



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



# Empowering rural youth for a sustainable future

Green jobs success stories from  
Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste and Zimbabwe



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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Rome, 2025

Required citation:

FAO. 2025. *Empowering rural youth for a sustainable future – Green jobs success stories from Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste and Zimbabwe*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd5259en>

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# ABBREVIATIONS

**BSF** – black soldier flies

**FAO** – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

**FBO** – farmer-based organization

**GJ4RYE** – Green Jobs for Rural Youth Employment

**GET** – Green Entrepreneurship Track

**KOICA** – Korea International Cooperation Agency

**VSLA** – Village Savings and Loans Association

**WEP** – Wage Employment Programme



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# INTRODUCTION

Globally, young people account for approximately 24 percent of the working poor and nearly 88 percent of the world's 1.2 billion youth live in developing countries. In Africa, over 70 percent of youth subsist on USD 2 per day or less. Moreover, the share of rural youth not in employment, education or training is significantly larger in lower-income countries and countries with higher shares of youth aged 15–24 years in their populations.

Although the global youth population is expected to continue to grow over the foreseeable future, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for young women and men remain limited. This is particularly true for those living in economically stagnant rural areas of developing countries.

Most rural youth are employed in the informal economy as contributing family workers, subsistence farmers, home-based micro-entrepreneurs or unskilled workers. They typically earn low wages, are employed under casual or seasonal work arrangements and face unsafe, often exploitive, working conditions that compel many to migrate to urban areas. Re-engaging youth in agriculture requires addressing the numerous constraints that they face when trying to earn a livelihood in the sector (FAO, CTA and IFAD, 2014). These include limited access to: knowledge, information and education; land; financial services; green jobs and prosperous livelihood opportunities; and markets; and weak engagement in decision-making processes, including policy dialogue.





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# Green Jobs: from concept to practice

Green jobs are defined as “decent jobs that contribute to preserve or restore the environment, be they in traditional sectors such as manufacturing and construction, or in new, emerging green sectors such as renewable energy and energy efficiency” (ILO, 2016).

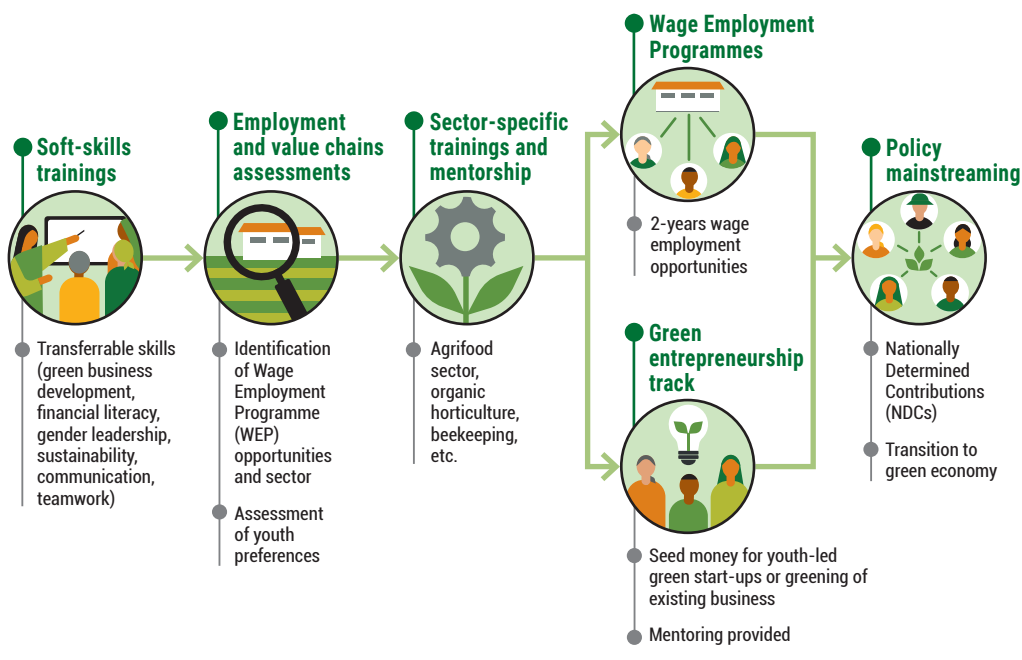
The opportunities for generating green jobs within agrifood systems are innumerable. People working in agricultural production are working directly with the natural environment. Conventional agricultural production practices can degrade the environment, but with the right incentives and skills, farmers can also be a force for restoring and preserving the natural environment through the adoption of regenerative and sustainable agricultural practices. Moreover, the opportunities for green job creation do not stop at the farm. The creation of green jobs at the farm level depends on supply chains that provide inputs and market opportunities to farmers to transition to green production systems, creating green job employment multipliers in the broader economy.

However, ensuring that green jobs provide decent employment is a challenge, particularly in rural areas. Work in agriculture is often informal and seasonal, with many workers self-employed with limited access to social safety nets. Capturing the opportunities for green job creation and addressing the challenges in the agrifood system require holistic and integrated approaches at multiple levels.

Between 2019 and 2024, the FAO Green Jobs for Rural Youth Employment (GJ4RYE) project piloted innovative strategies to foster sustainable development by creating green jobs within the agrifood system for rural youth. Implemented in Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste and Zimbabwe, with funding from the Korea International Cooperation Agency, the project combined comprehensive skills development with direct job creation through cash transfer and grant schemes.

Across the three countries, more than 700 youth participants were selected. Participants first received training in transferrable soft skills such as business development and financial literacy (Figure 1). Once the soft-skills training was complete, the project utilized a participatory approach empowering youth participants, community members and project partners to identify environmental and food-security challenges and employment opportunities to address these challenges. These were considered in the programme design. Value chain and skills assessments were also carried out at community level to better understand opportunities and barriers in local supply chains. Both of these processes supported the design of the skills training and employment programmes. Employment opportunities were created through the Green Entrepreneurship Track (GET) and the Wage Employment Programme (WEP).

**Figure 1. Key elements of the Green Jobs for Rural Youth Employment project approach implemented in Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste and Zimbabwe between 2019 and 2024**



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Under GET, youth received grants for launching or growing more than 135 agrifood startups. Over a two-year period, these businesses received both business and technical mentorship. Through the WEP, 265 youth were hired by project partners working across diverse value chains, including beekeeping, organic farming and sustainable timber production. This provided them with steady wages over two years.

To prepare them for either employment pathway, youth participant received additional training in business management and financial literacy as well as sector-specific training in areas such as organic horticultural, waste management and bioenergy. Both the WEP and the GET prioritized formalization of work and business practices through development of contracts that adhere to national labour standards and supporting the transition of informal businesses into formal enterprises. Based on their experience, project participants developed recommendations on how to improve youth employment in the green economy that fed into policy dialogues.



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QR code to Project Brief:

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**Youth  
engagement**

**Soft-skill training:**  
**202** youths  
participated

**Green Entrepreneurship Track:**  
**65** youths  
participated

**Wage Employment Programme:**  
**97** youths  
participated

# SIERRA LEONE

## Country context

In Sierra Leone, up to 65 percent of the population relies on agriculture to make a living (FAO, n.d.). Agriculture continues to be characterized by subsistence farming, low productivity and limited value-addition. It is thus unable to feed the country's population or to lift people out of poverty. The sector also remains highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. In recent years, agricultural areas have suffered from landslides, flooding and wildfires (FAO and Government of Sierra Leone, 2020). This is due to a number of factors, such as high dependency on rainfed agriculture, poor infrastructure, land degradation and lack of knowledge and application of climate-smart agricultural practices.

Moreover, youth unemployment, especially in rural areas, remains a serious development challenge. According to World Bank Group (2024), in 2018, 33.2 percent of youth were not in education, employment or training.

