



YOUTH AHEAD:

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



1. INTRODUCTION

In the past ten years, Zambia's population has grown by about 3 percent yearly, higher than the average population growth rate in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2022, Zambia's Census of Population and Housing estimated its population at 19.6 million, with 49 percent male and 51 percent female (ZamStats 2022). Youth constitute the largest portion of Zambia's population—65 percent of the population is under the age of 25 years, and 52 percent is under 18 (Population Council and UNFPA 2019). The

prevalence of youth in the population is attributed to the country's high population growth rate—the high youth population results from the country's diverse demographics (MOA 2023). Youth, who are defined as those aged 15 to 35 years of age, comprise 64 percent of Zambia's working-age population (all aged 15 years and above) and 56 percent of Zambia's labor force (ages 15 years and above who are employed or are unemployed but actively seeking work) (Bhorat, et al. 2015).



Although Zambia still faces some challenges, such as limited resources in its education sector, it has made significant progress in expanding education access—primary school enrollment has increased to 82 percent, and 58 percent of the population has completed secondary education (OYA 2022).

Outside of the COVID19 pandemic period, Zambia has experienced consistent economic growth of around 6 percent per year since 2000 (World Bank 2023a). Agriculture makes up approximately 20 percent of the country's GDP and has the potential to be a significant contributor to economic growth due to the country's significant fertile land area and favorable rainfall (IFAD 2023). Most people in Zambia rely on agriculture for at least part of their income (Andersson Djurfeldt, et al. 2019). Farming accounts for over 20 percent of Zambia's formal employment and over 50 percent of the population's livelihood. Between 2017 and 2021, Zambia's Agricultural Production Index per capita (2014-2016 = 100) averaged 106.0 (FAO 2023a). The country's Enabling Business for Agriculture score in 2019 was 63.7—ranking Zambia second only to Morocco among the African countries surveyed (World Bank 2019c).

The agriculture sector offers a pathway for rural development and diversified national socio-economic transformation (MOA 2023). There has been a decrease in youth participation in Zambian agriculture from 56 percent in 2012 to 22 percent in 2019, primarily due to their perception of agricultural work involving intensive labor for relatively low income. Nonetheless, youth and women are increasingly involved in agricultural value chains, including in primary production, agro-processing, trading, and retailing. In Zambia, most young people rely on agribusiness as their primary source of income, with 69 percent involved in the sector. Off-farm work is the second most popular livelihood activity for youth. Crop production is the most common type of agribusiness, involving 99 percent of respondents in Zambia (Mulema, et al. 2021). Many youth already process primary agricultural produce into products like meal, chips, and starch from cassava, peanut butter, and cooking oil from sunflower and soybeans. Often, this involves drying crops using simple technologies, like solar dryers, and then supplying the products obtained to markets and stores to generate income.

Zambia is committed to empowering its young people by signing and ratifying international agreements and implementing national laws and policies relevant to their economic well-being. These measures aim to support youth development by ensuring their human rights, promoting their participation in the economy and government, providing access to education, protecting them from hazardous work, improving their access to healthcare, and offering them financial support to undertake entrepreneurial activities (Population Council and UNFPA 2019). To create opportunities for youth, the government of Zambia aims to build a favorable environment for economic growth through privatization and good macroeconomic policies. In addition, dedicated efforts are being made to develop institutions and devise policies and programs to provide employment opportunities for young people in both the formal and informal sectors of the Zambian economy. This is being done principally by ensuring that youth obtain employable skills through appropriate higher education, technical education, and vocational training programs.

This case study provides a narrative review of the major institutional and policy innovations and programmatic interventions taken by the Government of Zambia and its partners to increase youth participation in the Zambian economy by offering them decent employment in the country's agrifood systems.

2. INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATIONS

The rising concerns and needs of the youth of Zambia have attracted the interest of the government in establishing an institutional architecture to channel their voices in guiding the design and implementation of government policies aimed at empowering them. Hence, the government of Zambia seeks to promote the increased participation of youth in agricultural education, providing them with management and marketing skills, including in agriculture, promoting their adoption of sustainable agricultural technologies, encouraging their engagement in food processing activities, and providing them with market information. To achieve this, the government plans to simplify land acquisition requirements for youth, acquire additional land for youth resettlement, provide them with agricultural implements and inputs, expand their access to microfinancing, offer



financial grants for youth agricultural projects, offer them dedicated agricultural extension and technical services, and reintroduce young farmers' clubs in schools. These efforts aim to reduce youth unemployment in Zambia by sharply increasing youth engagement in agriculture and expanding youth-run agro-based processing businesses.

Ministry of Agriculture (MOA). MOA manages the government's agricultural activities to support the development of a sustainable and diversified agricultural sector, resulting in food and nutrition security and increased income generation (MOA 2022a). The Zambian government has recognized agricultural entrepreneurship as a potential source of youth employment (Kabwe, Machina and Kinkese 2018). MOA aims to create a smart and value-centered environment for agricultural development, encouraging innovative production and productivity improvements. The Ministry also aims to foster a sustainable and diversified agricultural sector for increased income generation and food and nutrition security. This is to be achieved through cost-effective strategies, efficiency improvements, agricultural and dietary diversification, infrastructure improvements, and strengthening regulatory frameworks (MOA 2022a).

