



YALTA

Youth in Agroecology and Business Learning Track Opportunities for youth entrepreneurs in Agroecology

Regional summary of agroecology mapping in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda - October 2020

[“Challenges for youth in agroecology”](#)

[“Opportunities for youth in agroecology”](#)

[“Accelerators for opportunities”](#)

[“Cross-country collaboration”](#)

In Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda, many farmers and other agrifood sector actors try to build a more sustainable agrifood system. This is needed to address the multiple and inter-related social, economic and environmental challenges in these countries, such as the high levels of youth unemployment, low agricultural productivity, a declining status of natural resources and biodiversity, and the increasing impacts of both climate change and the COVID-19 crisis. In this context, agroecology is expected to contribute to development and business opportunities.

The YALTA programme aims to support young agripreneurs to apply agroecological principles and to co-create networks around them, in view of contributing to the increased sustainability of food systems and youth employment in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda. YALTA will facilitate various activities to help young women and men build their skills and relations in agroecology, such as a youth mentorship programme, business development support, an awareness campaign, and support to youth coalitions.

Agroecology is an integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of food and agricultural systems. It seeks to optimize the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while taking into consideration the social aspects that need to be addressed for a sustainable and fair food system - [FAO](#)

To inform YALTA's future programming and decision making, a mapping was done in the four countries to identify best practices, main challenges, existing financial mechanisms, relevant stakeholders and existing programmes and initiatives on the nexus of agroecology, youth and business. This note describes common findings of the mapping in the four countries and the opportunities identified for cross-country collaboration. It will serve as input for national summits around World Food Day in

Objectives YALTA



Improved business opportunities for youth in agroecology



Improved capacity of youth to apply agroecological principles



Youth more involved in agroecology initiatives



Increased effectiveness and efficiency of initiatives on youth and agroecology



Increased attention for youth and agroecology in research, policy agendas and educational curricula

Supported by

IKEA Foundation



Challenges for youth in agroecology

In Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda, youth face a number of challenges when setting up their agroecological business. They need to have (better):

- Access to land
- Access to investment and finance, including insurance
- An enabling policy environment
- Access to agricultural markets that reward sustainable practice
- Access to a pool of appropriate skills, capacities and knowledge, and ways to grow these
- Connections to scalable approaches and business models that work.

The constraints listed above are experienced by all agri-food SMEs, whether agroecological or not, but an extra effort is needed because agroecological practice is not yet common practice in the agricultural system and there is no level playing field yet for agroecology or other sustainable agriculture practices.



Particular challenges

Degrading soils remain a big hindrance for farmers in all four countries. Using chemical fertilizers is often the preferred method for farmers to manage soil fertility, because they do not have the financial means to wait for the soils to gain their fertility back using agro ecological methods.

Vulnerability to drought, and to a changing climate more generally.

The challenge to protect and promote local and traditional crops and food products, which is sometimes exacerbated by market dynamics that often favour foreign products.

Female youth face even greater challenges because unequal power relations leave them with limited decision-making power and fewer resources.

Opportunities for youth in agroecology

Agroecology offers clear business opportunities for youth. Several farmer entrepreneurs and other agripreneurs have shown they know how to grasp these, selling at domestic and/or export markets. They have diversified and strengthened their production systems and generated more employment. For example the local market for vermicompost and the export market for organic dried fruit and vegetables appear to be profitable. The mapping reports, available at the YALTA offices, for all four countries include more examples from different agricultural sub sectors.

Market opportunities

Youth can grasp this opportunity, implementing agroecological practice in a business setting. They can take advantage of specific funds (such as the Rwanda Youth in Agribusiness Forum fund or the Youth Venture Capital Fund in Uganda), and work as a group in order to meet the quantity and quality standards required by the market. At the same time other stakeholders in their environment (policy, market actors) need to create the conditions in which youth entrepreneurs can flourish ; or youth should challenge them to do so.

Specific areas in which agroecological business may flourish:

A range of interesting cases and businesses has been found in the four countries. This includes companies of different sizes, in different value chains and different parts of the value chain, offering different products.

- Soil health and fertility. Developing (short, local) supply chains and skills for sustainable business and practice and service provision related to soil health and fertility. This may include e.g. vermicompost business and subsistence, the distribution and application of lime for management of acid soils, the use of biofertilizers, and various other practices of integrated soil fertility management (ISFM).
- Regenerative agriculture in order to restore degraded land and agro-ecosystems. This may include reclamation of acid soils and waterways.
- Integrated pest management. Developing supply chains and skills for integrated pest management. New products and services are needed in view of reducing chemical applications while enhancing nature-based practices such as bio protection.
- Organic agriculture. Good market opportunities can be found by integrated organic farms that diversify their products and crops, developing a strong and innovative business model.
- Biodiversity or Natural Resource Management based income generation activities, which buffer for scarcity of land and may help strengthen the resilience of the food system: e.g. beekeeping, oil seed processing or also fruit, vegetable or fodder production.
- Eco-friendly youth business development (e.g. ecotourism).