Currently, women represent 70 percent of the labour force (Feed Salone, n.d.). However, women and youth are less likely than men to own land, have access to economic assets and be involved in household decision-making. Rural youth, particularly women, face significant barriers to acquiring land tenure, impeding their access to and control over land. This limits their ability to engage in agricultural activities, secure livelihoods and contribute meaningfully to community development. Moreover, limited awareness of legal rights and inadequate access to legal recourse further exacerbate their disenfranchisement (Feed Salone, n.d.). Meanwhile, smallholder farmers in general continue to have limited access to skills, finance, assets, information, technology and markets. Furthermore, the absence of comprehensive social safety nets in the country exacerbates their vulnerabilities, leaving them exposed to poverty and food insecurity.





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The GJ4RYE project has been active in five districts in Sierra Leone: Kambia, Kailahun, Kono, Moyamba and Western Area Rural. It has trained 202 rural youth in soft skills and supported 65 of them in developing 36 green startups. Additionally, 97 youth have participated in WEP, with a particular focus on land reclamation through organic horticulture, beekeeping and production of black soldier flies as feed for animal farming. The following sections depict some of their stories.



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# Emmanuel Aiah Gborie



## WHERE

Kono District, Eastern,  
Sierra Leone



## WHAT

Business incubator and  
integrated poultry  
and crops production



## TRACK

Green entrepreneurship



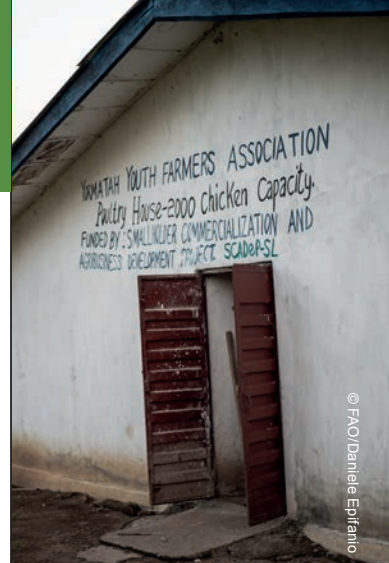
## ***“We are working towards building a resilient agricultural sector in Sierra Leone”***

As Emmanuel speaks about his business, one can sense that his mind is moving faster than he can speak. He is one of the founders of Yormatah Youth Farm Association, a business incubator that started as a not-for-profit association with the vision to **“create sustainable jobs for young people in Sierra Leone,”** Emmanuel says. The journey began with a simple yet powerful idea: **“If there are no jobs available, why not create them?”** Emmanuel and his colleagues believed that, by coming together, they could build opportunities not just for themselves but for future generations. They were given a piece of land, where they started by planting maize. In 2017, FAO supported their efforts by providing 500 laying hens and the necessary equipment to get started in producing eggs and chickens.

However, the journey was not without challenges. **“Feed was a major issue,”** Emmanuel recalls, and **“relying on seasonal farming for maize wouldn’t be sustainable.”**

To address this, they partnered with another group under the GJ4RYE project to introduce an irrigation system that allows for year-round cultivation and production of maize, sorghum and rice. But that was not the only hurdle. They also found it difficult to acquire day-old chicks, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when travel restrictions made importing chicks from abroad impossible. This led Emmanuel and his team to innovate further, building their own incubators that allowed them to produce day-old chicks of local chicken breeds that are well adapted to the bioclimatic conditions in Sierra Leone.

**“We are building a complete cycle of production, from feed production and processing to poultry farming,”** Emmanuel says. The organization, which started as a community-based non-profit, has now grown into a registered company with shareholders. They currently rear 400 climate-adapted crossbreed chickens of which 100 are parent stock.



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### Lessons learned and way forward

**“The green jobs training transformed our mindset,”** Emmanuel explains. They learned how to implement a zero-waste, climate-smart agricultural system. **“We use the waste from our poultry as organic fertilizer for our maize. The maize then feeds our chickens, and the waste from the maize is used to cultivate black soldier flies, which are in turn used to feed our poultry.”**



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The business has adopted a sustainable model that incorporates an outgrower scheme, supporting interns and small-scale farmers with seeds, equipment and organic fertilizer. In return, these farmers sell their produce back to the incubator, ensuring a consistent supply chain while fostering local agriculture.

**“We are working towards building a resilient agricultural sector in Sierra Leone,”** says Emmanuel. The initiative has created 12 permanent jobs and offers internships to many others. **“For the first three months, we provide interns with training without a stipend,”** Emmanuel explains. **“After that, we transition to a production-based approach, where they earn based on what they produce, typically receiving 60 percent of the revenue while 40 percent goes towards sustaining the programme.”**

Emmanuel and his team want to be the biggest producer of local chickens in Sierra Leone, and they are well on their way to achieving that goal. Under the Tech Summit Presidential Award organized by the Government of Sierra Leone, his team won prizes worth USD 50 000. With these funds, they plan to modernize their business by creating an integrated system of solar-powered farms that will include a store, a cold room and a dryer to process feed. Furthermore, they aim to increase the irrigated area from the current 12 hectares to 100 hectares, establish a hub for access to the internet and develop a fish pond to enhance aquaculture production, providing a sustainable source of protein and diversifying the farm’s output.



## Box 1

### Village Savings and Loans Association to increase social protection coverage and access to finance

Sierra Leone allocates only 0.7 percent of gross domestic product to social protection expenditures (excluding health care), one of the lowest levels in the world. In this context, local-level informal insurance and social protection schemes such as Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) are a powerful tool to enhance resilience of rural communities and provide access to finance.

The Green Jobs for Rural Youth Employment project supported youth enrolled in the Wage Employment Programme to establish VSLAs, which function as cooperative savings groups where members can regularly save money. These pooled funds can be also used as community emergency funds to support members cope with unexpected costs or to distribute small loans.

Following a training on VSLA management and governance, participants established five VSLA groups and associated bank accounts. Participants deposited an initial capital (5 percent of the Wage Employment Programme monthly stipend) to

support the consolidation of the five youth-led VSLAs.

Funds from the VSLAs could be used by members for various purposes, such as expanding a shared agricultural project, purchasing equipment that benefits all members or investing in community-based projects that align with the group's goals. For example, in Kono region, the VSLA group has utilized collective funds to further consolidate members' apiculture activities. To do this, they launched a new business called Green World Agro Enterprise and purchased material to build 21 beehives and maintenance tools, boosting honey production.

Funds can be used also for individual purposes, and some participants have invested the funds to start their own small business, while others used them to invest in education for themselves or members of their families.

Members can also use the VSLA to provide emergency funds to assist members during times of crisis, providing quick financial relief during unexpected events.





# Success Stanley Lavallie and Betty Serai Sam



## WHERE

Kono District, Eastern  
Area, Sierra Leone



## WHAT

Organic horticulture



## TRACK

Wage employment



## VIDEO

Scan this  
QR CODE  
and  
watch  
the video



Green jobs for rural youth  
employment in Sierra Leone  
[https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=WcvJQRJBU54](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcvJQRJBU54)