In addition to its ten departments, MOA runs seven training institutions through which youth can obtain specialized training in the agricultural sector. The institutions provide training in various topics, including horticulture, marketing, and cash production, and include:

- Katete College of Agricultural Marketing,
- Zambia Centre for Horticultural Training–Chapula,
- Zambia College of Agriculture–Monze,
- Zambia College of Agriculture–Mpika,
- Natural Resources Development College,
- Popota Tobacco Training College, and
- Zambia College of Agriculture–Mpongwe (MOA 2022b).

The Government of Zambia, through MOA, has also established institutions jointly with development partners. For example, the Zambian–German Agricultural Knowledge and Training Centre (AKTC) was established with Germany's Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture to provide hands-on training in farming, including to youth and beginner-level farmers. By 2023, AKTC had trained over 18,000 beneficiaries, including youth. AKTC is currently registered by Zambia's Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA) as a training institute and has established the only tractor-driving school in Zambia (GOPA AFC 2023). Since 2017, AKTC has organized an annual Youth Day to highlight the economic opportunities and innovative technologies employed in agricultural value chains to young people in Zambia (GOPA AFC 2017).

Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises Development. The Ministry was created in





September 2021 to promote the development and growth of cooperatives and small and medium enterprises (SME) to create jobs and wealth across the country (MSME 2023). The Ministry plays a pivotal role in developing and supporting youth initiatives in Zambia, especially in the agrifood sector. Recognizing the critical importance of agriculture to the nation's economy and the potential for SMEs to drive growth and employment in agrifood systems, the Ministry has implemented various strategies and programs to foster entrepreneurship and provide opportunities for youth in these systems.

These initiatives typically include:

- Access to financial services and credit for young entrepreneurs who wish to start or scale their agrifood businesses.
- Training and capacity building to equip youth with the necessary skills and knowledge in agriculture, business management, and value chain development.
- Strengthening market linkages by creating platforms for young agrifood entrepreneurs to connect with markets, both locally and internationally, to ensure that they can sell their products and services effectively.

- Encouraging the adoption of new technologies and innovative practices in agriculture to increase productivity, sustainability, and competitiveness.
- Advocating for policies that support youth involvement in agrifood SMEs, such as tax incentives, subsidies, or prioritizing youth-led enterprises in government procurement.
- Establishing business incubators and mentorship programs that support young agricultural entrepreneurs to develop viable business plans and navigate the challenges of the agrifood sector.

By focusing on these areas, the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises Development ensures that young people are provided with opportunities and empowered to take advantage of these opportunities to create successful businesses within Zambia's agrifood systems. This approach contributes significantly to job creation, food security, and overall economic diversification in Zambia.

Ministry of Youth, Sport, and Arts (MYSA). MYSA is responsible for developing and implementing programs to help young people reach their full potential and improve their physical and mental well-being. The Ministry promotes child





development, empowers youth, supports sports champions, and encourages healthy citizens. MYSA also aims to enhance youth economic empowerment programs, coordinate and promote sports programs, develop the arts industry, manage financial resources in these sectors effectively, improve its operational systems, enhance human resources and work culture, and improve infrastructure and equipment. The Ministry supports youth entrepreneurship by creating youth policies and fostering the development of youth skills. MYSA achieves its objectives through its five departments—Human Resource and Administration, Finance, Sports Development, Arts, and Youth Development (MYSA 2021b).

The Ministry conducts youth development programs at 23 Youth Resource Centres nationwide. These provide numerous training courses for youth, such as in food production and nutrition, general agriculture, entrepreneurship, computer and information and communication technologies (ICT) studies, and automotive mechanics, among others. Some agriculture-focused Youth Resource Centres, such as at Kwilimuna, were established by government between 2000 and 2011 with support from the Ndola Youth Resource Centre (NYRC), a youth-led and youth-focused Zambian non-governmental organization. NYRC's objective is to raise awareness of ICT-related skills among youth so that they can integrate those innovative skills into their work across various sectors, including agriculture. NYRC partners with Provincial Youth Development Offices to coordinate and implement various youth development programs. Equipped with computers, printers, and communication tools, these centers facilitate information sharing among young farmers, linking them to key agricultural services and supporting them in accessing credit through the Youth Development Fund (FAO, CTA, and IFAD 2014, Chanda 2012).

In 2021 and 2022, the Ministry empowered almost 120,000 youths, among whom almost 2,000 completed their training in a range of skills (MYSA 2021a, 2021c). In 2023, the Ministry partnered with India's Jain University to sponsor 500,000 students in online skills training programs. The training is being conducted in batches of 50,000 students at the Ministry's Youth Resource Centers. Jain University provides internet access, laptops, and solar equipment to enhance the online training experience for participating youth (MYSA 2023a).

National Youth Development Council (NYDC).

NYDC is an institution of the Zambian government responsible for increasing the involvement of young people in the country's social and economic development. Parliament established it to empower young people through effectively guiding the implementation of the National Youth Policy—the NYDC Act was passed in 1986 (NYCA 2005). The Council advises the government on youth-related programs, coordinates youth activities, implements programs, and supports other organizations in creating youth training and development initiatives. NYDC is also responsible for registering all youth-focused organizations in Zambia. It also offers opportunities for registered organizations to obtain funding (YouthLead 2021). NYDC additionally aims to assist young people in achieving their goals and aspirations by connecting them with opportunities to advance in life. It ensures that youth-led organizations, such as clubs, cooperatives, and associations, are equipped with the skills they need to operate effectively. The benefits of organizations registering with NYDC include legal recognition, compliance with Zambian laws, training in entrepreneurship and skills, access to mentorship and sponsorship, participation in meetings and conferences, and support in youth development.

