



**Making the agriculture sector work for youth:
A tool to promote young men and women's
engagement in growing root, tuber and banana crops**

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Introduction

The United Nations defines 'youth' as persons between 15 and 24 years of age. In 2015, there were an estimated 193 million 15-24-year-olds in sub-Saharan Africa; by 2050 this is projected to rise to more than 360 million. Today, 60% of Africa's youth live in rural areas.

Youth related issues, such as youth unemployment, have become a key policy focus for many governments in developing countries. 'Youth and women employment' is one of the six key priority areas for the African Union's 2014 *Plan of Action on Employment, Poverty Eradication and Inclusive Development in Africa*.

There is a growing perception that young people have become increasingly disengaged, disenchanted and unhappy: for example, a recent opinion piece in the Financial Times suggested that Africa's youth are "frustrated, jobless and angry".

Particularly in Africa, there has been renewed focus on youth as the 'youth bulge' (Africa has twice as many 15-year-olds as 35-year-olds) which, combined with high un- and under-employment rates, is perceived as a security threat and a major contributor to mass migration (Sommers, 2011, LaGraffe, 2012). According to a recent article on a UN website, "*youth unemployment...can fuel the fire of political violence and civil unrest*". On average, more than 70% of Africa's youth live on less than USD 2 per day, the internationally defined poverty threshold.

In many African countries, agriculture is one of the biggest employers. On average 54% of the working population works in the agricultural sector in sub-Saharan Africa although this varies widely between countries; for example, it is more than 80% in Burundi, Burkina Faso, and Madagascar, but less than 5% in South Africa.

Many African governments are looking to the agriculture sector to provide employment opportunities for young people through development of value chains. Some have enacted policy instruments, such as tax exemptions on agriculture and technology investments, that benefit young people (Republic of Malawi, 2013); adopted measures to improve youth's access to land, market information and training; or promoted use of information and communication technology (ICT) tools to make agriculture more attractive to young people (Republic of Uganda, 2001; Republic of Malawi, 2013).

Using data gathered from projects implemented by the International Potato Center (CIP) and the CGIAR Research Program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas, this paper first seeks to debunk some common myths and highlights ways to engage young men and women in agriculture in ways that are beneficial to them. It also proposes a tool, consisting of a checklist of questions, that could be used by agriculture research and development practitioners to help them ensure their agricultural projects in Africa effectively engage with youth, with a focus on root, tuber and banana (RTB) crops.

Involvement of youth in growing RTB crops

Myth 1: The same approaches will work for all youth regardless of gender and other social factors

Youth are not a homogeneous group and other social factors beyond age, including gender, ethnicity and wealth status of their family, can play important roles in determining their options. Also, the 15-24-year-old age spans a wide continuum from school children through adolescents to young adults who may be married with children of their own. In the vast majority of sub-Saharan African countries, average age to get married is below 24 years and 39% of girls are married before the age of 18 years. The average age at first birth is 20 years or younger in half of African countries.

As noted by an adult male farmer (see Box 1), a young person who is still in school and dependent on parents is very different from a young person who is no longer in school and leading an independent life. Additionally, young men and women may have different abilities, opportunities and challenges to engage with RTB crops because of their different positioning in the social milieu. Sumberg et al., (2012) for instance state that, *“Social difference as it affects young people’s ability to exploit the agri-food opportunity space must be central to this analysis.”*

Access to training has long been regarded as key to agriculture development, innovation and adoption of new improved varieties and techniques. As a result, it is important to ensure that both young men and young women have access to training in order to have the skills they need to engage profitably in agriculture.

When it comes to youth, the intersection of age and gender cannot be over emphasized (Elias et al., 2018). For example, it was noted that parents preferred their sons to receive training on agricultural activities compared to their daughters. Both young men and women noted that their parents often prefer to assign household chores, such as fetching water, cooking and cleaning, to young women while young men could attend training and even join agricultural groups. When young men and women in Uganda were asked if young men and women had equal opportunity to attend training, they often mentioned that opportunity was not equal because of male bias and also the greater workload that young women often had in their families.

“Most parents feel that girls play a more vital role in managing the homes than in being in agricultural groups.”

“Some girls may not feel comfortable to be in groups because most of them have parents that cannot allow them to easily join groups.”

Young men taking part in focus group discussion, Ntcheu, Malawi, under auspices of the GENNOVATE¹ project.

“Ladies who stay at home of our age may attend the meetings but for us we are in school sometimes we attend during the holidays to represent our families. However, often it is the young men who attend. Normally girls do not attend because as girls we have a lot of work at home so we remain at home to cook and do other tasks in the house.”