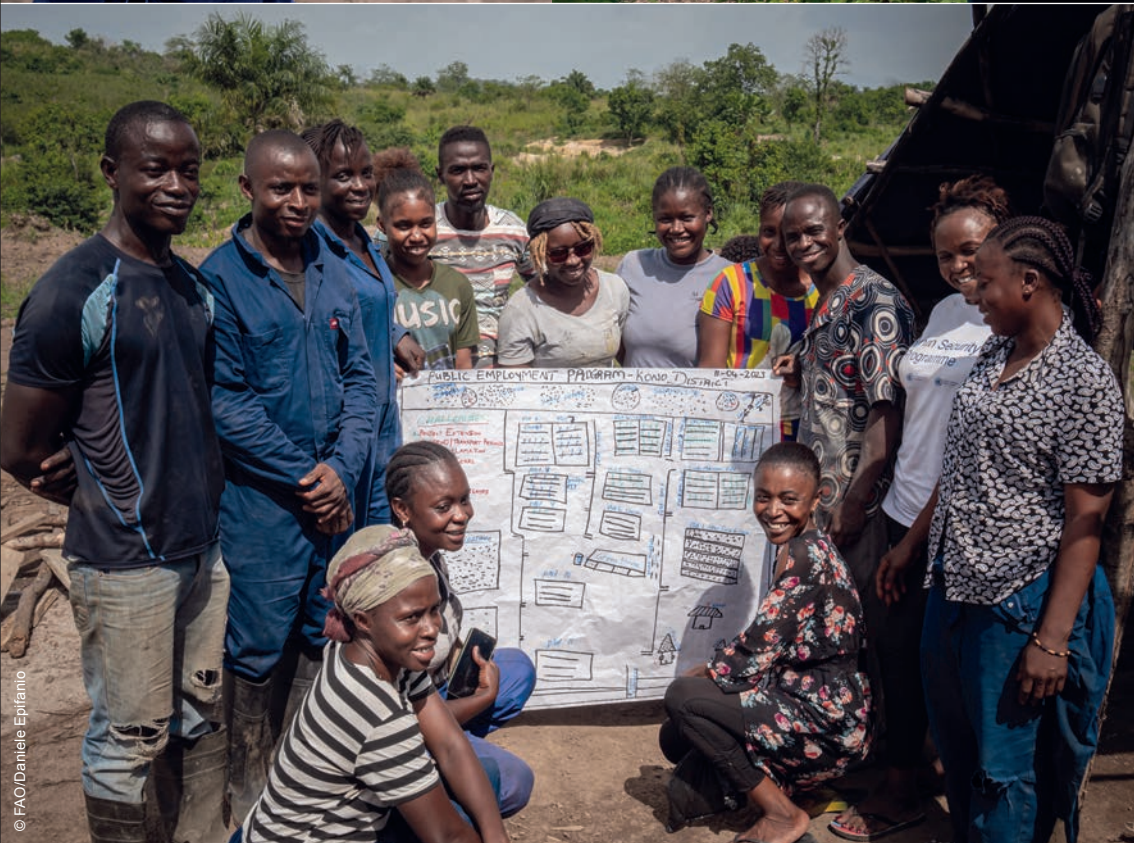
Success Stanley  
Lavallie and Betty  
Serai Sam, both from  
the Kono district,  
participated in the  
WEP, focusing on  
organic horticulture.



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The knowledge and skills they acquired have helped them see a better, greener and more prosperous future for themselves, their families and their communities.



Twenty-seven-year-old Stanley comes from a large mining family in Kono, a district primarily known for diamond mining. He has become known as one of the most passionate participants in the GJ4RYE project. Despite the generally low attractiveness of the agricultural sector to youth and the prevailing influence of the mining sector in the region, Stanley was eager to gain new skills and secure a meaningful and decent job that can benefit his community. **"I was working as a SIM card dealer, but I was not learning anything,"** he recalls.

The project started with intensive skills training, including training on soft skills and technical topics such as organic horticulture and beekeeping, greenhouse and drip irrigation systems, teamwork, farm business management and communication.

**"The trainings gave me the impression that there's life beyond mining,"** Stanley says.

Stanley saw the transformative potential of organic agriculture, from horticulture to beekeeping. He became deeply passionate about the latter. **"Bees have a positive impact on our products with pollination and help preserve the nutritional value,"** he shares. The training taught him how to use organic fertilizers. **"We don't use chemicals, and the customers enjoy our products in their natural taste which is also a marketing advantage."**

When talking about his future, Stanley says, **"I believe that I will be an agricultural ambassador in the next five years,"** a role he is already fulfilling through his appearances on national and local radio and at events like World Food Day and the Rome World Food Forum.





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Betty has become an example of a woman leader for the youth in her community. At 34 years old and a mother of three, she was introduced to the FAO green jobs initiative by her uncle. Seizing the opportunity, she bravely took the entrance exam. **“It was difficult,”** she recalls, but her determination paid off when she was selected as one of the farm representatives for the WEP at Ibeda Village, an organic horticulture farm run by Mabunduka, a local farmer-based organization.

Under the green jobs project, Betty embraced leadership and became responsible for sales and bookkeeping, though her entrepreneurial spirit did not stop there. Alongside her involvement in the WEP, her earnings enabled her to open

a small shop selling commodities in her community. With the support of the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) established as part of the project (see Box 1), she invested in a 1.6-hectare farm where she grows cassava and vegetables.

Looking ahead, Betty dreams of inspiring and training other youth using the knowledge she has gained through the project. **“Through the training, I discovered how to prepare beds, plant seeds and apply dung as fertilizer,”** she said, **“and how to communicate this knowledge.”** Beyond the technical skills, she has also gained the confidence to express her opinions in family matters and provide financial support to her household.

**"I'm an empowered woman now,"** Betty proudly declares, explaining how access to a decent, well-paying job has transformed her into a respected figure in her community. With her sights set high, Betty aspires to become a renowned producer of organic fruits and vegetables, both locally and nationally, using the skills she acquired through the FAO green jobs project.

### Best practices

Through the green jobs project, both Betty and Stanley have learned how to reclaim and restore mined-out areas, turning them into productive sources of income. By applying soil and biodiversity restoration techniques – such as green cover crops, organic fertilizers, mulch and natural pest control methods – along with a drip irrigation system and greenhouse technology, their assigned piece of land

has been rehabilitated for organic horticulture and beekeeping.

Today, they are producing high-value crops such as tomatoes, cucumbers, watermelons and habanero peppers. Thanks to the improved fertility of their soil, local staples like maize, groundnuts and cassava are also thriving. Additionally, the honey they produce provides extra income while supporting local biodiversity.

Together with the other 13 youth working on the farm, they have created a VSLA and registered as a farmer-based organization, further strengthening their collective efforts and economic resilience. Building on this and their desire to share the knowledge they acquired to support the community, they are developing VSLAs in their villages. Betty has already managed to have 20 members contributing and accessing finance for their own needs.



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# Anne Marie Dumbuya, Abubakarr Jenkins and Fatmata Binta Sawaneh



## WHERE

Western Area Rural  
District, Western Area,  
Sierra Leone



## WHAT

Organic horticulture



## TRACK

Wage employment

Anne Marie, Abubakarr and Fatmata participated in the GJ4RYE project in the Western Area Rural district of Sierra Leone. All three engaged in the project's WEP opportunities, gaining knowledge and skills in agrifood systems and production techniques that will stand them in good stead for the future.



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**"Agriculture is important because without agriculture, we are nothing"** says Anne Marie while conducting her favourite task on the farm: watering the crops. With a background in community development studies, she never imagined that farming would become her passion and give her a new sense of purpose in life. **"I was doing agriculture before this project, but it was just backyard farming – pepper, tomato – nothing serious,"** she recalls. **"Since I joined the green jobs project last year, I've found peace of mind. I didn't love agriculture before, but now I do. I'm planning to start my own farm, maybe in my backyard or even on a larger scale. Even if this project ends, I will sustain myself."**

When Anne Marie first heard about the green jobs project, she knew it was an

opportunity she could not pass up. **"When I learned about the project, I knew it was something I wanted to be a part of. Now I'm part of something that's changing my life,"** she says proudly.

Anne Marie has significant family responsibilities on her shoulders. **"In my family, we are four. I'm the eldest. I have two kids, and with agriculture, I take care of my family,"** she says proudly. Before joining the project, Anne Marie struggled to make ends meet, but now she can earn money and provide for her children, who live with their grandmother. **"I save some of my earnings in the bank for future purposes and I support my family with the rest,"** she explains. Her self-esteem has soared: **"Now I can say things because I earn money. They will listen to me and give me respect."**





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Abubakarr Jenkins is the class representative in the organic farming in the Western Area Rural district. A father of five, he is a remarkable example of entrepreneurial spirit. Before starting on the project, Abubakarr, launched a transportation service business. However, with the high inflation that hit the country in recent years, he faced challenges with high fuel prices.