Youth Development Organization (YDO).

YDO was established in 1997 to plan, collaborate, and implement joint advocacy activities related to youth development in Zambia. The aim was to ensure that the government, cooperating partners, civil society organizations, communities, and other stakeholders, such as the private sector, collaboratively initiate and implement activities that contribute to a national approach to youth empowerment and, thereby, create a conducive environment for youth development in Zambia. The revised strategic plan for YDO is crucial in this context, being based on input and feedback from an evaluation of YDO's past performance (YDO 2021a).

YDO has created 30 Economic Empowerment Clubs in rural areas around Choma town in the Southern Province. These clubs consist of between 15 and 20 youth who share a passion for improving their skills and becoming financially independent. Over the years, club members have collaborated to generate income for themselves and their families. YDO has offered resources,



training, and assistance to the clubs. Not only have the clubs improved the economic situation of their members, but they have also provided a valuable support system for vulnerable youth in the Choma area. YDO plans to increase the number of clubs and expand its support to areas beyond Choma by 2025. Also, with assistance from Voluntary Services Overseas, YDO helped 100 women with local chicken farming and 30 young individuals with goat rearing in 2020. YDO aims to expand its agricultural program to include a broader range of farming and marketing activities, including adding value to agricultural produce (YDO 2021b).

In 2009, YDO initiated Kick-Start Courses for orphaned and vulnerable young people in Singani and Pangwe. These courses equip young people with carpentry skills and start-up resources to develop their own income-generating activities. The project helps these young people overcome their disadvantages and work themselves out of poverty. YDO uses an innovative and comprehensive approach to provide them with the necessary skills, start-up resources, and motivation to develop their own small businesses. The initiative reduces stigma and discrimination and establishes a structured system to support orphaned and vulnerable youth in the long term. The Kick-Start Programme has been proven to be sustainable and to meet immediate needs, as those targeted by the program in Singani and Pangwe often suffer from food shortages and starvation. By reducing stigma and discrimination for orphaned and vulnerable young people, the program aims to bring about sustained development for its beneficiaries (YDO 2021b).

Provincial Youth Development Coordinating Departments. Zambia comprises ten provinces, each headed by a deputy minister. The provinces are each further divided into several districts (Central Province 2021). Under each provincial administration, the Youth Development Coordinating Department focuses on the well-being of young people aged between 15 and 35 years in the province. It manages programs that help young people start businesses in agriculture and transportation. These departments also run training centers that offer courses in various skills, such as information and communication technologies (ICT), electrical work, food production, tailoring, and carpentry (Central Province 2022).

To improve coordination, the government ensures that the various ministries and organizations involved in youth development work together without duplicating or weakening each other (DYD 1994). This initiative to improve the coordination of youth development services within Zambia's provinces includes agencies involved with commerce, trade, technical education, vocational training, general education, local government, community development, social services, small and village industries development, and non-governmental organizations.

Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA). TEVETA was established under the Technical Education, Vocational, and Entrepreneurship Training Act No.13 of 1998 and TEVET (Amendment) Act No. 11 of 2005. Its functions include:

- Advising the Ministry of Science, Technology and Vocational Training on human resource development through technical education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship training,
- Regulating management boards,
- Providing technical consultancies and promoting technical capacity,
- Developing national curricula, setting minimum standards and qualifications, providing guidelines for institutional curriculum development, approving examinations, conducting national examinations, charging fees and awarding certificates, guiding institutions in recruitment rules, approving curricula and standards, registering institutions, and canceling registrations, and
- Performing other tasks related to the Authority's functions (TEVETA Zambia 2024).

Under TEVETA, the Government of Zambia has made significant reforms to the national technical education and vocational training system to better meet the economy's needs. The effort started in 1994 when a task force was appointed to review government policy and recommend necessary changes. These reforms were necessary because the earlier policies, formulated in 1968, did not align with the country's emerging economic and demographic conditions. Despite some attempts



to adapt to the changing environment, the training system was not adequately providing workers with the new skills demanded in the country's labor markets. In January 1995, the Task Force made recommendations, leading the government to enact the TEVET Act in 1998. This law established TEVETA as the body responsible for implementing the TEVET policy. The new policy is more comprehensive and aims to meet the changing demands of the labor market and socio-economic conditions.

TEVETA is governed by a Board of Directors appointed by the Minister according to the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training (Amendment) Act No. 11 of 2005. The Board comprises representatives from various organizations and institutions involved in technical education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship. These include representatives from trade unions, chambers of commerce, universities, employers' organizations, small and medium business associations, research and development institutions, religious organizations, and government ministries (TEVETA Zambia 2022c). TEVETA is partly funded by resources collected via the skills development levy through the Skills Development Fund, managed by the Ministry of Higher Education (UNESCO 2022).