Growing market for food produced in agroecological way

The increasing demand for safe food of good quality is considered to provide ample opportunity to invest in, build and strengthen sustainable agriculture. And particularly in agroecological business, because the quality food it offers gives a comparative advantage, while the approach can help focus on and celebrate local food traditions. Middle class consumers in East Africa show a growing willingness to pay a premium price for organic products, amongst others because of quality and safety aspects.



Markets reward agroecology,
creating opportunities for youth.

Consumers across the region are increasingly interested in consuming local food products, rather than eating imported foods that are cheaply imported after nutritious crops have been exported. Globally the market for organic products is growing, while an improved infrastructure and more mobility in the regional markets offers opportunities for additional regional trade and local consumption.

Agroecological practice across the region

In Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda, a range of agroecological practices are used, many of which appear to be good business for farmers and other entrepreneurs. Some of the practices are not particularly labelled as 'agroecological' but take place in the related fields of 'sustainable' or 'climate smart' agricultural practices.

Agroecological practices seen are : indigenous crop and vegetable production and consumption; indigenous seed saving; composting and use of local fertilizers; integrated pest management; integrated nutrient management; conservation tillage or minimum tillage; ecological land use management; agroforestry; mixed farming methods; crop rotation and integration; integrated watershed management; aquaculture; water harvesting in dryland areas; permanent soil coverage with plants, stones and mulch; application of local farming practice and food cultures.

Developing innovative practices

Agroecology has a science component and can use both modern and traditional technologies. Throughout the four countries, elder farmers and key research and knowledge institutions serve as a source of traditional and scientific knowledge on agroecology, developing innovative solutions. Collaboration opportunities could be further explored between these centres and young farmers with an interest to develop innovative agroecological practice.

In addition, using ICT in agriculture offers huge potential particularly for youth who are more apt to quickly adopt it. The ICT sector provides solutions to make agriculture more efficient, including digital platforms to spread knowledge, build networks and reduce farmers' costs in market access and information gathering while increasing their profitability.

Accelerators for opportunities

To attract youth to (agroecological) farming, having a business case is more important than anything else. The narrative around agriculture needs to be connected to young people's interests. What could help in addition is to change perceptions on family land, so that older generations will allow youth to farm in the lands as well as allow leasing for land for farming.

Enabling youth-led innovations

The research and development of innovative practices requires proper support systems for youth-led research, as well as good collaboration between farmers and research bodies. This includes innovations which could facilitate the process of transition to agroecology. When young entrepreneurs develop new ideas or solutions, there is a need to have proper arrangements for protecting intellectual property rights (patenting innovations, if appropriate). Agroecology needs to be mainstreamed in national and regional research agendas.



Youth are the driving force behind a sustainable, healthy food system.

Finance and investment for youth

While access to finance is among the key constraints for youth mentioned above, innovative financial packages and services are becoming available in several countries. This is promising, as improving access to loans and investments is a key condition for youth to engage in agroecological business. Youth need to build their knowledge on funding opportunities, while financial institutions need to be flexible in their financial models in order to facilitate access to funds for youth. There should be incentives for investors in this domain, and recognition of the particular needs of youth.

Develop markets for agroecology

On the other hand the market should provide incentives for sustainability. Market prices for agroecological products need to be sufficient to cover costs made by the farmer and by other chain actors. Youth could be motivated if they could get premium prices at the 'high end' consumer markets. These pricing issues may be controversial: some think all food market prices should incorporate the cost of externalities (e.g. of harmful environmental effects) in order to create a more level playing field for agroecological or organic products (e.g. organically produced tomatoes are on the same price range as conventionally produced, non-organic tomatoes so there is no market product differentiation nor incentive; this is the case in both Uganda and Ethiopia). Others are concerned that higher prices may go against access to quality food for the poorest consumers.

Policy environment

For youth to develop successful business in agroecology the proper policy environment should be in place. In policy advocacy, it should be made clear that agroecology can contribute to food security. In Uganda, some supportive policies are being developed such as the National Organic Agriculture Policy, which can support the sale of agriculture products as organic. In Rwanda, a specific policy or legislative framework for agroecology does not exist yet and agroecology stakeholders are interested to see one. In Ethiopia, there are many policies with agroecological considerations, but coordination of these, and ensuring effective capacity for implementation is needed. In Kenya, the youth can anchor some of their transformative agendas on a number of promising policies under development. Regulatory measures need to be improved for domestic markets and export and import; such as for example getting certification systems in place for inputs such as seeds, or getting certification of different value chains according to international standards.