Reflecting on his entrepreneurial experience, Abubakarr advocates for cooperation and collective action to overcome challenges. He believes that sensitizing the community and working together can bring about meaningful change. **"Unity is strength,"** he says, emphasizing the importance of teamwork in mobilizing resources to fix bad roads and solve electricity problems.

He also sees the potential in financial schemes. He has been a pioneer in leading the group to set up a VSLA system as a

self-help system to save money for future investment. **"In Africa, our social security is not working. So, it's only left with your relationship. Your relationship is your social security,"** Abubakarr notes.

Abubakarr's involvement in the WEP also equipped him with valuable skills and knowledge in green practices. **"We are not using chemicals, we are only using cow dung, chicken dung and composted manure,"** he says, describing the organic fertilizers they use in vegetable production. This commitment to sustainability is central to his vision for the future. By the time the project ends, Abubakarr is confident that he will be financially strong and equipped with the knowledge to start his own vegetable farm.

Fatmata, once a university student studying Business Administration, had to step down from her studies because she did not have anybody to assist her, she recalls.



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When it seemed her educational journey had stalled, Fatmata learned about the green jobs project and decided to apply. **“I went through interviews and I performed well, so I became one of the participants,”** she says with pride.

Fatmata works as part of a team on the WEP farm. **“When we arrive for the day, our agronomist, our boss, tells us what to do,”** she explains. Whether it’s digging, planting, watering or weeding, Fatmata is fully engaged in all aspects of farm work. Her favourite tasks are weeding and watering, which she finds particularly fulfilling. **“We do everything together,”** she says, highlighting the collaborative spirit of the project.

The impact of the project on Fatmata’s life has been profound. **“Every month, I get my stipend. I can use it to sustain myself and my family,”** she says gratefully. The project

has also rekindled her desire to continue her education. **“I can even do agriculture because I have vast experience in it,”** she says. **“Now, I’m a senior farmer.”**

Fatmata’s agricultural roots run deep, as she was raised in a farming family. **“My parents are into farming, especially my mother. They plant cassava, groundnut, vegetables, pepper and nuts,”** she shares, describing the subsistence farming that shaped her upbringing. Inspired by her background, Fatmata now dreams of expanding her agricultural endeavours. **“I want to go into agriculture because, in this country, even if you have your degree, getting a job is not easy. It’s a very big challenge. I want to plant vegetables, groundnut, cassava and, if I have the opportunity, even rice,”** she says.

The high-quality products from the farm are in demand, both locally and in broader markets.





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**“At times, we sell the products to people in our community or to hotels, and people go in for our products more,”** she notes. Fatmata’s success is evident from the response she receives: **“The last time I just put it on my WhatsApp status, and people were calling here and there, asking for the product.”**

### Best practices and way forward

Following the FAO training, the group transformed the group’s VSLA saving system into a registered farmer-based organization called Green Job Happy Farmers Organisms. With the funds collected from the 19 members, the group plans to buy land and start their businesses based on the skills and experience acquired under the farm run by Mabunduka. The farm will also be a training centre for organic horticulture where youth can come and learn from their experience.

**“I learned a few things from the VSLA, including that it brings cohesion among people [...] you interact and your problems become shared problems,”** Fatmata and Abubakarr reflect.

This sense of community and mutual support was crucial in helping Fatmata to establish a side business, which is pivotal to allowing her oldest son to go to university.

Thanks to the VSLA, Fatmata managed to buy land for herself, where she is planning to produce several crops for which there is a good market in her region, such as cassava, groundnut and habanero peppers. For Anne Marie, the project has given her a clear understanding of the critical challenges faced by her rural community, particularly the lack of access to healthy and affordable food.

And thanks to the project, Abubakar has been able to consolidate his transportation business and invest in poultry to complement his vegetable production. The integration of multiple businesses is providing him and his family with a decent livelihood.

Moving forward, Anne Marie plans to use the knowledge and experience gained from the project to address food insecurity in her community by providing affordable, healthy produce. Her confidence in the potential of habanero peppers as a profitable crop was solidified during World Food Day. The visitors, including government ministers, were amazed by the quality of the peppers she is growing. This made Anne Marie realize their market potential. **“I would love to be the biggest farmer in Sierra Leone in the next five years,”** she says.



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## Box 2

### Green innovative solutions to address shortages in quality poultry feed

In Sierra Leone, as part of the Wage Employment Programme on poultry production, FAO collaborated with Njala University in Moyamba District on a research project aimed at assessing the possibility of using black soldier flies (BSF) as an alternative source of protein for chickens, fish and pigs.

BSF for feed is a novel concept in Sierra Leone, but it holds significant potential to address two major challenges in the country. The first of these is waste management. In Freetown alone, over 742 tonnes of garbage are generated every day, with more than 84 percent of this waste being biodegradable organic material, much of it coming from residential areas and vegetable markets. Black soldier fly larvae are natural scavengers that feed on a variety of organic waste, including food scraps, agro-industrial by-products and chicken or dairy manure. The larvae can reduce the initial weight of organic waste by up to 50 percent much quicker than

traditional composting, and they also significantly reduce nitrogen and phosphorus content. Additionally, the processed waste can be repurposed as compost.

The second challenge is the shortage of affordable and nutritious protein in animal feed – a major barrier to the growth of the poultry sector in Sierra Leone. BSF larvae contain up to 50 percent high-quality protein, plus essential vitamins, fats and amino acids, making them a valuable feed ingredient for poultry, fish and pigs. Moreover, raising BSF larvae requires relatively low initial investment, making it a practice that farmers can easily adopt.

As part of the Wage Employment Programme on poultry production, FAO, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, has established a BSF production unit to complement poultry activities. As part of this initiative, youth were trained in BSF rearing, maize production and feed formulation for poultry.



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**Youth  
engagement**

**Soft-skill training:**  
**199** youths  
participated

**Green Entrepreneurship Track:**  
**33** youths  
participated

**Wage Employment Programme:**  
**70** youths  
participated

# TIMOR-LESTE

## Country context

Agriculture remains a key economic sector in Timor-Leste, providing 38 percent of employment and contributing an average of 23 percent of non-oil real gross domestic product (World Bank, 2023). Crop production, livestock rearing and artisanal fisheries are practised by 90 percent of Timorese households (GDS and MAF, 2020), 97 percent of whom are smallholder subsistence producers, and two-thirds cultivate less than one hectare of land (GDS and MAF, 2020). With a high percentage of the poor in rural areas relying on rainfed agriculture for their livelihoods, the country is highly vulnerable to climate change, making Timor-Leste one of the top ten countries most at risk of natural disasters. As a result, the nation has been highly reliant on imported foods from other nations. For instance, about 60 percent of the nation's total cereal consumption demands are met by imports from China, Viet Nam and India and imports are expected to increase due to rising domestic consumption and population growth (FAO, 2024). In 2023, 262 000 individuals (20 percent of the population) experienced high levels of acute food insecurity due to rising food costs and declining income. These factors reduced the purchasing power of households, resulting in restricted access to food. Rural households, particularly women and children, are more vulnerable than urban households.

Timor-Leste is one of the youngest countries globally, with youth under 25 making up 60 percent of its population (IPC, 2023). Therefore, a key priority should be access to quality education and health care as well as meaningful employment opportunities, especially for young people. Agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors play vital roles in providing decent jobs for youth. However, according to the United Nations, only 30.5 percent of youth aged 15 to 24 years participated in the labour market. Females participate much less (24.2 percent) than males (36.9 percent) (United Nations Timor-Leste, 2023).



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The GJ4RYE has operated in four districts in Timor-Leste: Baucau, Dili, Ermera and Manufahi. The project has trained 199 rural youth on soft skills. Among these, 33 young leaders took part in the GET and received support in developing green startups with financial and technical mentoring. A further 70 youths took part in two-year WEPs focusing on conservation agriculture, including organic fertilizer production, livestock management and seed management.