TEVETA's mandate is far broader than simply managing the levy-financed TEVET Fund—it includes more than 20 different areas of responsibility (TEVETA Zambia 2024), including, for example, direct training provision, regulation and standards, curriculum and assessment, certification, accreditation, labor market information, national TEVET coordination, and national policy development (MOHE 2017). By 2020, TEVETA had registered 295 institutions (TEVETA Zambia 2020). In 2021, 6,180 trainees were enrolled in various trades-focused courses, including 30 in agricultural mechanics, almost 500 in food production, and over 30 in poultry farming (TEVETA Zambia 2022c).

Musika—Making Agricultural Markets Work for Zambia. Musika is a non-profit organization in Zambia that aims to encourage private investment in the country's agricultural markets, particularly in the lower end of those markets. 'Musika' means 'market' in several local languages in Zambia. Musika was registered in 2010 and is owned by six Zambian agriculture-related institutions:

- Zambia National Farmers Union,
- Golden Valley Agricultural Research Trust,
- Grain Traders Association of Zambia,
- Indaba Agricultural Policy Research Institute,
- Zambia Seed Traders Association, and
- Bankers Association of Zambia.

Musika aims to reduce poverty by ensuring that agricultural markets benefit all stakeholders, especially the rural poor. Its strategy involves creating a supportive market environment that allows farmers to invest in their own production and use markets to improve their economic situation. This approach aligns with the Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P) methodology, which focuses on stimulating change within market systems to involve poor individuals in economic development (Musika 2024a). Musika was formed as a follow-up to successful market development interventions under the USAID|PROFIT private sector development program, which ran in Zambia for over seven years. Musika started in November 2011 with funding from several donors. It focuses on the agriculture sector and rural Zambians, primarily through working with firms and associations in the market. The project does not directly engage with the rural poor. This design feature is to ensure sustainability and to minimize market disruptions.

Musika's interventions in Zambia's smallholder markets have created numerous opportunities for youth to invest in agriculture as a business, enabling them to play a solid and equitable role in the development of the agricultural sector. The development approach involves creating a beneficial market environment that supports improved market access while ensuring that women and youth are key market participants. An improved market environment includes increased opportunities for value addition, access to extension services and finance, opportunities for technology transfer, forward pricing, assured off-take, supply contracts, and other market services.

With Musika's support, the private sector has invested USD 50 million in rural areas, resulting in increased economic activity at the community level. Between 2015 and 2019, over USD 36 million of additional income was accrued to the smallholder



economy due to improved commercial relationships between smallholders and agribusinesses. Musika's private sector partners provide extension support, training, and product knowledge, allowing youth to learn and adopt better farm management practices. Additionally, these private sector partners offer flexible asset leasing and tillage and haulage service provision to support efficient and increased crop production among youth who lack machinery. Partners also provide improved access to solar irrigation and small processing equipment, which enables youth to produce crops and process products throughout the year. Young people's engagement in low-cost agricultural enterprises, like vegetable gardening, fruit tree planting, and small livestock, leads to increased income generation and economically safeguards rural youth in Zambia against economic and climatic shocks (Musika 2024b).

3. POLICY INNOVATIONS

Compelled by the growing youth population and their aspirations for a better future and access to opportunities, Zambia has initiated several policy reforms to ensure youth mainstreaming in public investments and programming in line with its Vision 2030. Statements on unleashing youth potential through programs to expand employable skills and to empower youth to engage in public

policy processes are enshrined in various policy documents, including Vision 2030, the National Youth Policy, and the eighth National Development Plan (2022-2026).

Vision 2030. Adopted in 2006, Vision2030 has since served as a blueprint document to guide the national development planning toward improving the quality of life of Zambians (Republic of Zambia 2006). This is to be done through increased investments in health, education, and infrastructure. The aspiration of the vision is that Zambia will become a middle-income nation by 2030. Vision 2030 is structured around seven principles:

- Sustainable development;
- Upholding democratic principles;
- Respect for human rights;
- Fostering family values;
- A positive attitude to work;
- Peaceful coexistence; and
- Upholding good traditional values.

Over time, succeeding governments have aligned their policies, including those that are youth-focused, to the goals of Vision2030. Examples





include the 2015 National Youth Policy and the 2020 National Policy on Technical and Vocational Education—both envision better skilled and more entrepreneurial Zambian youth. To ensure proper implementation of Vision 2030, in 2018, the government of Zambia designed the National Performance Framework as an accountability tool with clear metrics to track progress toward Vision 2030.

Eighth National Development Plan, 2022-2026 (8NDP). The eighth NDP was adopted after the 2021 presidential elections, in which the manifestos of the main competing parties included proposals for agriculture development and youth empowerment (UPND 2021, Patriotic Front 2021). This focus on youth in the election platforms reflected a recognition of the need to reduce unemployment among youth in Zambia, which stood at 17 percent in 2021, having grown from 14 percent in 2005.

8NDP outlines the country's investment priorities in four strategic areas:

- Economic transformation and job creation,
- Human and social development,
- Environmental sustainability, and
- Good governance environment.

The development plan recognizes that increased investment in the agriculture sector, in skills development, and in science, technology, and information and communication technologies (ICT) for digital transformation and innovation are necessary for creating decent jobs, especially for youth, under the economic transformation and job creation agenda.

Specific to youth and food systems transformation, 8NDP set out several priority investment areas:

- Providing equitable access to agricultural services;
- Promoting science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and technical, vocational, and entrepreneurship skills for the youth workforce; and
- Investing in infrastructure, research and extension, and agribusiness development.