Schoolgirl taking part in focus group discussion with young people aged 15-24, Odoo, Uganda, GENNOVATE).

Young people, particularly young women, may depend on their parents for permission to access training. When this permission is not forthcoming, young women will have difficulties in accessing agricultural knowledge. Due to social restrictions therefore, young women are not able to freely access information and join agricultural groups. Although young women often mentioned that it was not easy to join agriculture groups, they could easily join groups offering training in sewing, embroidery and hairdressing,

¹ GENNOVATE is a cross-CRP, global comparative research initiative which addresses the question of how gender norms and agency influence men, women, and youth to adopt innovation in agriculture and natural resource management (NRM). <https://gennovate.org/>

activities which are regarded as being in the female domain and appropriate for young women.

Not all young women, however, are disadvantaged in this way. Some RTB crops, such as cassava and sweetpotato, which are largely regarded as women's crops in Malawi and Uganda, provide opportunities for young women to access knowledge and training. For example, when asked whether young men and women had equal opportunities to learn about orange fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP), a group of young men in Ntove, Uganda observed:

"Young women have more opportunities because the OFSP innovation was brought in by women who are nearer to the girls."

"Girls have more opportunities since they are the ones who usually attend meetings about the OFSP. In most cases young men are out working in farms like the sugarcane plantations."

"Girls have more opportunities because they are always at home and the opportunities get them there."

Source: GENNOVATE

So, because young men may be working for wages in the agricultural sector, this can provide an opportunity for greater engagement of young women in their household's agriculture as well as agricultural training. This also emphasizes the need to study the opportunity structure for young men and women and what this means for future developments in the agriculture sector.

Strong cultural norms associated with gender division of labor may also influence what young men and women can do in agriculture and the investments that parents are willing to make on their children. For example, if young women can be harassed or even attacked while trying to sell crops, or they tend to be offered a lower price than their male counterparts would receive for the same crop, parents will not be motivated to involve their young daughters in this part of the value chain. Additionally, as land for farming is limited, girls tend not to have the same opportunity to learn and practice farming as their brothers; parents generally groom their sons to take over the land in the future. In many societies in Africa, women do not usually inherit land.

Myth 2: Young men and women are not interested in cultivating root and tuber crops

CIP research, done through the GENNOVATE project, indicates that young men and women are interested in opportunities that can improve their livelihoods and, where they can see tangible benefits, they will engage. For example, in Ntove district, Uganda, young men mentioned a sugarcane farm that had been launched in their area as an important development because it provided them with employment. This provides a window into young people's motivations: they are not averse to engaging along the agricultural value chain as long as there are opportunities for them to make a living.

However, family hierarchies may mean that young people typically do not have access to resources they need to engage in agriculture, or they feel that they do not benefit from agriculture because heads of households feel entitled to young people's free labor (Box 1).

Box 1: Contributions made during a stakeholders' meeting in Nyandarua, Kenya

Young female seed potato farmer in Kenya: *"I was in formal employment. I worked in a bank. I was interacting very much with farmers, lending loans appraising them. From there I was able to identify opportunities that I can engage as a young person in farming even making profits and achieve greater things... [But] young people feel that parents are clinging too much to the land. They do not want to involve the youth. They don't want to give land to the youth so the youth can work on the land. Maybe that's why parents feel that young people do not want to be involved. Then at the end of the day the youth feel that when parents sell the produce the youth get nothing. As a young person you feel that you are just involved in labor provisioning."*

Adult male seed potato farmer in Kenya: *“We have youth who are under their parents’ care and we have youth who are beyond parents’ care therefore those two categories will differ...because if at all if you are under your parents care and you are schooling and you want me to pay you, is it okay? It can’t work because when I plant this potato I am working for your fees then you want me to pay you. Is it fair? The age of 18-35, they have a lot of ambition. Their ambition makes them think that farming is parents’ business or a business for those who do not know what they are doing.”* Young male potato farmer: *“To be a seed producer you must have at least 5 acres of land. I have to talk to my parents and ask for a piece of land...Because parents are the ones who refuse to give youth land, so they can work on it.”*

Source: Unpublished data from *Integrating gender into Kenya’s evolving seed policies and regulations for roots and tubers (2018-2019)*

A lack of access by young men and women to resources, such as land and loans, can also make it difficult for them to engage in agriculture. It is therefore important to understand the household and community norms and beliefs and the distribution of resources that can constrain young people from participating in agriculture on their own account.