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# Joanila Nelia de Jesus



## WHERE

Ermera Municipality,  
Timor Leste



## WHAT

Seedling productions/  
Integrated farming



## TRACK

Green entrepreneurship



After graduating from high school, Joanila had ambitions to continue her studies at university but could not pursue them due to financial constraints. Instead, she began helping her mother with their small farm business, which specialized in producing seedlings of various local crops, including coffee, and raising poultry. **"While helping my mother, I enrolled in a three-year English course,"** Joanila says. **"I chose to study English because I discovered that the constraints of the business with my mother came from a lack of connections with people [...] I remember how difficult it was for us to find buyers,"** she explains. In addition, Joanila and her mother were losing a lot of livestock to infections. **"Life was pretty tough for me at the time,"** she confesses.

Through the green jobs project, Joanila was able to expand her family business. **"The project's training and funding allowed us to broaden our supply chain,"** she explains. **"We could verify the type of seedling, and we could expand the scope of farm production by adding local poultry, ducks and pigs and horticultural products such as dragon fruit, rambutan, passion fruit, grapes and mango."**

Joanila and her team improved their farm by drawing inspiration from natural integrated ecosystems, allowing spontaneous biological relationships between plants, animals and insects to thrive on the farm. She planted plants to attract predatory insects like ladybugs and parasitic wasps and raised animals like free-range pigs and chickens to control pests and to increase soil nutrients through their urine and faeces. She also increased availability of water during the dry seasons by storing rainwater running off roofs.

Thanks to the green jobs project, Joanila learned that mentors from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries are always available to offer support. **"Now, if our animals become ill, or if I find challenges while managing my integrated farm, I know who to contact and ask for technical assistance. The government staff even contact me to buy seedlings,"** she explains proudly.

### Best practices

Since enrolling in the green jobs project, Joanila has dedicated time and efforts to supporting her community by successfully establishing two associations in her village. **"After six months on the project, I established the Human Building Capacity Association to teach English and leadership skills to local youths. In February 2023, I also founded the Youth Association of Green Agricultural Jobs of Ermera to help rural farmers learn green farming methods,"** she explains. Through these associations, around 270 young people have been trained in environmental conservation, agroecological farming and other sectors. Her business success has allowed her to pay for her five siblings' school fees and support her family's daily needs. **"I'm also donating fresh fruits to local churches and hospitals to help sick people,"** she shares. Looking ahead, Joanila envisions continuing to empower local youth through her associations, while expanding her farm and deepening her community contributions.



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# Aluzio Dos Dantos Abreo



## WHERE

Manufahi Municipality,  
Timor Leste



## WHAT

Integrated livestock  
and crops



## TRACK

Green entrepreneurship



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**“Significant changes have happened in my life thanks to the support provided by the Green Jobs project”**



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Aluzio grew up in a large family of farmers and has nine siblings. From a young age, he was drawn to raising animals. This eventually led him to pursue a bachelor's degree in animal production at the Institute Polytechnic of Betanu in Manufahi, from which he graduated in 2020. However, he faced difficulties in getting a job at that time. Determined not to stand still, he returned to his village to help his parents raise pigs and chickens. During this time, he realized how challenging farming in his community could be. **“We couldn't provide proper housing for the animals and struggled to feed them properly,”** he explained. The family relied on food scraps from the village to feed the livestock, and they lacked the knowledge and resources to ensure that the animals were fed well.

It became clear to Aluzio that traditional farming practices were holding them back.

**“Most of our neighbours face the same challenges as they have limited access to alternative farming methods,”** he observes. Realizing that feeding animals human-food leftovers was not only nutritionally inadequate but also risked spreading infections, Aluzio began seeking better farming practices and decided to enrol in the green jobs project.

He used the start-up grants from the project to build an animal house and plant more than two hectares of *Leucaena leucocephala*, known locally as *lamtoro taramba*, a leguminous tree that can be used to provide feed for livestock. Furthermore, Aluzio leveraged the knowledge he received from the trainings the project provided to increase his farm productivity organically while lowering farm production costs.



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With the support of his mentor from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Aluzio used local materials such as pepper, betel leaves, ginger and grasses to produce his own organic pesticides.

In 2023–24, his first year in business, Aluzio managed to generate over USD 3 000 in income, which he reinvested in his farm, allowing him to expand into cattle farming. **“Since then, significant changes have happened in my life thanks to the technical support and seed money provided by the green jobs project,”** he acknowledges.



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### Lessons learned and best practices

Aluzio took on the role of youth representative in his village council (*Uma-Berloik*), leading environmental preservation efforts and sharing his agricultural knowledge with other young villagers. He learned how to address the rising issue of limited access to nutritious animal feed in rural areas like his own and he is now sharing it with his community. Aluzio's operation now represents a sustainable business model for his community.

Looking ahead, Aluzio is eager to continue sharing his knowledge and experiences with his community, particularly with the younger generation. Several neighbourhood youths have already approached him, eager to learn about his farming practices, and he has been teaching them about animal housing and sustainable agriculture techniques. By sharing what he has learned, Aluzio hopes to inspire others to combine innovative technology with traditional methods to boost production and enhance livelihoods in his village.



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# Julia da Conceicao



## WHERE

Baucau Municipality,  
Timor Leste



## WHAT

Organic horticulture



## TRACK

Wage employment



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Before joining the green jobs project in late 2019, Julia was balancing her final year of university studies in agroforestry with a job that barely sustained her financially. She worked for a local team involved in the government school feeding programme, preparing and serving food to students. **“My life was really difficult back then since I had too many obligations to the family,”** she recalls. With the added pressure of supporting her siblings, an unstable contract and an employer that did not always pay on time, and no opportunity to upskill herself, she felt trapped in uncertainty.

However, her life took a significant turn when she was selected for the green jobs project. **“This was one of the life-changing moments in my life,”** she says. **“The project gave me the opportunity to apply the knowledge I had learned at university in real-world agricultural practices,”** she explains. Julia was able to refine her technical skills and, through her role as an extension staff assistant, interact with agricultural projects, supporting farmers at the local level.



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*“By skilling myself, I could grow my passion for helping more farmers”*



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### Best practices

Since joining the WEP initiative, Julia has made a lasting impact in her community, especially in the Laisorulai de Baixo area, where she has supported over 1 500 farmers. One of her primary roles include promoting good agricultural practices and helping farmers adopt more efficient and sustainable farming methods. **“We provided training on land preparation using compost, improved sowing techniques such as planting distance and number of seeds per hole, weeding, and pest and disease control,”** Julia explains.

This hands-on training has helped increase the productivity of crops in the village, including maize, sweet potato, groundnut and cassava. Reflecting on her role, Julia says, **“It was very meaningful work for me and gave me a sense of accomplishment.”**

Julia is determined to continue assisting farmers whenever they need help, and her work has already made a tangible difference in increasing agricultural outputs. She looks forward to expanding her influence further, ensuring that more farmers have the knowledge and resources to thrive.



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**“By building my skills, I could grow my passion for helping more farmers by providing technical support to horticultural activities,”** she says proudly. The WEP also gave her a steady income, allowing her to better support her family, including paying for her brother’s school tuition in Dili.



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# Ana Teresa Belo



## WHERE

Baucau Municipality,  
Timor Leste



## WHAT

Animal health



## TRACK

Wage employment



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Before joining the green jobs project, Ana was in her final year at the National University of Timor-Leste, studying animal health and was seeking a job that aligned with her educational background. When a friend told her about the green jobs project, Ana knew it was the perfect fit. **"I was highly interested since the activities under this project were relevant to my educational background, and I also had a strong passion for working with community members,"** she explains.

Through the project, Ana was able to build connections with senior technical staff from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and with national and international staff from various agencies. Through these, she has learned how to operate in animal health issues on the ground. In addition to gaining experience, Ana found a way to give back to her family: **"They used to provide me with financial support when I was in university, but now I can give back to my family members,"** she says proudly.



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*“I was highly interested since the activities under this project were relevant to my educational background”*



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### Best practices

Since joining the project, Ana has made a significant impact in Laga, her home town, particularly in livestock health. **“All the efforts our team made have prevented animal infections and increased farm productivity, which ends up raising incomes of farmers in Laga,”** she says.

