



YOUTH AHEAD:

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



1. INTRODUCTION

With 62 percent of its population of 15.8 million persons aged 18 to 35 years, Zimbabwe takes pride in being a youthful nation (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe 2022, ZIMSTAT 2016). Zimbabwe has shown an unwavering commitment to invest in human capital development over the years. Ninety-five percent of education financing in Zimbabwe comes from domestic resources. From 2020 to 2022, 13 percent of the national budget was allocated to education, down somewhat from the peak budget

allocation of 22 percent in 2015 (UNICEF 2022). These investments have allowed the country to achieve a 90 percent literacy rate among its youth (FHI360 2018, ILO 2019c).

However, Zimbabwe faces a persisting challenge of youth unemployment—the 2019 Labour Force and Child Labour Survey Report estimated that 55 percent of youth (ages 15 to 35 years) are unemployed (ZIMSTAT 2020).



In response, the Government of Zimbabwe prioritized skills development programs to empower its youth. These government efforts increased enrollment in polytechnics and industrial training colleges from 20,300 students in 2015 to an estimated 32,700 in 2020 (ILO 2019c).

Thirty-seven percent of Zimbabwe's youth are employed in agriculture (ZIMSTAT 2020). Zimbabwe is making substantive investments in revitalizing its agricultural sector and ensuring that youth have the skills they need to take up decent employment opportunities arising from the transformation of food systems in the country (MoFED 2022a). Agricultural production is increasing in Zimbabwe. The Agriculture Production Index per capita (2014-2016 = 100) for 2021 was 114.8 (FAO 2023a). In 2022, agriculture contributed 11.7 percent of Zimbabwe's GDP and 18 percent of total exports (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe 2022).

This case study provides a systematic narrative review of the major institutional and policy innovations and programmatic interventions that the government and its partners have taken to empower Zimbabwe's youth by improving their access to productive resources, such as skills, land, and finance. These resources will enable youth to increase their participation in decent employment in Zimbabwe's food systems.

2. INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATIONS

Owing to their growing share of Zimbabwe's population coupled with their increasing voting power, Zimbabwean youth have been bargaining more effectively for policies and institutions more responsive to their needs and concerns (YETT 2018). In 2009, Zimbabwe signed the African Youth Charter, which commits African states and civil society organizations to address the economic, social, educational, and spiritual needs of African youth (African Union 2006).

Competition to entice the political support of Zimbabwe's youth is felt across the country's political arena, particularly in the manifestos of political parties, many of which have established youth wings. Leveraging their appetite for digital media, youth are increasingly making their voices heard in public policy spheres. The Government has responded by designing institutions to implement youth empowerment policies (Moyo 2023, Oosterom and Gukurume 2019). In this

regard, the Constitution of 2013 also requires the state to promote affirmative action for youth empowerment (Republic of Zimbabwe 2013a).

The national youth machinery includes institutions such as the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts, and Recreation; the Zimbabwe Youth Council; and youth-led civil society organizations. In addition, in 2022, the Parliament of Zimbabwe established a Youth Caucus to foster and aid in the design of youth-friendly policies and legislation (IPU 2023).

Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation (MoYSAR). Since Independence there has been a government portfolio for young people. This shifted between the Ministries of Women's Affairs and that for Education. A fully-fledged ministry for youth only emerged in the 2000s following the institutionalization of the African Youth Charter (Oosterom and Gukurume 2019). The social and political changes that started in 2017 resulted in the Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation, and Economic Empowerment being restructured and renamed the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts, and Recreation (MoYSAR). Its mission is to lead the formulation and implementation of holistic youth empowerment and development policies.

To accomplish this, MoYSAR has four departments—Youth Development and Empowerment, Vocational Training and Skills Development, Sport and Recreation, and Arts and Culture Promotion (MoYSAR 2022).

The Youth Development and Empowerment Department has been expanded in recent years to ensure youth mainstreaming and engagement in the planning and programming of sector ministries. An example of its efforts includes supporting the implementation of the Presidential 10-hectare Scheme to empower youth in farming. To expand skills development opportunities for youth, the Vocational Training and Skills Development Department coordinates the planning and delivery of training in vocational training centers (MoYSAR 2023). In parallel with these increased efforts to empower youth, the budget allocation to MoYSAR increased from USD 9.4 million in 2021 to USD 70 million in 2023 (MoFED 2020, 2022b).