These investments are expected to improve national food security and create employment opportunities along agricultural value chains. The government has committed to providing sustained financing to the national TEVET system and enlarging and decentralizing the skills development bursary scheme for improved access by vulnerable youths to skills training. The government is set to spend an average of almost ZMW 240 million annually on the Skills Development Fund from 2022 to 2026. To further promote STEM education; science, technology, and innovation (STI); digital skills; and increased research and development in secondary and tertiary educational institutions, the government will utilize additional resources, such as the Strategic Research Fund and the STI Youth Fund (Republic of Zambia 2023).

National Youth Policy. The National Youth Policy was adopted in 2015 as a replacement to the 1994 and 2006 Youth Policies. It provides a revised framework to tackle both old and emerging concerns of Zambia's youth, including their ever-increasing levels of unemployment (MOYS 2015a). The policy reform was motivated by the need to ensure that the Youth Policy considers emerging issues and opportunities, such as increased exposure of youth to information—70 percent of internet users in Zambia are youth—and the expanding economic opportunities available in Zambia's cities, which results in increased rural to urban migration (UNDP-Zambia 2023).

In this regard, the revised Youth Policy aims at ensuring youth mainstreaming and coordination of the Government's efforts toward holistic youth development and economic empowerment through focused programs and investments in youth employment, entrepreneurship development, education and skills development, health and cultural promotion, creative industries, and sport (MOYS 2015a). In the same year, the Government adopted an Action Plan for Youth Empowerment and Employment, which mainstreams youth employment in critical sectors of the economy. The Strategy proposes an integrated package of youth economic support services, including mentorship, entrepreneurship skills training through Technical and Vocational Education training centers, business development services, and marketing support services (MOYS 2015b).



National Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training (TEVET) Policy. The National TEVET Policy was adopted in 2020 to replace the 1996 Policy. The implementation of the earlier policy was adversely affected by several challenges, including a lack of sustainable funding mechanisms and limited linkages with industry. Faced with the challenges of an ever-increasing youth population unable to pursue studies in the formal education system and rising numbers of unemployed graduates and school drop-outs, the revised policy aims to leverage public and private resources to strengthen TEVET delivery of skills training at all levels. Under the policy, the human and infrastructure capacity of secondary schools, vocational training centers, trades training institutes, and technical colleges will be increased to absorb all categories of unemployed youth who need to be better equipped with employable entrepreneurship skills to engage productively and profitably in Zambia's labor markets (MOHE 2020a).

Implemented by the Ministry of Higher Education, the policy objectives include:

- Increasing access and enrollment in TEVET through the expansion and equipment of TEVET infrastructure across Zambia for skills training and promotion of apprenticeships and other workplace-based training.
- Promoting the quality and relevance of TEVET by ensuring the availability of quality human resources, quality monitoring, and mainstreaming the use of information technology at all levels of TEVET. This includes involving the private sector in providing skills to TEVET learners.
- Promoting innovation and entrepreneurship development through business incubators and providing strategic support to enterprises launched by TEVET graduates.
- Sustaining TEVET sector funding through implementing the Skills Development Fund and other incentives for the private sector to develop the skills of Zambian youth (MOHE 2020a).

To achieve one of the TEVET Policy's main objectives, Zambia's government introduced the TEVET bursary to enable the most vulnerable youth

to benefit from skills training. The TEVET bursary obtains its finances from the Skills Development Fund and is managed by the Ministry of Technology and Science. Applications to the TEVET bursary are made via an online system. Beneficiaries of the TEVET bursary are then selected based on financial vulnerability and priority training programs, such as in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. In 2022, almost 9,000 students were awarded TEVET bursaries to train in courses that included general agriculture, food and beverage production, automotive mechanics engineering, electrical engineering, computer studies, biomedical engineering, and science laboratory technology (MOTS 2022, TEVETA Zambia 2022a, MOTS 2024).

Skills Development Levy Act, 2016. The Skills Development Levy Act provides for a skills development levy of 0.5 percent of gross emoluments to be channeled toward the funding of technical and vocational education and entrepreneurship training (GOZ 2016). The Zambia Revenue Authority collects the levy. The funds are then utilized by the Ministry of Higher Education, the supervising ministry of the Skill Development Fund, within its Technical Education, Vocational, and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA) (ZRA 2020). Between 2017 and 2019, over ZMW 180 million (USD 7.8 million) was released to the Skill Development Fund from the proceeds of the Skill Development Levy (MOHE 2020b). The funds are used to cover costs related to infrastructure and equipment for TEVET institutions, pre-employment training, employer-based training, and informal sector and small- and medium-enterprise training (UNESCO 2022).

National Strategy on Financial Education for Zambia, 2019-2024 (NSFE II). Approved in 2019, NSFE II is designed to provide a framework for financial education efforts across Zambia (MOF 2019). This second strategy is a follow-up to the first NSFE, which covered the period from 2012 to 2017. NSFE I focused on improving financial literacy, raising awareness of available financial products and building skills on informed financial decision-making. NSFE I contributed to reducing the financial inclusion gap in Zambia—the level of financial inclusion rose from 59 percent (4.8 million adults) in 2015 to 69 percent (6.6 million adults) in 2020 (BOZ 2020). At the same time, the percentage of youth aged 26 to 35 years who



are financially included rose from 21 percent in 2015 to 29 percent in 2020. Building on the achievements of NSFE I and through intensified financial literacy campaigns, such as youth clubs in schools and communities, NSFE II aims to increase the percentage of financially included youth from 55 percent in 2015 to 82 percent in 2024 (MOF 2019).