Ana has been working closely with two veterinary staff from the ministry to support communities across eight villages, providing crucial treatments and vaccinations to over 250 livestock farmers. From 2022 to 2023, the team vaccinated thousands of cattle, local chickens and pigs, helping to prevent the spread of infections and increase farm productivity. In her spare time, Ana also provided technical support to promote good agricultural practices to 25 farmers’ groups.



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# Pascoal da Costa Fernandes



## WHERE

Manufahi Municipality,  
Timor Leste



## WHAT

Integrated livestock  
and crops



## TRACK

Green entrepreneurship



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Pascoal, who studied agroforestry at the National University of Timor-Leste in Dili, had always been passionate about farming. However, after returning to his family's home in Manufahi, he found himself unemployed and helping his parents on their farm.

**"I noticed that they were only growing one**

**or two crops, and most of the produce was consumed by the family, with only a small portion left for sale."** This resulted in insufficient income to meet their needs, prompting Pascoal to dream of running a more diversified and integrated horticultural and livestock farm.



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## *“This opportunity helped me improve technical knowledge in operating the integrated farm”*



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Things changed when Pascoal heard from the village chief about the green jobs project. **“I applied and luckily could join the project,”** Pascoal recalls. Through the GET initiative, he received training in business and livestock management from the university and mentorship support from extension officers from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. **“This opportunity helped me improve my technical knowledge in operating the integrated farm, such as how to grow a variety of crops in both dry and rainy seasons and how to produce compost and animal feed for cows and chickens,”** he says.

The impact was immediate. Pascoal and five other village youths successfully planted more than ten different horticultural crops while also raising cattle and local chickens. His integrated farm is organized into zones

and subzones for rotational cultivation. This method helps control pests and increases productivity by leveraging natural processes. For instance, covering soil with rice straw while planting watermelon seedlings protects crops from high temperatures and activates beneficial microorganisms. Pascoal also grows some crops specifically for livestock feed, reducing reliance on imported feeds and protecting his farm from market fluctuations.

The increased production led to significant earnings, particularly from growing cucumbers and watermelons and raising cattle. **“The increased variety of products led us to year-round production and consistent revenue,”** Pascoal adds. Strong local market connections and consistent supply have allowed him to sell the farm’s produce to five supermarkets in Dili.



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## Best practices

By joining the project, Pascoal has gained lifelong skills, including a deep understanding of conservation agriculture and environmental preservation. He is now a self-sufficient agripreneur and able to pay his children's school bills. In addition to improving his farm, Pascoal has created green job opportunities for young people in his village.

He regularly employs village youth as seasonal workers to help prepare the land and harvest crops and he is part of the Hai-Dulas young farmers' association in his village, which promotes agroecological integrated farming.

Looking ahead, he envisions further growth for his farm and hopes to continue sharing his knowledge with the village youth and the younger generation.



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**Youth  
engagement**

**Soft-skill training:**  
**288** youths  
participated

**Green Entrepreneurship Track:**  
**143** youths  
participated

**Wage Employment Programme:**  
**71** youths  
participated

# ZIMBABWE

## Country context

In Zimbabwe, one out of three workers is involved in agriculture, making the agricultural sector the main national employer. The sector is characterized by low productivity and vulnerability to weather shocks. Over 70 percent of the economically active population relies on rainfed subsistence agriculture, which is highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change (IFAD, 2020). Between 1900 and 2017, Zimbabwe endured seven major droughts, 22 epidemic episodes, 12 floods and five storms that resulted in around 7 000 deaths, affected millions of people and caused approximately USD 950 million in damage (World Bank Group, n.d.).

Furthermore, the population of Zimbabwe is notably young: 34 percent are between 10 and 24 years old, and 40 percent are aged between 0 and 14 years (UNFPA, n.d.). According to the 2019 Labour Force and Child Labour Survey report, 55 percent of the country's youth, defined as those aged between 15 and 35 years, are unemployed (Munongerwa, 2024).

Youth in Zimbabwe face significant barriers to economic participation. Limited access to assets, collateral, and credit represents a major obstacle for them to pursue skills development or venture into businesses without government support. Agriculture often relies on seasonal rainfall, weak infrastructure, and limited public services, which makes it an unattractive option for many young people. As a result, youth engagement in agricultural value chains is generally limited to supporting family operations or working for those who own assets, rather than building their own businesses (ILO, 2017).

The GJ4RYE project operated in six administrative districts in Zimbabwe: Chegutu, Chimanimani, Marondera, Mazowe, Kariba and Kwekwe. The project has trained 288 rural youth in soft skills and has supported 143 youths in creating 66 green startups and 71 youths taking part in WEPs, particularly focusing on organic vermicomposting, beekeeping, sustainable fish processing and tree nurseries.





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# Charles Muswati



## WHERE

Marondera District,  
Mashonaland East,  
Zimbabwe



## WHAT

Oyster mushrooms



## TRACK

Green entrepreneurship



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## "We established a strong market presence in the region"

Charles laughed while explaining that he struggled to secure a job after graduating from agricultural college. **"Employers want people with working experience,"** he explained. With no luck in the job market, Charles and five of his fellow graduates opted to go for entrepreneurship. **"That way, we gain both production and marketing experience,"** he says. Eventually, they were awarded a grant from the FAO green jobs project and started their oyster mushroom production business.

**"We decided to develop a mushroom business because it utilizes waste from farms, which is affordable."** Charles and his team's business, Green Quality Produce, is now a role model among fellow graduates. Even students from his college visit the production site. **"The students benefit from their visits by learning organic production**

**of oyster mushrooms, which is also beneficial to society,"** he says.

Their business is thriving. **"We've expanded our production capacity by 300 percent, increased our workforce by 50 percent and established a strong market presence in the region,"** Charles states. They even supply big supermarkets in Marondera, the main city in the province.

The success of his project has enabled him to gain visibility in neighbouring countries such as Zambia and Namibia, where he has been invited to share his experience and business model. **"I'm planning to diversify towards button mushroom and start exporting my products,"** he says while smiling and talking about the future he envisions.



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### Lessons learned and best practices

Since the launch of the project, Charles and his team have gained a deep understanding of efficient business management, including financial planning, market analysis and supply chain optimization. These skills, gained through project implementation and mentoring, have been pivotal in their ability to scale their operations and navigate the challenges of running a successful agribusiness.

The team has rooted its business in the use of agricultural waste, such as wheat straw and maize stover, as substrates on which to grow their mushrooms. By adopting methods such as composting, rainwater harvesting and integrated pest management, they have minimized their environmental impact and enhanced mushroom yields and product quality. This has led to cutting water consumption by 40 percent and waste by 30 percent, while substantially increasing production levels.

Looking ahead, the team's goal is to build a thriving and profitable agribusiness that contributes positively both to the community and the environment. They envision their mushroom farm evolving into a leading supplier in the national market, with a strong emphasis on sustainability and social responsibility. Their plans aim at expanding the product range, exploring opportunities for export and establishing a training centre for local farmers.



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# Svodai Tami



© FAO/Svodai Tami

One of nine siblings born to a farming family, Svodai found herself navigating life's challenges from an early age. Married at 19 and with three children to support, she and her husband ventured into the vegetable distribution market.

**"Before we got involved in the FAO project, we were buying and selling vegetables and tomatoes because none of us were employed,"** Svodai recounts.

Upon joining the FAO green jobs project, she became a class representative in the WEP focused on organic vermicompost. This initiative not only provided her with a stable

income but also equipped her with valuable knowledge to contribute back to her community. **"We can now spread knowledge about vermicomposting in the community,"** Svodai states.

