and safeguard and strengthen data protection. Support the protection of youth by appropriately assessing social, environmental and economic implications of new and old digital and other technologies, and by promoting, when applicable, open-access and community-owned technologies and digital solutions; (*#Digital tools and data protection*)

g) Support science, research, technology and innovation, including traditional, local communities', and Indigenous Peoples' knowledge with free,

prior and informed consent, as applicable, and co-creation of knowledge, especially in developing countries, while taking into account the needs of the most marginalized, to bring sustainable practices to youth. This includes through the voluntary sharing of knowledge and practices, research and technology transfer on mutually agreed terms and improving equitable access to research results and technologies on mutually agreed terms, at the national, regional and international level, such as through South-South and Triangular Cooperation, with the purpose of peer to peer learning and building capacities and skills among youth, especially young women. (*#Knowledge transfer*)

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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 of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome, 2021.

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