For those who are working in agriculture on their own account, if they had no access to bank loans or land from their parents, then first they will have had to do other work to raise the capital needed to purchase or rent land and invest in their agricultural endeavors. The need to undertake such income generation as a pathway into agriculture can be a barrier for young women. For example, in Malawi young women suggested that they did not have equal opportunities to participate in agricultural because only young men could access income generating opportunities which provided them with necessary capital.

“Of course, we differ in that boys tend to have more capital to start businesses or to buy farm tools than women.”

“Boys in this village do work for the Somalis. They sew potato sacks for them, and this is intensive work that women cannot do because it is very physical. The physical work we leave for the men.”

Young women, Ntcheu District, Uganda, GENNOVATE project

Young men often mentioned that having opportunities to start small businesses in their communities was desirable. RTB crops can provide such opportunities. Other income generating opportunities, such as migration for work to towns and cities, or neighboring countries, can also provide young men with opportunities to earn money which they can then invest in agriculture. Young women, however, were often prevented from taking up similar opportunities; if they did, they could run the risk of being labelled as prostitutes upon return to the community (GENNOVATE, 2017).

Research has provided evidence that young people are especially interested in engaging in agriculture when there are quick returns to their investment.

“Young men usually participate in cultivation of maize not cassava. Maize here grows very fast and matures earlier than cassava so they want fast income - that’s why they engage in maize.”

Women focal group discussion participant, Rwibare, Uganda, RTB-ENDURE project – Expanding Utilization of roots tubers and banana through research (Mayanja et al., 2016).

In a stakeholder meeting on potato in Kenya, key stakeholders, who included NGOs, county government officials, and representatives of farmers and young people, suggested that young people would find potato relevant to their needs because of faster maturity and quick returns. This suggests that young people can engage in production of RTB crops, if these crops can meet their needs for earning an income and livelihood. Crops that take longer to mature, however, may face problems in attracting youth to invest.

In interviews with older men and women in Uganda and Kenya, it was often noted that young people did not engage in the production of RTB crops, *“because it is hard work”*. However, in relation to

production of cassava in Uganda and potato in Kenya, young people had a different explanation, that the value did not accrue to them:

“Parents may insist you do a lot of work with little pay and sometimes without [pay] so the youth may disappear.”

Young woman in Kenya. Unpublished data from *Integrating gender into Kenya’s evolving seed policies and regulations for roots and tubers (2018-2019)*.

Not surprisingly, young men and women are not interested in working for little or no reward.

Myth 3: Young men and women prefer white collar jobs or other jobs outside of agriculture

It is often stated that young men and women are not interested in hard labor and the grime and dirty associated with some agricultural tasks.

“I funded my son I did everything but he decided to go and work in a supermarket. He needs a white-collar job.”

Male farmer, Kenya. Unpublished data from *Integrating gender into Kenya’s evolving seed policies and regulations for roots and tubers (2018-2019)*

Undoubtedly, some youth want white-collar jobs but, as explained earlier, youth is not a single homogenous group. The evidence shows that some youth do want to engage in agriculture, although they may face obstacles in doing so (see Box 2).

Box 2:

Adult woman potato farmer, Kenya: *“The youth are so much discouraged. I can remember when I was in class 8, the teacher came into the class and we were making noise. We were taken outside and beaten. I was asked what I would like to be. When I said ‘farmer’, he beat me. Even up to today, I still remember the beating I was given. Let us change this attitude even in farming institutions. Tell the youth, farming is there so that when they come outside to the society they will have something in mind that even if I lack a white-collar job I can do farming and its well-paying. Our youth, we have spoiled their minds that farming is like slavery. Now even money to support youth in agriculture is being returned because there is no one to collect the money.”*

Young man potato farmer, Kenya: *“I used to belong to an agricultural youth group. That is when people from the agricultural offices came to our place. They told us the importance of planting potatoes but from there it was not successful because most of the youth want quick money. So, I left the group to work on my own. On my own I continued on a small piece of land 50 meters by 100 meters that I farm and give myself a source of income. If the government can at least remove this issue of groups and deal with a young person as an individual. And be given money you will be able to handle those 5 acres on your own. The problem with most of the youth is lack of capital and they don’t have land. If you get the youth fund you can rent the land even for 5 years.”*

Source: Unpublished data from *Integrating gender into Kenya’s evolving seed policies and regulations for roots and tubers 2018-2019)*

Accelerated Value Chains Development potato project, Kenya

The project promoted a business model in which farmers could engage in seed businesses as part of co-operatives. This was regarded as a chance for women and young men and women with no access to land to be able to participate as part of cooperatives.

