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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

YOUTH AHEAD: Policy Innovations to Create Opportunities for Young People in Africa's Agrifood Systems

The Malabo Montpellier Panel is jointly facilitated by



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Approximately ten years ago, the Malabo Montpellier Panel published a report on entrepreneurship in Africa's agriculture sector. The report stressed the opportunities awaiting Africa's young people in the agrifood sector. It delved into the actions governments must take to help small agribusinesses grow and prosper. Since then, we at the Malabo Montpellier Panel have highlighted in all our reports the challenges and opportunities of Africa's growing youth population as a critical cross-cutting policy issue for agrifood system transformation in Africa. With a sense of urgency, we now revisit the status of young people in Africa's agrifood systems to propose further actions to put youth at the center of those transformations and reflect on policy opportunities to accelerate the contributions African youth can make to those changes.

Africa is the youngest continent globally—approximately 60 percent of its population is younger than 25 years, and over one-third are between 15 and 35. By the end of this century, the world's youth population may mostly come from Africa. However, as Africa's youth continue to shape the region's demographics, they increasingly face economic headwinds. The majority of young people in Africa live on less than USD 2.00 per day, and youth unemployment is high, as is youth underemployment. In a context where the annual number of young people joining the African labor market is more than that for jobs being created, youth poverty and unemployment figures are set to rise. Hence, there is an urgent need for African governments to accelerate the pace of job creation.

Africa's agrifood systems hold significant promise for improving youth employment and livelihoods. Moreover, youth will be pivotal to transforming Africa's agrifood systems and attaining the continent's job, growth, and health goals. The active involvement of young people in Africa's agrifood systems is essential for the continent's socio-economic development and prosperity, including improved food security.

African youth, however, still face challenges that hinder them from pursuing meaningful, decent, and profitable opportunities in the agrifood sector. Africa's agrifood systems are changing rapidly, are highly dynamic, and can offer many opportunities for entrepreneurship and employment along all segments of agribusiness value chains—from upstream science and research to production to processing of those

agricultural products for value addition through to engagement with domestic, regional, and international markets.

To harness these economic opportunities in agrifood systems, young people must be equipped with skills and knowledge that match those demanded by rapidly transforming food systems. Such training must go beyond formal education. African governments need to invest at scale in various training institutions that support youth in acquiring strategic skills to build their innovation and entrepreneurship capacity across the agrifood value chains. The expanded skills they acquire will enable them to design and develop locally-suited technologies that improve the quantity and quality of food produced across Africa, contributing to achieving continental ambitions on food systems transformation and trade while increasing incomes for youth. However, attracting young people to pursue employment in agrifood systems will also require their active involvement and participation in political decision-making processes, particularly in designing policies that will enable youth to engage in those systems productively and profitably.

This report by the Malabo Montpellier Panel—**YOUTH AHEAD: Policy innovations to create opportunities for young people in Africa's agrifood systems**—summarizes key findings from case studies conducted in four systematically selected countries: **Ghana, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe**. The report reviews these countries' policy and institutional innovations and their programmatic interventions to target youth in transforming their food systems. These four countries' experiences can guide other African countries' strategies to achieve the same goals. Examples of key policy innovations in these countries include Ghana's Education Strategic Plan (ESP 2018-2030) to improve technical and vocational education and the National Employment Policy to create decent job opportunities for youth; and Uganda's Universal Secondary Education, which has increased young people's access to secondary education, and the Science Education Policy, which made science subjects compulsory at lower secondary level. To empower young people, the government of Zambia implemented the Skills Development Levy to fund technical and vocational training, while the government of Zimbabwe established EmpowerBank - a youth-focused bank to improve young people's access to business finance.



While most African governments have long recognized that turning their youth bulge into a demographic dividend for their economies must be a policy priority, efforts must be redoubled to ensure that Africa's young people are equipped with the required skills, knowledge, resources, and supportive environments. All these are needed if youth are to thrive economically and play an important role in sustainably transforming and elevating food systems across the continent.

The Action Agenda presented by the Malabo Montpellier Panel draws on Africa-wide experiences and those of the four countries to highlight several key factors underlying some of the successes achieved in creating economic opportunities for young people in Africa's agrifood systems:

**Diversify education and training programs for youth entrepreneurship**—While tailor-made upskilling programs, enterprise-based training, and apprenticeships will address short-term gaps, earnest efforts will be required to update, upgrade and diversify sources of technical training. Only with such efforts will these skills development institutions be fit to buttress food systems that rapidly evolve through technological advances. To facilitate entrepreneurship and employment for young Africans in agriculture and agribusinesses, several governments and development partners have introduced innovative training programs. These often combine capacity enhancement with access to finance and mentorship to successfully support and steer youth-run agribusinesses.

**Address trade barriers coupled with technology infrastructure for jobs**—To stimulate agriculture trade, tariff and non-tariff barriers need to be removed. Such actions should be coupled with increased investments in technology and the infrastructure necessary to stimulate a more dynamic, technology-driven, and thriving agro-processing sector. The infrastructure investments should be designed to create employment directly and indirectly. Through these investments in agro-processing and the strengthened forward

links to marketing and trade and backward links to production that result, these value chains will become a core employment-generating sector in agrifood systems.

**Design and implement dedicated processes to include youth in policy- and decision-making**—Establish formalized consultations and platforms through which the opinions of young people around sustainable food system transformation can be captured. Such processes will enable youth to actively participate in and shape policy design and implementation at the national, regional, economic community, and continental levels. Mainstream youth across all aspects of agrifood system policy design and decision-making procedures. Youth are not a homogeneous group and their specific needs and demands must be reflected in how governments set priorities and design policies and strategies that impact the participation of youth and future generations in food systems across Africa. This includes a dedicated ministry or departments that work cross-governmental to support youth mainstreaming in these processes. The resulting youth-focused policies would empower youth to take on job creation or employment opportunities in transforming food systems, contributing to economic growth.

**Simultaneously address green growth and employment agendas with youth as investors**—Ensure that environmentally sustainable economic growth and employment generation agendas are designed and implemented in ways that are mutually reinforcing and beneficial. Such efforts must include youth-oriented technology and innovation systems and much better access to business finance by youth entrepreneurs. The rural banking sector is called upon to play an important role in ensuring that green growth results in increased employment and industrial expansion while ensuring that any new jobs generated support sustainable and equitable economic growth. One such approach can be the development of bioeconomies at scale at the national and continental levels.

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