Zimbabwe Youth Council. The Zimbabwe Youth Council was established by an Act of Parliament in 2001 (Republic of Zimbabwe 2013b). Under the supervision of MoYSAR, the Council's mandate



includes ensuring youth mainstreaming across government policies and programs by organizing youth into clubs and associations so that they can make their voices and needs heard. In addition, the Council advises the Government on the needs of youth and undertakes projects designed to create employment and youth empowerment in all economic sectors. To mainstream the needs of youth in public policy and programming, the Council oversees youth desks across the sector ministries. It also engages with other government institutions in the economic empowerment of youth.

An example of its youth empowerment efforts is the introduction in 2019 of the Youth Employment Tax Incentive by the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority to incentivize the Zimbabwean private sector to employ young people (Oosterom and Gukurume 2019, ZIMRA 2022, MoFED 2019). Similarly, the Council, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund, supported the establishment of the Zimbabwe Youth Policy Tracking Group, which serves as a platform for young people to engage with lawmakers on issues of concern as part of the process of shaping youth-friendly policies (UNFPA 2022).

Regarding youth engagement in Zimbabwe's food systems, the Zimbabwe Youth Council, in collaboration with other government agencies, set up innovation hubs at tertiary-level educational

institutions to better enable youth to pursue careers in agrifood systems. For rural youth, the Council, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, is establishing and promoting Community Youth Hubs to enable increased value-addition to agricultural products at their source—hence, fostering entrepreneurship and creating employment within rural communities. The Council has also supported several youth-led organizations focused on agriculture, including the Zimbabwe Young Farmers Association for Sustainable Development. This group of young farmers actively leverages the social media abilities of young people to communicate success stories of youth in agribusinesses through videos and virtual demonstrations.

Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water, Climate, and Rural Development (MLAFWCRD).

MLAFWCRD is mandated to provide technical, extension and advisory, regulatory, and administrative services to achieve food security in Zimbabwe and to meet the country's economic development targets. Specifically for youth, the Ministry is responsible for prioritizing efforts to ensure that they benefit from public agricultural development schemes and investments (Malabo Montpellier Panel 2022c).

To ensure youth mainstreaming in policy and planning, a Chief Programs Coordinator leads MLAFWCRD's Agricultural Youth Desk. As a result





of its engagement, there have been improvements in youth awareness of the economic opportunities they might pursue in food systems. The Agricultural Youth Desk also works to improve the engagement of youth in the Ministry's flagship projects, such as those focused on agricultural mechanization, irrigation development, horticulture, aquaculture, and livestock. Examples of agricultural programs in which youth are targeted as beneficiaries include the Presidential Input Scheme to improve farmers' access to modern farm inputs (Pindiriri, et al. 2021) and the Presidential 10-ha Scheme, which is geared toward improving youth's access to land (Dube-Matutu 2023).

Youth access to finance: EmpowerBank.

EmpowerBank is a government-owned institution launched in 2018 to improve access to finance for youth and their businesses (MoFED 2022b). Unlike commercial banks, EmpowerBank attracts most of its youth clients through tailored products, such as providing microloans with low or no collateral requirements and business training that addresses the challenges of its youth clientele (YETT 2018). The bank has several loan products to fit the needs of underserved youth. These include the Youth Business Starter Pack for new entrepreneurs, while the Thuthuka loan product provides micro loans to small businesses, including farmers, who require working capital to grow their businesses (EmpowerBank 2022).

EmpowerBank's loan size ranges from USD 100 to 5,000. The interest rate for short-term loans is 10 percent per month, while for other loans, it is 8.5 percent per month. As of January 2022, the bank reported having made loan disbursements to over 3,000 beneficiaries. Sixty-five thousand young people have also received financial literacy training through its programs.

3. POLICY INNOVATIONS

To respond to the needs and concerns of young people, the Government of Zimbabwe initiated several policy and legislative reforms in line with the provisions of the Constitution to promote holistic youth empowerment through education, healthcare, and decent employment, among others. Key policies focused on youth include, among others, the National Youth Policy and the Financial Inclusion Strategy.

The Constitution. The Constitution of Zimbabwe, as adopted in 2013, provides extensive details on protecting and guaranteeing basic human rights for youth, including the right to work and equal access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunities, as well as their engagement in public policy development (Republic of Zimbabwe 2013a). Section 20 of the Constitution requires the state to demonstrate a high level of commitment to protecting and enforcing youth's rights and promoting affirmative action for youth. In addition, the Constitution bestows the duty of facilitating rapid and equitable agricultural development to the State. In line with this duty, the state seeks to formulate and implement policies that will permit the youth of Zimbabwe to access the productive resources and skills they require for their economic ventures in agrifood systems to flourish.