The Kenyan government insists that all cooperatives that are funded by government money should have at least 30% of the participants being youths.

However, young participants at a stakeholders meeting stated that young people are not comfortable joining cooperatives dominated by older people since they end up not having a say in how the cooperatives are run. It was noted that older members within cooperatives may not be willing to give up controlling roles in cooperatives causing intergenerational stress and tension).

Stakeholders suggested that it may be a good opportunity to form new youth dominated clubs where young people can have full and meaningful participation. However, the problem of access to land for youth was noted as a key limitation since land is often expensive to rent. Additionally, sustainability of young people dominated groups was also called into question since young people are highly mobile and can easily move in and out of groups and migrate to far off places in search of employment whilst older people are more stable.

Source: Workshop minutes, USAID Feed the Future-funded Improved Potato and Sweetpotato Value Chains for Income and Nutrition (2015-2018), part of the Accelerated Value Chains Development project

As we have shown, it is not as simple as young people preferring white-collar jobs. Rather, even if they want to engage in agriculture, they face a lot of obstacles that may prevent them succeeding, including structural issues and interventions that do not adequately consider young people’s needs and position. Likewise, young people may be expected to participate in agricultural value chains despite lacking any decision-making powers or influence over what happens to them. They may find this disempowering which could be a factor in driving them away from agriculture and towards other jobs where they may feel more in control. As citizens, young people need to be properly consulted and greater efforts need to be made to understand the barriers and opportunities to engagement, and to develop better strategies that more effectively promote and support their engagement.

In light of the above considerations and of the literature on young people in agriculture, we have developed a checklist to guide projects seeking to engage youth in agriculture (Table 1).

Table 1: Checklist for effective youth participation in agriculture and in RTB crops

<p>Researchers and program designers should obtain answers to the following questions to ensure that their projects are designed to address issues facing youth:</p>
<p>Does your project adequately address the drivers for youth involvement in agriculture and agro-enterprises?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Does your project adequately integrate gender and age so you can fully understand the potential for young men and women to engage? b. What strategies can be developed or have been used in this project to improve their engagement (discuss young men and women separately)? c. How will you refine the project approach to better address the needs of young men and young women farmers/entrepreneurs?
<p>What constraints and opportunities exists hindering youth engagement in RTB agriculture?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Discuss with young men and women to understand their context specific barriers to participation in RTB value chains and address these. b. Invite young men and women or representative of youth organizations to participate in decisions related to RTB programs and crops development.

- c. Develop RTB programs that address structural issues and social norms that prevent the engagement of young men and women in RTB value chains.
- d. Consult young people on the modalities of their engagement as well as opportunities and constraints.
- e. Involve young people during decision making as well as in leadership positions.
- f. Provide interventions that meet gendered needs, interests, opportunities, and challenges for young women and men in different socio-economic conditions

When designing interventions, it is important to ensure that the interventions are youth responsive by considering all or some of the following issues:

If developing a youth extension program, you need to address young people's needs and capabilities

- a. What should an extension program targeted towards young men and women, respectively look like? What is the viability of a youth extension program?
 - i. Is your extension program giving young people the skills they need for meaningful and sustainable employment in agriculture?
 - ii. Are you offering young people training on business management, leadership and apprenticeship opportunities, especially to young women, as part of your extension program?
 - iii. Is your extension program using approaches that appeal to young people, such as using ICTs?
 - iv. If working with groups, are you working with organizations catering to the needs of young people?

Where projects target groups for funding and extension, researchers and program designers need to assess whether groups are addressing young people's needs

- a. What is the role of cooperatives/ farmer groups in promoting and upgrading your crop?
- b. Are these effective and efficient?
- c. What are the opportunities and constraints for the participation of youth, especially young women in co-operatives?
- d. Do young men and young women have a voice and can they participate equally?
- e. Are farmer groups / cooperatives the best way to reach young men and women? Why? Why not? What else can be done

To benefit young people research and interventions needs to target structural transformation

- a. Are you targeting rural youth, this means not focusing only on economic empowerment but should also targeting social norms that can prevent young men and women from reaching their full potential?
- b. Is your project or program taking time to identify and address structural barriers to youth involvement?
- c. Is your project or program targeting attitudinal shift among parents and care givers towards the involvement of both male and female youth in agriculture training, and access to information and knowledge?
- d. How does your research or program ensure that the skills and knowledge that young women have and acquire are valued, acknowledged and utilized?

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