Svodai's involvement in the FAO project has positively changed her family's dynamics and finances. With her husband experiencing periods of unemployment, Svodai's role as the primary breadwinner has become crucial. **"With the funds I am getting from FAO, I can pay for my kids' school fees, pay the rent and cover food and clothing as well."**



## WHERE

Kwekwe District, Midlands, Zimbabwe



## WHAT

Organic vermicomposting and beekeeping



## TRACK

Wage employment



## VIDEO



Scan this QR CODE and watch the video

From honey combs to green jobs: Empowering Zimbabwe's rural youth through beekeeping <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcvJQRJBU54>



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### Lessons learned and best practices

Since joining the WEP focused on organic vermicomposting, Svodai and her fellow colleagues have developed best practices centred around the efficient disposal of waste in ways that protect the environment and human health. **“We have learned how to dispose of waste in a sustainable way,”** Svodai says. A key takeaway from their experience has been the importance of reducing waste production and implementing composting as a sustainable method to convert organic waste into usable organic fertilizer.

Looking ahead, Svodai and the other youth participants plan to apply these skills by

starting their own vermicompost production projects. These initiatives will not only provide a source of income through the sale of organic fertilizer in the local community, but also support their agricultural pursuits by enhancing soil quality.

The participants are also committed to passing on their knowledge to other rural youth. By training others in vermicomposting and sustainable waste management, they aim to create more job opportunities and promote environmentally responsible practices within their communities. Their vision is to contribute to the sustainable development of their region while improving their own economic prospects.

## Box 3

### Collaboration with private sector and United Nations agencies towards a just transition

In Kwekwe district, Zimbabwe, the Green Jobs for Rural Youth Employment project has fostered successful partnerships to support a just transition. A partnership with a chemical fertilizer company led to the establishment of an organic vermicomposting initiative. This provided youth with skills in sustainable agriculture and at the same time helped the country's largest synthetic fertilizer company to transition to organic fertilizer production and distribution.

Together with partner UN agencies, the project has facilitated policy dialogues among government, civil society and workers' organizations, contributing to the development of a Just Transition Country Analysis for Zimbabwe and the foundation of an interministerial task force. These efforts aim to establish a just transition road map, shaping national policies and supporting the updating process of the nationally determined contributions.



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# Courage Gwena and Primrose and Precious Chakaingesu



## WHERE

Marondera District,  
Mashonaland East,  
Zimbabwe



## WHAT

Organic eggs



## TRACK

Green entrepreneurship



## "I've always wanted to be an entrepreneur"



However, upon returning to Harare, he faced a difficult reality. **"I realized that the money I was getting there was not enough to sustain me nor support my siblings who depend on me,"** he explains. Courage adds, **"I have a disabled sister, and I would like to generate enough income to pay for a course that could empower her to earn her income and provide her with an investment for the future."**

Courage decided to move back to his rural home to start farming. **"I've always wanted to be an entrepreneur, so I decided to take the risk to start a business [...] but the farming projects were not lucrative. I hoped that one day I would have a breakthrough, but that didn't happen,"** he says. When the FAO green jobs project started, Courage and three of his colleagues opted for the GET option. They had a clear vision of their community's challenges in accessing affordable and nutritious food and developed a strong business proposal. The group founded Ease & Green Private Ltd., a registered company specializing in sustainable egg production from Hy-Line laying chickens.

Now, as Chair of the largest egg production business in his area, Courage manages around 880 layers, with 90 percent laying eggs daily. His farm implements circular practices, repurposing waste as fertilizer and using solar energy, and has diversified its services. **"We purchased a grinding mill to produce our feed. Although last season was a bad harvest due to a serious drought, we are offering milling services to other villages, adding a source of income to the business,"** he notes.

Reflecting on his earlier entrepreneurial challenges, he recalls, **"There were days when I didn't have enough vaccines, but since joining this project we haven't lost a single bird to disease."** He adds, **"Without this grant, I would probably be a tobacco farmer,**

Courage Gwena, 34 years old, has always had big dreams but limited financial resources. Selected for the Presidential Scholarship, he studied marketing in South Africa – an opportunity few rural youth receive.



which is common here but harmful to the environment, or I might be doing small poultry projects that don't generate enough income [...] achieving this would not have been possible with just our savings."

Primrose and Precious Chalaingesu, two sisters working alongside Courage Gwena in Ease & Green Private Ltd., have shifted from their family's traditional tobacco-farming roots.



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**“At home, we survived on tobacco farming but the money was not enough to pay for school,”** Primrose recalls, explaining the reasons why she dropped out of school. **“I decided to get a job so that I could support my family in raising the other kids that depend on me, three of them,”** she remembers.

Despite their father’s initial reservations about both daughters participating in the green jobs initiative, Primrose and Precious remained unwavering in their goal, even resorting to subterfuge to attend training sessions. **“We had to tell our parents we**

**were going to fetch firewood when we were actually going to the project site to finalize our proposals with Courage,”** they recall.

The two sisters believe in the business’s potential to tackle community challenges by providing an affordable product that remains fresh for extended periods while pursuing their dreams. **“I would like to pursue a degree in business so that we can manage our enterprise by ourselves,”** Primrose says. **“We’re going to acquire more land so that we can grow our operation and open a front shop in town,”** Precious adds.



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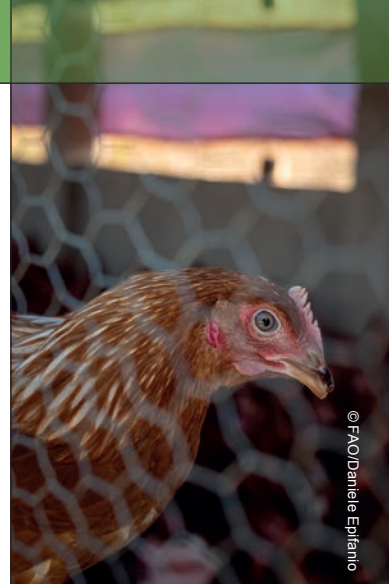
## Best practices and way forward

One of the key factors in this group's success was their ability to identify opportunities in their community and to build a clear vision for taking advantage of these. **"The first one was the lack of a consistent supplier of eggs in our community but a demand for eggs,"** the group notes. **"We noted that people in surrounding communities earn about USD 3 a day, so we decided to offer an affordable product, selling eggs at around USD 0.12 to USD 0.14 each,"** Courage adds.

A major challenge they identified was the lack of electricity in their community. **"We needed a product that could stay fresh for an extended period without relying on refrigeration or electricity, and our eggs can last for about 21 days,"** they explain.

Reflecting on the impact of the programme, Courage notes, **"This programme has changed our lives in so many ways. It has given us knowledge – we have learned how to manage business, how important it is to preserve the environment, how to identify problems within our communities and how we can monetize solutions to those problems."**

Looking forward, Courage, Primrose and Precious envision significant growth for the business. **"In ten years, we see this business expanding to other districts within Marondera or Mashonaland East and diversifying into other farming activities, like a piggery and horticulture."** Additionally, they hope the business will contribute to the community by educating orphans, donating food to those in need and producing their own feed to achieve sustainability.



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# Melissa Mhlanga, Ruth Madzudzo and Courage Marewo



## WHERE

Mazowe District,  
Mashonaland Central,  
Zimbabwe



## WHAT

Integrated fish farming



## TRACK

Green entrepreneurship



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## **“We want to buy land for fish farming and diversify with poultry, using waste from one to feed the other”**

Melissa, Ruth and Courage, three youths from Mazowe, chased the opportunity provided by GET to venture into tilapia fish production. This marked the beginning of a new chapter defined by youth empowerment and improved financial conditions.

Since starting the fish-pond project, the trio has gained significant respect within their community. Village elders have been particularly supportive, allowing them to prioritize their fishery work over other tasks. **“When the headman heard that we had to attend to our fishery, he exempted us from the village meeting; that would have never happened before,”** Ruth recalls.

Ruth comes from a family that practised subsistence farming and pig farming and has always been passionate about agriculture. Since the launch of the project, her status in the community has changed

significantly. **“People now interact with me and treat us with more respect. Some come to see what we are doing and want to do the same at their places,”** she shares. Ruth dreams of teaching others about fish farming, hoping to uplift her community through shared knowledge and improved livelihoods.