National Health Strategic Plan, 2022-2026.

Zambia's government recognizes that good health among its citizens is vital for sustainable economic growth and development. The 2022-2026 National Health Strategic Plan, developed by the Ministry of Health, lays out a number of priorities for strengthening health sector delivery to the general population in Zambia (MOH 2022).

Regarding youth health, the strategy outlines interventions to promote adolescent health through improved access to health services, including delivery of sexual and reproductive health services. Specifically, the adolescent health interventions were estimated to cost ZMW 3.04 billion (USD 131 million) by 2026 (MOH 2022). The plan aims to increase the proportion of districts with the capacity to provide a minimum adolescent health service platform from 60 percent in 2021 to 100 percent by 2026. During the same period, the strategic plan also aims to

increase adolescents' awareness and utilization of available health services through innovative social and behavior change communication platforms, such as social media, radio, and TV.

National Agricultural Policy.

The National Agriculture Policy was adopted in 2016 to provide a policy framework to orient government's and partners' efforts in agriculture development (MOA and MOFL 2016). The policy is articulated around ten policy objectives, which revolve around developing a sustainable agricultural sector to ensure food and nutrition security and increased employment opportunities and incomes. For example, under its objective 10, the policy supports the promotion of youth and women to participate in the agriculture sector, their access to resources and agricultural services, and the development of agricultural technologies that are appropriate to them. Other objectives include increasing agricultural production and productivity through improved farm inputs and infrastructure, such as irrigation, mechanization, and rural roads (objective 1), and strengthening the capacities of agricultural training institutions by increasing their human and infrastructure capabilities to train the skilled labor force that will match the needs of Zambia's agrifood industry (objective 3).





Comprehensive Agriculture Transformation Support Programme (CATSP). CATSP was adopted in 2023 as the flagship investment plan for Zambia's agricultural sector. It reflects the ambitions of the Zambian government for agriculture and rural modernization in line with 8NDP and Vision 2030 (MOA 2023). The plan sets out policy and institutional reforms and targeted investments—including in rural infrastructure, irrigation, mechanization, and research and extension—to improve agricultural productivity and commercialization.

In addition, CATSP outlines plans to engage Zambia's youth in unleashing their creativity and employment potential to transform the country's agrifood value chains, including in primary production, processing; trading, and retailing and in providing agricultural services of various sorts. The investment areas described in CATSP include those that will improve youth's access to needed skills. One dimension of this is reforming the agricultural vocational training curriculum to reflect labor market needs and emerging entrepreneurship opportunities in Zambian agriculture. To improve access to agricultural finance, the Government, through CATSP, aims to establish a Youth Agriculture Loans Facility to de-risk credit provision to youth-owned agrifood enterprises.

4. PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTIONS

In collaboration with its development partners, the Government of the Republic of Zambia has implemented several skills and entrepreneurship development programs to concretize its youth engagement and empowerment objectives in various development sectors, including agrifood systems. This includes preparing school leavers for employment, involving youth in agriculture and other sustainable ventures, assisting skilled youth to start small businesses that employ other youth, promoting youth cooperatives, supporting viable economic projects to reduce unemployment and improve living standards, and prioritizing the use of ICT for job creation. The strategies to achieve these objectives include opening new industries, supporting youth entrepreneurship, providing credit lending facilities, utilizing for youth development otherwise unused facilities, offering youth extension and technical services, commercializing youth agricultural activities, and

strengthening systems and structures to coordinate and manage youth entrepreneurship efforts. All these efforts are to reduce youth unemployment and to improve their living standards.

Program on "Unleashing scalable solutions for youth empowerment and employment in Zambia". In collaboration with the United Nations Country Team for Zambia, the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Arts (MYSA) launched in December 2022 phase one of the program, "Unleashing scalable solutions for youth empowerment and employment in Zambia". The program's first phase focuses on improving the well-being of and economic opportunities for youth. Its objective is to improve the employability of young Zambians and amplify the economic returns they obtain from their work. This will be done by enabling Zambian youth to acquire the skills and experience that Zambian employers look for in their workers. The program is designed under the government's renewed approach to multisectoral coordination, focusing on integrating service provision and testing scalable solutions (MYSA 2023b). The program is part of a range of initiatives by the government to meet the changing needs of young people so that they can contribute effectively to the economic development of Zambia. As such, in 2023, the first cohort of 2,000 young people was selected under the program and placed into internships in a range of public, private, and civil society organizations, including many operating in the agrifood sector (Lusaka Times 2023).

Youth Empowerment Program (YEP). Through MYSA, the Government of Zambia is implementing a multisectoral approach through YEP in partnership with the National Youth Development Council. YEP aims to empower registered youth organizations, cooperatives, and entrepreneurs to contribute to sustainable national development through various initiatives. The program objectives include encouraging marginalized and unemployed youth to engage in income-generating projects, promoting the development of competitive youth-owned enterprises, providing business support services, creating employment opportunities, and promoting financing for innovative entrepreneurial business ideas (GoZambiaJobs 2020).

