



*Young farmer interviews in Nigeria with Ravel & Here I Am Studios*

## Executive Summary

From August 2024 to November 2025, One Acre Fund worked with research organizations Ravel and Here I Am Studios, and Busara Global to better understand the experiences of youth farmers across Burundi, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. These research partners brought deep experience engaging rural communities across Africa. Through conversations with hundreds of young women and men, as well as their families and community leaders, the research explored the barriers, motivations, and opportunities shaping youth participation in agriculture. This work was supported through One Acre Fund's five-year partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, which aims to reach and empower 1.2 million youth and young women in farming households by 2029.

This memo summarizes the most actionable findings from that research. It highlights five key insights and practical recommendations across three opportunity areas to help agricultural programs better engage and support rural youth, especially young women.

## I. Key Research Insights

- 1) Across all countries, research found that youth deeply respect farming as a profession.** Young people saw farming not only as a way of life, but a connection between their communities, and a continuation of their family's legacy. Farming was often seen as a safety net as well – a way to ensure one's family can remain fed and secure and provide stable income for routine costs such as education.
- 2) Rural youth pursue multiple income-generating activities inside and outside agriculture, making time constraints a key design consideration, especially for young women.** Though young women and young men pursue gendered opportunities for additional income, they both see opportunities within agriculture as a means to diversify their income flows, and as a potential for seed income for other investments. Time-efficient farming matters so that youth have time to address other responsibilities or pursue additional opportunities for themselves.
- 3) Land ownership is a persistent barrier for young people to invest deeply in their fields, and disproportionately excludes young women.** Youth do often have some land access through their families or by seasonal renting, but this limits their decision making power and ability to try novel techniques or approaches or invest in long-term soil health. Acknowledging this dynamic and working with families will be important work in the short term, while broader systemic advancements around land tenure and land access are designed for.
- 4) Youth are ready to be first-movers when it comes to adopting tech innovation in agriculture, and addressing climate change through resilience practices.** Youth mentioned being keen to integrate digital tools into their farming practices, and across countries routinely shared an interest and willingness to adopt Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) techniques. This is a unique opportunity to enable youth to support their communities by testing and advocating for new ways of farming.
- 5) Young women are keen to see trusted peers or mentors demonstrate a way forward.** In addition to time poverty from household and familial obligations and lower land access, many young women also have limited decision-making power on their own. The research pointed to the importance of connecting young women with inspiring voices from peers, older women, and respected community leaders to assuage their self-doubt and show them how to engage in agriculture in a way that will be financially beneficial but also practical given their time constraints.

# Making Agriculture Work for Youth

Research Insights from Six Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa

ONE ACRE FUND



*Rehema Solomon Mgova, 31 Years Old, Tanzania*

## II. Recommendations on reframing the farming profession

- Support young people at different stages of their farming journey by offering clear entry points and pathways for growth.
  - Start at training, starter packs, supporting non-land owning youth to practice with demo plots, in groups, etc.
  - Communications should speak to young people's aspirations to find new solutions, build independence, and create stronger futures for themselves and their families.
  - More experienced or higher-capacity youth should have clear pathways to access packages that support progression toward commercial farming.
  - Where appropriate, programs can authentically position offerings as designed with and for youth.
- Frame farming as a business by outlining new skills, profit focus, and tech-forward opportunities.
  - Strategic and high value career choice, lean into existing pride and connection with community.
  - Tech improvements in tools, inputs and practices will lead to higher yields (modern techniques).
  - Highlight how farming can help youth access what they care about (affording school fees, buying a smartphone, investing in a small business venture, etc).

- Equip young farmers to stabilize and strengthen agricultural income, through diversified production including agroforestry.
  - Position resilience as part of the farming value proposition, including insurance, safety nets, soil health practices, and tree species that support income diversification and restore soil quality.
  - Use testimonials about young farmers who have endured and found prosperity in the sector to encourage their peers.
  - Recognize farming as one part of a broader livelihood strategy, not necessarily a young person's only income-generating activity.

## III. Recommendations on youth-specific outreach

- Engage trusted voices to reach youth. Effective outreach should include peers, role models, parents, community leaders, and other trusted messengers who influence youth decisions.
  - In some contexts, traditional messengers like 'town criers' have implicit approval of community leaders and therefore are perceived as highly credible.
  - Community meetings can be a great place to receive endorsements from community leaders and influencers - and also allow for two-way communication between 'experts' and young people.
  - Young women farmers in particular want to be connected with mentors, including their field officers. Designing more direct 'mentor' opportunities within the community could draw more young women into agricultural programs.
- "Seeing is Believing"
  - Demonstration plots in contexts such as Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Tanzania are particularly effective tools - and give a step by step explanation throughout the season with guidance from an expert host or model farmer for youth.
  - This model also gives an opportunity for new inputs, products or processes to be demonstrated and build buy in for the upcoming season.
- Stay ahead of the curve when it comes to digital marketing and brand engagement
  - Stay on pace with youth as early movers here - whatsapp broadcasts, audio messages from Field Officers, interactive chatbots, meme/photos that can be circulated with farming facts/info.
  - Social Behavior Change Campaigns that focus on shaping youth perceptions of farming could be successful in contexts such as Burundi and Uganda.



Jean Claude Niyonkuru, 20 Years Old, Rwanda

### IV. Recommendations on meeting youth where they are

- Address young people's thirst for knowledge head-on
  - Develop training that demystifies the controllable aspects of farming.
  - Provide clear information on program offers including package structure, repayment terms, timelines, and logistics so they feel empowered and informed.
  - Consider additional training for youth around areas of concern/interest, including broader financial planning and management, and "masterclasses" on innovative farming practices.
  - Address youth's interest in multiple income streams, and speak to how both staple and high value crops could address their broader goals.
- Design activities around young women's time constraints, especially for training and distribution, recognizing that many balance farming with household and childcare responsibilities.
  - Check that training times offered are during mornings, or clearly support or welcome young children to also be in attendance.
  - Develop services or packages that improve time poverty with labor-saving tools or techniques.
  - Leverage peers and mentors to disseminate important messages and offer testimonials.

- Social and Behavior Change (SBC) campaigns can support youth and young women to build greater autonomy in farming over time.
  - Use SBC to strengthen youth decision-making on family farms, particularly in contexts such as Nigeria and Rwanda, by helping parents see the benefits of involving youth in farm decisions and preparing young people for greater independence.
  - Frame women's participation as a household and community benefit, especially in contexts such as Ethiopia, where social and cultural norms may limit young women's role in agricultural decision-making.
  - Use community-level SBC to address safety barriers for young women, building local awareness and support where safety concerns limit women's ability to participate fully in farming.
- Agricultural organizations can help address land access barriers by advocating for youth with policymakers, community leaders, and landowners, and by supporting practical pathways for young people to access and use land productively.
  - Work with policy makers and community leaders to launch an advocacy campaign to support more favorable rental practices for youth in the community, or improved access to currently un/underutilized land.
  - Support youth to begin farming in cohorts/small groups, to reduce individual young farmer risk and start up costs while still leveraging their shared willingness to farm.

### Conclusion:

Across countries, youth see agriculture as meaningful, practical, and full of potential, especially when it is connected to income, independence, innovation, and family wellbeing. To turn that interest into sustained participation, programs must better reflect young people's realities, including limited land, capital, time, risk, and decision-making power. Designing with youth, especially young women, can help make farming a more accessible, resilient, and aspirational pathway for the next generation.