Vision 2030. Inspired by the global Sustainable Development Goals, Zimbabwe Vision 2030 was adopted in 2018 as the country's development blueprint. It reflects the government's long-term development ambitions to progress "towards a prosperous and empowered upper middle-income society by 2030, with job opportunities and a high quality of life for its citizens" (Republic of Zimbabwe 2018). Regarding youth empowerment, Vision 2030's objectives are geared toward increased investments to improve the access of Zimbabwe's youth to education, housing, health services, employment opportunities, and other essential services. Vision 2030 identifies empowered and skilled youth as necessary to drive agricultural development in Zimbabwe so that the agricultural sector effectively contributes to achieving the national ambitions of re-positioning Zimbabwe as the breadbasket of Southern Africa. These efforts will be supported through substantive public investments in infrastructure for agricultural research, extension, mechanization, irrigation, and improved access to markets.

National Development Strategy, 2021-2025 (NDS1). The National Development Strategy (NDS1) was approved in 2020 as the first five-year Medium Term Plan to guide strategic investment toward realizing Zimbabwe's Vision 2030 (Republic of Zimbabwe 2020). NDS1 proposes strategic measures on macroeconomic stability and investments in soft and hard infrastructure to spur economic growth. The strategy's priorities include:



- Economic growth and stability;
- Food security and nutrition;
- Governance;
- Moving the economy up the value chain and structural transformation;
- Human capital development;
- Environmental protection;
- Climate resilience; and
- Natural resource management.

Considering that empowered and skilled youth can be an engine for the desired growth, NDS1 emphasizes youth mainstreaming across public policies and investments to promote holistic positive youth development through education, including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET); healthcare; and sports and recreational facilities. Hence, NDS1 seeks to improve the participation of youth in public decision-making and development processes from 3 percent of those involved in 2020 to 25 percent by 2025. At the same, the number of youths who access empowerment opportunities in all sectors of the economy will be increased from 16,000 in 2020 to 200,000 by 2025.

Regarding food systems transformation, NDS1 prioritizes investments to expand the amount of land under irrigation, in research, in the dissemination of drought-resistant seed varieties, in improving the capacity of agricultural extension services, and in upscaling climate-smart agriculture practices. In 2022, the government allocated approximately USD 186 million, 6.2 percent of the national budget, to food and nutrition security activities (Malabo Montpellier Panel 2022c). Zimbabwe's Ministry of Finance and Economic Development reports that the implementation of NDS1 allowed the country to reverse declining economic growth trends and achieve a positive growth rate of 6.5 percent in 2022 (MoFED 2023).

Revised National Youth Policy, 2020-2025.

Following the 2000 and 2013 versions of the national youth policy (MoYDIE 2013), a revised policy was adopted in 2021 to accommodate emerging opportunities and issues affecting Zimbabwe's youth (Zimbabwe Cabinet 2021). The revised policy guides the government in leading an

integrated approach to promoting youth-positive development and empowerment, increasing their participation in policy formulation and implementation, and granting them equal access to economic, political, and social opportunities. The goal of the 2021 youth policy is to create "an empowered youth actively involved in national development". The policy is articulated around four thematic areas:

- Education and skills development;
- Employment and entrepreneurship;
- Youth governance and participation; and
- Health and well-being.

The policy particularly emphasizes strategies for harnessing the demographic dividend that youth present to Zimbabwe's economic development. This will be achieved through expanded and improved investments in education and skill development, especially in existing vocational training facilities.

Regarding promoting youth employment and entrepreneurship, the policy envisages creating an enabling environment for active involvement of the private sector in skills provision to youth, providing entrepreneurship training, expanding incubation hubs, and improving access to business start-up resources and other support. Owing to the notably low representation of youth in key sectors of the economy, one of the most significant policy changes stipulated in the revised youth policy is the provision of an enforceable 25 percent youth quota for employment in key economic sectors, such as agriculture and mining. Also, one-quarter of public procurement is to rely for supply on youth-owned firms. Finally, the policy seeks to strengthen youth focal desks across government ministries to ensure youth mainstreaming and better coordination of the ministries' programs that target youth.

Zimbabwe National Agriculture Policy Framework, 2019-2030.

This agricultural development framework was adopted in 2019 to serve as a holistic blueprint for guiding efforts on agricultural modernization for income and wealth generation in line with the national development agenda outlined in Zimbabwe Vision 2030 (MoLAWCRR 2018). It outlines actions to fast-track the achievements of the Maputo Declaration (2003)



and Malabo Declaration (2014) on accelerating agricultural growth for food and nutrition security (African Union 2003, 2014). With a focus on the private sector in the transformation of food systems and ensuring women and youth mainstreaming in investments in agrifood systems in Zimbabwe, the policy framework is articulated around nine pillars to support the resilient growth of the agricultural sector.

