



A Webinar by the Thematic Working Group on Rural Youth Employment of the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development

Derisking Agrifood Systems for Young People: Co-creation and Decent Work

Thursday, 10 September 2026, 15:00-16:30 CET

Zoom registration link:

<https://ifad.zoom.us/meeting/register/Ro7PrximR1S6cjpXA8y2VA#/registration>

CONCEPT NOTE

1. Background and rationale

Agrifood systems are undergoing profound transformation as they confront the intersecting challenges of climate change, environmental degradation, market volatility, demographic shifts, and technological disruption. These pressures pose significant risks to livelihoods, food security, and sustainable development, while also creating opportunities for innovation and economic transformation. For the world's growing youth population — particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where the youth population is projected to continue growing and reach its largest-ever cohort by 2035 — the future of agrifood systems will largely determine the access to productive employment, entrepreneurship opportunities, and resilient livelihoods.¹

This transformation carries direct consequences for how young people engage with agrifood systems. Young people are increasingly recognized as essential agents of agrifood systems transformation rather than merely beneficiaries of development interventions. Yet they continue to face systemic barriers that discourage their participation in agriculture and broader agrifood systems. Limited access to productive assets such as land, finance, technology, skills, information, and markets, coupled with weak social protection and heightened exposure to climate and economic shocks, increases the risks associated with engaging in agrifood systems.² These challenges are further compounded by fragmented policies, weak

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems* (Rome: FAO, 2025).

² World Bank, *Jobs for Youth in Agrifood Systems* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2023).

institutions, and insufficient investment in youth-responsive programmes.³

Agrifood systems encompass employment far beyond primary agricultural production. They encompass interconnected activities across production, processing, logistics, distribution, retail, food services, digital services, waste management, and ecosystem restoration. Recent evidence highlights that this broader perspective holds significant potential to create diverse, skilled, decent and attractive employment opportunities for young people.⁴ Realizing this potential, however, requires, among other things, deliberate efforts to reduce both actual and perceived risks associated with participation in agrifood value chains through targeted investments, innovation ecosystems, and youth-responsive financing mechanisms.⁵

Entrepreneurship is increasingly central to how young people engage with agrifood systems, offering a pathway to livelihoods that formal wage employment alone cannot provide at the scale required. The Malabo Montpellier Panel's YOUTH AHEAD report finds that while an estimated 11 million young Africans enter the labour market each year, only around 3.7 million formal jobs are created annually, leaving a substantial gap that youth-led enterprises are well placed to help close.⁶ Case studies from Ghana, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe illustrate how targeted policy support—such as Zambia's Skills Development Levy, which finances youth entrepreneurship training, and Zimbabwe's TVET hubs and EmpowerBank facility, which combine technical skills training with access to start-up finance—can help young people move from informal, precarious activity toward viable agribusinesses. Strengthening entrepreneurship ecosystems in this way not only expands decent employment but also drives innovation across processing, digital services, and last-mile distribution, reinforcing the co-creation agenda at the heart of this webinar.

These systemic barriers are compounded by mounting environmental pressures. Climate change remains one of the greatest sources of risk for agrifood systems. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, water scarcity, land degradation, and biodiversity loss threaten agricultural productivity and undermine rural livelihoods. At the same time, mounting pressure on land and water resources is pushing many ecosystems toward their ecological limits, making the sustainable management of natural resources essential for long-term resilience.⁷ Conflict and resource scarcity further increase risks while also creating opportunities for young people to develop innovative solutions. Despite representing a growing share of new labour market entrants, rural youth in developing countries continue to face informality, working poverty and limited decent work opportunities, with implications for rural transformation and generational renewal.⁸ Investments in agroecology, fair digital technologies, and decent employment promotion therefore represent not only environmental priorities but also pathways to creating sustainable and resilient livelihoods for youth.⁹

³ AKADEMIYA2063, Kampala Policy Brief Series No. 14: Youth Employment and Agrifood Systems Transformation (Kigali: AKADEMIYA2063, 2024).

⁴ FAO, *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems* (2025).

⁵ FSD Kenya, *Green Technology and Redesigned Finance Can Transform Kenya's Food Deficits into Decent Youth Jobs* (Nairobi: FSD Kenya, 2024).

⁶ Malabo Montpellier Panel, *YOUTH AHEAD: Policy Innovations to Create Opportunities for Young People in Africa's Agrifood Systems* (Kampala: Malabo Montpellier Panel, 2024).

⁷ FAO, *The State of the World's Land and Water Resources for Food and Agriculture (SOLAW 2021): Systems at Breaking Point* (Rome: FAO, 2021).

⁸ ILO, *Elevating the potential of rural youth: Paths to Decent Jobs and Sustainable Futures* (2024).