The nationwide skills training programs under YEP are to be implemented in 100 constituencies by 81 training institutions registered with TEVETA. More than 7,100 youth are to be trained in nearly 40



skills courses. Some of the vocational skills courses offered include food production and nutrition, general agriculture, automotive mechanics, computer and ICT studies, design, metal fabrication and welding, electrical engineering, and plumbing, among others (TEVETA Zambia 2022b).

Youths interested in acquiring a loan from the Youth Empowerment Fund under YEP are required to submit their applications to the Ministry, which then selects qualifying projects. The application forms are available online and in all provincial MYSA and National Youth Development Council offices (Recruitment Record 2023).

Youth Compact of the Technologies of African Agricultural Transformation (TAAT). The African Development Bank (AfDB) created the Youth in Agribusiness Compact in 2018 to support and empower young entrepreneurs in Africa's agricultural sector by introducing them to agribusiness value chains and profit-making strategies. The TAAT program, funded by AfDB, aims to enhance agricultural productivity in Africa by implementing effective advanced agricultural technologies.

The Youth in Agribusiness Compact, also known as ENABLE-TAAT (Empowering Novel AgriBusiness-Led Employment), offers training and support for youth-led agribusinesses to grow and succeed. In Zambia, the compact has succeeded in helping

young people earn a living through the aquaculture value chain (IITA 2022). It aims to connect the drive and passions of young people to improvements in nine agricultural value chains—cassava, orange-fleshed sweet potato, aquaculture, small livestock, high iron beans, maize, rice, sorghum and millet, and wheat. These connections are to result in the creation of new agricultural businesses, more job opportunities for youth, decreased reliance on imported food, increased value added to products, and improved nutritional security in Zambia and across Africa (ENABLE-TAAT 2023).

The program boosts agricultural productivity by deploying high-performance technologies for the nine agricultural value chains. It also addresses transversal issues like soil fertility management, water management, capacity development, policy support, and African youth agribusiness (AfDB 2021). In 2018, ENABLE-TAAT trained 30 young people in Kaoma on aquaculture and poultry. Following the training, the participants formed three youth groups—Innovative, Mulamatila, and Future Feeders. Before the training, the youth involved had limited knowledge and experience with aquaculture and poultry (IITA 2021).

Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP) electronic voucher system. The Government of Zambia launched FISP in 2002, through which smallholder farmers are provided commercial maize seed and inorganic fertilizers at subsidized prices. FISP,





implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture, has played a central role in Zambia's efforts to develop its agriculture sector. Youth are among the targeted beneficiaries of the program. Its primary goals are to improve food security, increase incomes, and foster the growth of private sector input supply chains (PMRC 2018).

The FISP program increasingly has used electronic vouchers to distribute specific farm inputs to beneficiaries. This has included offering smallholder farmers subsidized access to planting materials for other crops, like groundnut, orange maize, common bean, and cottonseed, enabling them to expand their farming activities and diversify their production. FISP specifically targeted many young people in distributing these electronic vouchers.

Moreover, the electronic vouchers have resulted in the growth of agro-dealer businesses across the country. In 2013, FISP resulted in new employment in agro-input supply for over 3,000 young men and women nationally (Machina, Namonje-Kapembwa and Kasoma 2018). These agro-dealers sell chemicals, fertilizers, and improved seed varieties and offer training to farmers to guide them in making effective use of the inputs. The number of farmers who benefitted from the program rose from 120,000 in 2002/03 to approximately 900,000 in 2012/13. In the 2023/24 farming season, the targeted beneficiaries countrywide were just over one million small-scale farmers, including youth.

In the 2016/17 farming season, the Ministry included weather index insurance in the FISP subsidy provided to farmers. Weather index insurance utilizes satellite technology to track and predict weather conditions affecting agricultural output levels in specific regions. It automatically identifies locations with a lack or an excess of rainfall and financially compensates participating farmers, including young farmers, affected in those areas by these adverse crop production conditions (Mlambo 2019).

Youth Development Fund (YDF). In 2006, the Government of Zambia established YDF to support young entrepreneurs nationwide. The fund, managed by the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Arts, aims to involve youth in the country's economic development, encourage marginalized and unemployed young people to start income-generating projects, promote the growth of youth-owned businesses, support rural development, provide business services for sustainable youth enterprises, and create employment opportunities for youth through sustainable projects (Tambulukani 2018). The YDF Loan is offered to young entrepreneurs who own businesses in specific sectors, including manufacturing, agriculture, health, education, and tourism. The loan can also be used to support economic activities in other sectors, as determined by the YDF Technical Committee (MOYS 2012).





In 2014, approximately 1,300 young people in the country received financial support from YDF. The largest number of beneficiaries was in Lusaka, which has the largest youth population, followed by Copperbelt province. The lowest number of beneficiaries was in Muchinga province. Overall, the distribution of funds was reasonably proportional to the size of the youth population in each province.