- Food and nutrition security and resilience;
- Agricultural knowledge, technology, and innovation systems;
- Production and supply of agricultural inputs;
- Development of agricultural infrastructure;
- Agricultural marketing and trade development;
- Agricultural finance and credit;
- Access, tenure security, and land administration;
- Resilient and sustainable agriculture; and
- Institutional arrangements for policy implementation.

Specific investments will be made in irrigation development and water harvesting technologies,

agricultural mechanization, scaling up of agricultural insurance, and in early warning systems to reduce the vulnerability of smallholder farmers to climate change.

However, the policy framework recognizes that progress toward the desired policy outcomes is still hampered by a workforce with limited skills, so currently it is unable to drive much-needed food systems transformation. The National Skills Audit showed a skills deficit of 88 percent in the agriculture sector. The same report highlighted a skills deficit of 94 percent in the engineering and technology skills cluster (MoHTESTD 2019). To improve skills in the current and future labor force in Zimbabwe's agricultural sector, the policy recommends improving agricultural colleges and universities and adapting the curricula they use to address the specific challenges faced by Zimbabwe's farmers, including climate-resilient sustainable intensification, early warning systems, managing pests and diseases, and nutrition, while also offering practical training to guide the interactions of agricultural extension staff with farmers (Malabo Montpellier Panel 2022c).

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Policy. Adopted in 2023, the TVET policy aims to strengthen and streamline vocational education for youth to ensure that the content and skills delivered matches the needs of the labor market. In the past, vocational education in





Zimbabwe was hampered by the scattered delivery of TVET programs whereby line ministries, such as health or education, ran their own TVET programs without a clear policy framework to coordinate all the institutions involved in skills development programs (ILO 2019c). The TVET policy provides an institutional framework for amalgamating them.

To achieve its goals of imparting employable skills to the youth, the TVET policy focuses on increasing investments and funding in developing and maintaining physical and digital infrastructure and enhancing the quality of TVET trainers. The policy also seeks to improve the capacities of TVET institutions to generate and commercialize innovative products and services. To ensure the inclusion and retention of youth from poor backgrounds in TVET programs, the policy introduced a work-for-fee program through which students can work for the training institution in exchange for their tuition fees (Harare Post 2023). As a follow-up to the implementation of the policy, to ensure the enrollment in TVET facilities of vulnerable youth, especially those out of school, in August 2023, the Government approved measures to revamp the 45 fully-fledged Vocational Training Centers and 25 satellite centers and to establish one vocational training center in each of Zimbabwe's 64 districts (Zimbabwe Cabinet 2023).

To complement the skills delivery by TVET institutions, the Government set up innovation hubs in higher education institutions to provide technical and research-based solutions for skills enhancement in Zimbabwe's labor force. The innovation hubs are also to equip students with specific industrial skills and to enable them to operate entrepreneurially so that they successfully incubate any businesses they create. Beneficiary sectors for these innovation hubs are agriculture, energy, and mining. Progress has already been made in promoting value-addition for agricultural products.

National Financial Inclusion Strategy, 2022-2026.

Considerable progress in reaching youth was registered under the implementation of the first National Financial Inclusion Strategy between 2016 and 2020. Among the successful initiatives of the first strategy were the establishment of EmpowerBank, a bank dedicated to young people; financial literacy programs; and youth-dedicated desks in commercial banks. These efforts increased

youth financial inclusion from 67 percent in 2014 to 83 percent in 2022.

The government designed the second National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2022-2026) (NFIS II) to build on the achievements of the first NFIS, particularly to further expand the financial inclusion of youth (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe 2022, Tarinda 2019). NFIS II has four pillars:

- Financial innovations;
- Financial consumer protection and financial capability;
- Microfinancing; micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME) and entrepreneurship development; and
- Devolution.

NFIS II aims to increase access to financial services for all Zimbabweans from 83 percent to 95 percent by 2026. The strategy aims to promote youth access to finance by developing more financial products that are tailored to their needs, as well as offering youth-targeted financial education and entrepreneurship development programs (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe 2022).

4. PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTIONS

Over the years, the government of Zimbabwe has piloted several youth empowerment initiatives with some level of impact and success on youth livelihoods. Those include, among others, the Pfumvudza program, the establishment of EmpowerBank, and initiatives to promote youth entrepreneurship (Yingi 2023). Here the most recent and ongoing initiatives are described.