Melissa, a mother of three boys, faced educational challenges, passing only three out of six subjects in her secondary school exams. Despite these setbacks, she is focused on earning money to support her family. **“I can't stress myself with books any more. I just want to make enough money to support my family,”** she admits. Melissa noticed a deep shift in her position within her household; her husband now respects her contributions and helps more with home responsibilities.



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**“Before, he didn’t help with anything at home. But now, if I get busy with the project I can ask him to help and he’s very willing,”** she says, reflecting on the impact the project has had on her family dynamics.

Courage, who previously grew maize and vegetables to sustain his family, has learned valuable lessons in strategic planning and business management through the fish-farming project. Although he could not afford to finalize his exams, Courage

remains determined to continue his studies and hopes to one day become an electrician or study animals and birds. **“I want to go back to school and finish. If funds are available, I can advance to college,”** he shares with hope. In the meantime, he is focused on using the fish-farming project as a stepping stone to secure a brighter future for his family. **“Now, I have learned how to strategize and become more of a businessperson,”** he says.



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## Best practices and way forward

The group's success has been driven by a sustainable business model that emphasizes environmental responsibility. They operate seven fish ponds with a total capacity of 8 250 fish. They use organic feeds derived from natural resources such as pig and broiler droppings, earthworms and black soldier fly larvae. The group is also producing its own feed from ingredients such as soybean cake and sunflower meal, reducing production costs by approximately 70 percent and allowing them to maintain competitive pricing. By innovatively recycling water to irrigate vegetable gardens and incorporating vegetable waste into fish feed, they maximize resource efficiency. Solar energy powers their operations.

Looking to the future, the group aims to become a leading fish supplier. They plan to establish depots with cold storage facilities and to expand their fingerling supply. Over the next five years, they envision purchasing

land to create an integrated operation focused on fish farming and complementary activities. **"We want to buy land for fish farming and diversify with poultry, using waste from one to feed the other,"** says Courage.

The project has also sparked individual aspirations. Ruth, inspired by the project's success, hopes to upgrade her family's lifestyle. **"If the project does well, I want to finish my O-levels and join the Veterinary Services Section, like my father,"** she shares. Melissa is focused on securing a better future for her family by investing in commercial farming and ensuring her children receive a good education. **"In five years, I want to have bought a vehicle to transport the fish,"** she says, setting practical goals to expand the business. Together, Melissa, Ruth and Courage are not only building a thriving business but also laying a foundation for a better future for their families and the broader community.



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# Tinei Matanga and Knowledge Mhariwa



## WHERE

Marondera District,  
Mashonaland East,  
Zimbabwe



## WHAT

Organic horticulture



## TRACK

Green entrepreneurship



In a large, perfectly fenced field, Tinei Matanga and Knowledge Mhariwa, both in their early thirties, are preparing the beds for the next crop. They are the founders of Tripple M Organic Potatoes, a business specializing in organic crop production, mainly potatoes. Before joining the green jobs project, they were producing horticultural products but on a small scale due to limited capital. Their involvement in the project has transformed their operations, enabling them to harvest a crop nearly every month and generate significant profits.

With the financial and technical support of FAO, Tinei and Knowledge have expanded the range of crops they grow and greened their production. In 2024, they harvested

580 sacks of potatoes (5–15 kg each), 106 kg of carrots and about 10 kg of green beans, among other crops. **“We carefully plan our production cycles and crop rotations to make sure that we have produce to sell every month,”** they explain. They have also integrated green components into their production, including solar energy for irrigation and reusable packaging, which is both environmentally friendly and cost-effective. Their approach has allowed them to sell crops consistently and meet the varying demands of the market while generating local employment: they employ three to five part-time workers to support them with field operations.



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### Lessons learned and way forward

With the help of their agricultural practices and business development mentors, Tinei and Knowledge have gained knowledge of sustainable agriculture and effective business management. A key lesson has been the value of consistent production cycles and crop rotation, which have enabled them to maintain a steady income stream while allowing them to plan for further investments. **“After realizing profits, we decided to invest some of them in cattle, and now we have seven cows,”** said Tinei. These provide manure for their crops and diversify their business. They have also learned the importance of diversifying their crops to meet market demands, especially during high-demand periods such as the rainy season.

Among the main challenges they faced one was competition with other producers in the market. **“This was our first time to produce at large with few customers knowing us,”** they recall. To address this, they worked hard on social media and direct networking with customers.

Moving forward, Tinei and Knowledge are focused on expanding their operations and securing the future growth of their business. Their plans include acquiring a larger plot of land to increase production capacity, drilling a borehole to ensure water security and purchasing a vehicle to improve distribution logistics. They are also committed to registering their business for export, which will open up new markets and opportunities for growth.



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# Green jobs, hope for a bright future

Increasing youth unemployment, rural outmigration and the impacts of climate change on our environments is putting the sustainability of rural landscapes and communities in doubt.

Promoting green jobs in agrifood systems and in rural contexts can offer solutions to address many of these issues. This includes incentives to shift towards regenerative agriculture practices and an enabling environment where decent work is available. The latter, in particular, is likely to engage youth in agrifood systems. Promoting sustainable green jobs at scale requires holistic and integrated strategies

at various levels. Ensuring that young men and women are actively participating in this process, and empowered to be agents of change, is of utmost importance.

The Green Jobs for Rural Youth Employment project in Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, and Zimbabwe provided skills training and green job opportunities, while also strengthening youth empowerment, particularly by building self-confidence among young women. Many of the youth participants have gone on to become community trainers, employers and, in some cases, agricultural and climate-action ambassadors.

The project improved the livelihoods of direct and indirect beneficiaries by facilitating skills development and increasing employment and business opportunities, which enabled improvements in housing, education and asset ownership.

National and local governments, as well as academic institutions, NGOs, and the private sector, played strong roles in the implementation of the project and now have the know-how to further replicate skills development and employment programmes

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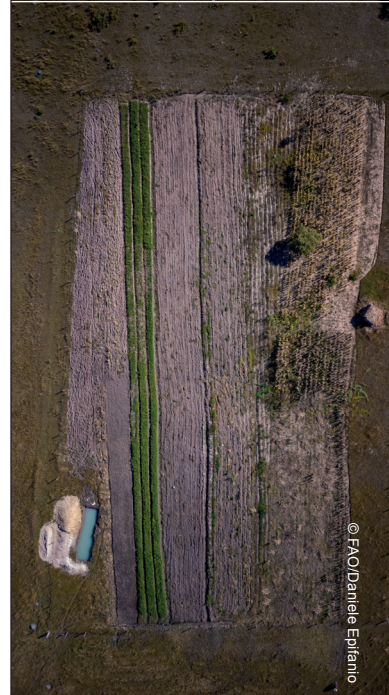
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## Empowering rural youth for a sustainable future

Green jobs  
success stories from  
Sierra Leone,  
Timor-Leste and  
Zimbabwe

Green Jobs for  
Rural Youth Employment  
project

Financed by Korea  
International Cooperation  
Agency (KOICA)

With limited access to education, training, land, finance, and decision-making processes, rural youth, especially women, tend to have few decent work opportunities in rural areas. Many work in the informal economy as subsistence farmers, or as micro-entrepreneurs, often under precarious, unsafe, and unsustainable conditions. Unlocking their potential requires removing barriers and creating meaningful and prosperous, green job opportunities.

With support from the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), FAO has promoted the creation of green jobs in Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste, and Zimbabwe to empower rural youth and support the shift to more sustainable agrifood systems. Through targeted training, micro-financing, and business development support, over 600 young people have gained skills, and economic opportunities in areas such as agroecology, beekeeping, sustainable livestock, and waste management—turning environmental challenges into opportunities for decent rural employment.

**Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**  
Rome, Italy

[fao.org/rural-employment](http://fao.org/rural-employment)

Design: [studio@bartoleschi.com](mailto:studio@bartoleschi.com)

CD52591EN/1/05\_25