YAPASA: Developing youth-led enterprises in rural areas of Zambia. Between 2013 and 2019, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the Zambian Government collaborated on the Yapasa Project. The project addressed youth unemployment in rural areas of Zambia by promoting the development of sustainable micro, small, and medium enterprises that would create job opportunities for young men and women (FAO 2018b). YAPASA sought to address youth unemployment and food insecurity in rural communities by helping young people establish sustainable businesses. The project focused on promoting small and medium-scale enterprises in the soybean and aquaculture value chains, but later expanded to other commodity value chains, such as horticulture (BEAM 2019). YAPASA operated in the Northwest and Central parts of Zambia (ILO 2018). The project successfully created around 3,000 jobs for rural youth in Zambia and improved the performance of over 5,000 youth-led rural enterprises (FAO 2018b). It promoted collaboration between different actors in the agrifood value chains and stronger connections between small producers, particularly young farmers, and larger agribusinesses.

Youth Lead Activity. USAID/Zambia funded the Youth Lead Activity from 2018 to 2021. Its aim was to support and connect youth leaders in Zambia, helping them to increase the impact of their work and to foster and encourage their civic engagement. The project enhanced youth development in Zambia by offering internships and mentorship opportunities in various sectors, providing leadership and civic engagement skills to Zambian youth, and encouraging them to identify and address issues they are passionate about. Additionally, the program focused on strengthening local institutions by improving the capacity and networking of government entities, businesses, and civil society organizations that

participate in youth internship programs and supporting the National Youth Development Council (NYDC) in involving youth in policymaking and other government activities.

NYDC established a 25-member Youth Lead Activity project Advisory Board made up of youth leaders, faith-based organizations, local and international civil society organizations, business leaders, and government officials. The Board used a co-creation process, including a youth mapping exercise, to design a training curriculum for project beneficiaries. Twenty-five youth were trained in research and interview skills as part of this design process, so they were engaged in the design of internship and training components of the Youth Lead Activity. Under the project, over 100 youth obtained internships or were being mentored at 66 public and private sector institutions, participating in ongoing civic education and leadership skills training. The first cohort of 44 youth completed their internships and identified critical issues within their communities on which to continue to work and resolve, focusing on women's rights, governance, and health. Nineteen of the interns were hired by their internship host at the end of their internships (NGOConnect 2020).

Constituency Development Fund (CDF). In evaluating Zambia's efforts to create employment opportunities for youth in agrifood systems, CDF emerges as a pivotal tool. Established in 1995, the CDF provides Members of Parliament and their constituent communities with the funding to design and implement local development projects in line with their needs and preferences (Chibomba 2013). CDF has become a crucial mechanism for funding community-level development projects (Decentralisation Secretariat 2023). Its budget per constituency significantly increased from approximately ZMW 1.6 million in 2021 to ZMW 30.8 million under the 2024 budget. There is a current practical devolution of development efforts to local levels as communities start participating in decision-making on how development funds are to be spent.

Youth are involved in these decision-making processes. The growth in CDF resources allows for more targeted investment in community-based projects, substantially benefiting young people, especially in agricultural entrepreneurship, skill development, and training. By financing local



initiatives, CDF supports creating employment opportunities and fosters youth entrepreneurship in the agrifood sector. It contributes to skill enhancement through educational and training programs, thus addressing the unique needs of youth and integrating them more effectively into the agrifood systems. Additionally, CDF facilitates youth participation in local governance and decision-making processes, enhancing its impact on youth empowerment in agriculture. This aligns well with Zambia's broader goals of fostering youth employment and skill development in this sector, making CDF a cornerstone in Zambia's strategy to empower its youth in local agrifood systems.

Citizens Economic Empowerment Commission (CEEC). CEEC, established under the Citizens Economic Empowerment Act No. 9 of 2006, promotes inclusive economic growth and empowerment in Zambia. Its main objective is to support and integrate underprivileged and marginalized groups, including youth, into the mainstream economy. Over the past 15 years, CEEC has received financial support from the government to aid businesses across all 116 districts of Zambia.

In 2022/23, there was a notable increase in the Empowerment Funds released annually by the Treasury to just under ZMW 900 million. CEEC provided over ZMW 150 million to traders in Marketeer Booster Loans and over ZMW 500 million to 535 small and medium-sized enterprises and cooperatives. Additionally, over ZMW 50 million was allocated to more than 50,000 loan applicants, including women (33 percent of recipients) and youth (52 percent) (CEEC 2023). The financial support provided by CEEC is estimated to have supported the creation of 135,000 jobs, either

directly or indirectly, contributing to reducing unemployment and enhancing livelihoods. Loan recovery rates improved to 66 percent in 2023 from 27 percent in 2022.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the efforts of the government of Zambia in youth empowerment and engagement in the transformation of agrifood systems nationwide. The country has established several institutions and policies to ensure youth concerns and needs are heard in public policy processes and investment programming toward achieving Vision 2030. The recently approved Comprehensive Agricultural Transformation Support Programme (CATSP) puts youth and enhancing their skills at the center of driving the much-needed transformation of Zambian food systems while maintaining focus on strengthening the human and infrastructure capabilities of TEVET institutions through the proceeds of the Skills Development Levy.

Despite many commendable achievements, the reach of ongoing initiatives is small relative to the large share of Zambia's population made up by youth. Zambia would greatly benefit from establishing and effectively implementing flagship policies and programs to improve youth access to skills, land, and finance, as highlighted in 8NDP and CATSP. Moreover, strengthening and incentivizing the involvement of the Zambian private sector in skills provision would allow youth graduates to acquire skills that are more greatly demanded by employers, as well as strengthen their entrepreneurial abilities.



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