⁹ International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), *Building Resilient Food Systems and Youth Opportunities* (JSTOR Research Report, 2024).

These interlocking risks call for a systemically integrated response. Derisking agrifood systems requires more than financial instruments; it requires an enabling ecosystem grounded in a rights-based approach that addresses interconnected risks across policy, finance, infrastructure, education, innovation, and governance. Innovative financing mechanisms — including blended finance, insurance products, and guarantee schemes — can improve young entrepreneurs' access to capital while contributing to protect their incomes. Equally important are investments in extension services, digital infrastructure, vocational training, business development services, social and labour protection, and inclusive markets that strengthen resilience.¹⁰

Any effective response must also be shaped with young people themselves, not merely for them. Evidence shows that youth-centered approaches are most effective when young people actively lead in designing policies, programmes, and innovations. Co-creation positions youth not as passive recipients but as equal partners in identifying challenges, developing solutions, testing innovations, and shaping institutions. Such participatory approaches enhance the relevance, ownership, and sustainability of interventions while fostering leadership, entrepreneurship, and social inclusion.¹¹ They are particularly important for ensuring that the voices of young women, marginalized groups, and rural youth are meaningfully reflected in decision-making processes. The European Commission's Youth Sounding Boards, established to advise on international partnerships, provide a practical example of structured youth engagement through co-creation.

The concept of decent work provides an important framework for this transformation. Beyond job creation, it encompasses productive employment, fair incomes, safe working conditions, social protection, rights at work, and meaningful participation. The ILO Guidelines for the promotion of decent work in the agri-food sector provide sound and comprehensive guidance specific to the needs of actors in the sector. Strengthening agrifood systems through these guidelines can contribute not only to economic growth but also to social justice, environmental sustainability, and resilience to future shocks.

2. Session topics and objectives

This webinar will provide a platform for youth leaders, development partners, researchers, financial institutions, and private sector actors to explore practical strategies for derisking agrifood systems through co-creation and youth-responsive investments. Discussions will examine collaborative approaches to unlocking innovation, expanding decent employment opportunities, improving working conditions, strengthening resilience, and positioning young people as leaders in transforming agrifood systems. Drawing on diverse perspectives and emerging evidence, with a particular focus on Africa, the webinar aims to identify actionable pathways for creating inclusive, sustainable, and resilient agrifood systems that create meaningful opportunities for current and future generations. It will also explore solutions-oriented approaches that remain effective in fragile and conflict-affected (FCV) contexts.

The [Thematic Working Group on Rural Youth Employment](#) (TWG RYE) was established following the 2018 Annual General Assembly of the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development, which was entirely dedicated to empowering rural youth. The TWG RYE taps a multistakeholder approach to share

¹⁰ World Bank, *Jobs for Youth in Agrifood Systems* (2023); FSD Kenya, *Green Technology and Redesigned Finance Can Transform Kenya's Food Deficits into Decent Youth Jobs* (2024).

¹¹ International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), *How to Do Note: The Ecosystem Approach to Decent Rural Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship* (Rome: IFAD, 2022).

knowledge and promote strategies that create decent employment opportunities and empower youth to contribute to and benefit from sustainable rural livelihoods.

3. Provisional Agenda

Date	
15:00 – 15:05 (CET) (5 min)	Welcome and Introduction - Leonard Mizzi, TWG RYE Co-Chair (<i>Welcoming remarks</i>) - Genna Tesdall, TWG RYE Co-Chair (<i>Moderator</i>)
15:05 – 15:30 (CET) (25 min)	Scene setting: Global Youth Agrifood Systems Engagement Trends - Juan Carlos Mendoza, Director, Environment, Climate, Gender and Social Inclusion Division, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) - Marwan Benali, Social Policy Officer, Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) - Elisenda Estruch Puertas, Economist/Rural Economy Specialist, Sectoral Policies Branch, International Labour Organization (ILO)
15:30 – 16:10 (CET) (40 min)	Innovation in Co-Creation and Decent Work - Izabela Leao, Senior Agribusiness Specialist, World Bank Group - Aisha Musaazi S. Nakitto, Head, Policy Innovation Unit, and Program Lead, Malabo Montpellier Panel, AKADEMIYA2063 - Swetha Stotra Bhashyam, Youth Affiliate, Synchronicity Earth and Co-Director, Kinship - Abou Ba, Agricultural Engineer; Member of the Global Youth Sounding Board of the European Commission (DG INTPA) and Youth Sounding Board of the European Union Delegation to Senegal
16:10-16:25 (CET) (15 min)	Q&A and Discussion
16:25 – 16:30 (CET) (5 min)	Wrap-up and Closing - Genna Tesdall, TWG RYE Co-Chair