Improving youth's agricultural productivity–Pfumvudza program. Launched by the government of Zimbabwe in June 2020, the Pfumvudza program aims at strengthening the resilience of smallholder farmers to climate shocks and erratic rains by promoting conservation agriculture practices–*Pfumvudza*–and providing improved inputs to increase productivity levels (Mavesere and Dzawanda 2023). The program targets 1.8 million smallholder farming households. Beneficiaries are supported with agricultural extension services and an inputs grant package that includes improved seed and inorganic fertilizers sufficient for a 0.125



ha plot (Maseya 2020). Moreover, the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water, Climate, and Rural Development targets 100,000 youths as beneficiaries in the conservation agriculture component of the Pfumvudza program every year, either as own-account farmers, dependents working with their parents, or farm employees. To ensure the continuity of the program, each beneficiary household returns 75 kg of maize grain after harvest as a contribution to the country's strategic grain reserve (United Nations 2022b, Tokora 2023).

The program has been instrumental in shielding farmers from poor harvests due to droughts. In Mutare South Constituency, beneficiary farmers of the Pfumvudza program were found to have realized significantly higher yields than non-beneficiaries (Mavesere and Dzawanda 2023).

Improving youth's access to land—Presidential 10-ha Scheme. Any youth in Zimbabwe willing to venture into agricultural activities will almost certainly have limited access to land. Most were not at an eligible age to receive land distributed during the Fast-track Land Reform Program in 2000 (Chipenda and Tom 2022). The Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water, Climate, and Rural Development through its Youth Desk has been implementing the Presidential 10-ha Scheme to provide youth with access to land. Under the scheme, Provincial heads provide land to youth

in the A1 and A2 resettled areas. In communal areas, youth also access land from their parents or community leaders. The Ministry reports that under the scheme annually at least 700 youths in every province of Zimbabwe have been trained and allocated land (Dube-Matutu 2023).

Supporting youth entrepreneurship. Owing to the limited economic opportunities available to rural youth, in 2022, the Government of Zimbabwe launched the Provincial Integrated Youths Skills Development Centres (PIYSDC) in all ten provinces. The program is designed to annually train 5,000 young people in good agricultural practices as an avenue for increased income and self-employment. The Government allocated 1,235 acres of land to the PIYSDCs for farming demonstrations and distributed 700 heifers and some tractors to the trainee youth as a part of starter packages. By late 2022, 3,000 youths had been trained at the PIYSDCs (Krishnaswami 2023, Further Africa 2022).

At the same time, urban tech-savvy youth have demonstrated ingenuity in developing start-ups to solve challenges along agrifood value chains that also provide employment. An example is IFAam, which leverages artificial intelligence and remote sensing technologies for early warning of crop pests and diseases and for timely weather information. The company also supports farmers in conducting soil analysis (Mahlahla 2023).





Another example is Skybrands, a youth-led food processing company founded by two young graduates in 2017. Skybrands partnered with the international organization HarvestPlus to promote the processing of nutritious foods based on locally available ingredients, such as vitamin A orange maize (Meyer and Walton 2019). The company has entered into off-take agreements with 100 farmers to market 400 tons of biofortified grain. In 2019, Skybrands sold 16.5 tons of biofortified vitamin A orange maize.

Finally, in Mashonaland West province, youth established Mhuri Farming to promote the production of tobacco seedlings by and for youth farmers (Mhuri Farming 2019). The firm benefitted 162 youth in the 2022/23 agricultural season, enabling them to benefit from Zimbabwe's lucrative USD 1 billion tobacco production industry.

5. CONCLUSION

Despite challenges in implementation, the Government of Zimbabwe has demonstrated political will in addressing some of the pressing

issues and concerns of its youth through youth empowerment policies and institutions. However, most youth still operate in the informal sector and remain unemployed. While the country is making substantive investments in agricultural modernization (MoFED 2022b), more investments need to be made to ensure that the country's youth are equipped with proper skills and resources, such as access to finance and land, to take up decent employment opportunities arising from the economic growth, in general, and food systems transformation, in particular (MoHTESTD 2019). The country must continue to strengthen and coordinate its TVET delivery systems. It also must continue offering youth opportunities to engage in shaping the public policies that concern them. With proper youth empowerment and skills development opportunities coupled with the country's abundant natural resources and creativity, Zimbabwe is well-placed to derive a significant demographic dividend from its youth to drive the much-needed economic growth that will enable the country to meet the targets of its Vision 2030 for the nation's development.





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