At the regional level, the African Union led Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative may provide extra opportunities, which is looking at its scaling up agroecological organic agriculture in national policies and frameworks. Finally, to enable policy making, access to and use of relevant data and statistics are very important, including country level overviews of the state of agroecology with figures on inclusiveness.

Communications and awareness raising



Connection and information flow between food systems actors is essential for prompting agroecology. Good communications are a prerequisite to show that agroecology can change the life of practitioners. Overall, there is a need to differentiate agroecological food and to get better recognition of the value of agroecological practice within the agricultural system. The youth themselves need proper and clear communication, such that they are able to conceptualize, to understand and to appreciate what exactly the agroecological practices are and how they could help them develop employment. Consumer awareness is important, as people need to understand the negative effects of pesticide use and unsustainable land use practice, and why agroecologically produced food is different, both because of these safety aspects and because of the value of enjoying and preserving local and nutritious food cultures.

Different food systems actors need to be networked and organized for better value chain functioning so that coalitions promoting food systems sustainability can arise.

Cross-country collaboration to maximize opportunities

The four mapping studies show there is an interesting potential for cross-country collaboration between these four countries in East Africa and the Horn of Africa. A range of knowledge institutions and practitioner networks have been identified, which promote agroecology in practice, in research and in policy. While several specific networks exist across these countries, none of those covers the whole region or the whole spectrum. Each of them has its particular role, orientation, constituency and geographical scope. All of them build upon a rich heritage among their countries' farming communities and among the regional and global communities they are part of. There is a need to enhance collaboration and partnerships between civil society, companies, government institutions and research, possibly in multi-stakeholder forums. Strengthening farmer and consumer associations, and youth forums is particularly important. This needs to be done at national level, while it could be strengthened through cross-country and regional connections.

The following areas could be explored to optimise synergy and impact of agroecology work in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda:



Connecting the business actors

Youth entrepreneurs investing in agroecology may form their particular business networks, in order to strengthen their position in the broader stakeholder network, their negotiating position in the market, and their position within the broader agrifood business environment. The role of particular cooperatives or other collaborative mechanisms for agroecological farmers may be explored. Key connections could be built and maintained with bigger agriculture sector companies in the region, which offer employment for youth in particular.

In each of the four countries, a list of key stakeholders has been compiled, which is constantly updated. Please contact the YALTA offices for more information.



Knowledge sharing, learning and innovating

Collaboration for learning and innovation is a key condition for impact. Jointly, agroecology partners in the different countries could explore the opportunity to develop a customized extension service, which helps facilitate the application of agroecological practice in each country. Collaboration could be sought as well to facilitate the functioning and financial investments in local demonstration plots of agroecological farming or specific business centers for agroecological products.

Education sector collaboration

Building upon indigenous and local knowledge systems of farmers, integrating agroecology in agricultural extension services and in the curriculum of education. Training and learning are key for youth to benefit from agriculture and agribusiness. In several countries, there are promising trends of how issues related to sustainability, environment, nutrition and climate change are integrated within the education system. These initiatives could be a starting point for a stronger link between the education and the business sector, also at regional level.



Building awareness about agroecology among youth

A collaborative effort can be made to promote awareness among youth in each of the four countries, with use of creative communication approaches. A specific idea is to have local and national agroecology shows with exhibition of agroecological products.



Engagement for improved market standards and prices

Cross-country collaboration is needed to systematically improve the regulatory environment for agroecological products. A premium price for agroecological products may be agreed upon, supported with the necessary regulatory measures. Standard setting processes may be boosted, respectively for local, regional or international markets. The discussion on the price and standards for 'normal' food products may be held in parallel, in order to monitor whether there is a sufficient level playing field for agroecological products. Joint studies could be undertaken to better understand the costs and benefits of agroecological production, processing and trade. The challenge to be explored at regional level is also whether there are sufficient incentives for new investors in agro-ecology and to involve more youth.



Policy engagement

In each of the four countries, targeted engagement with policy is needed to promote holistic food policies fostering nutrition security, climate change resilience, sustainability and agricultural biodiversity, which also support agroecological practice. The national level influencing may also include promoting an (improved) national strategy for youth employment. Some existing policies need to be redirected; for example, government bodies that are responsible for inputs may be supported in promoting the increased use of organic compost and of IPM practices.

It is recommended that the YALTA coalitions that will be formed join their forces at regional level to coordinate and mutually strengthen this national level policy influencing, as well as collaborating on regional level policy advocacy. The regional collaboration may be directed at the African Union or the East African Community, to further build on the existing legislation, particularly focusing on the nexus of youth employment and agroecology. It may also involve regional policy learning and experience exchange on policy related to specific issues that are important for agroecology (e.g. national policies to promote sustainable land management). International network partners of YALTA may be involved in the approach, depending on the specific strategy per issue.

Youth-specific projects and programmes, like YALTA can provide the extra push to strengthen youth in the agroecology business sector. The YALTA initiative is a partnership between AgriProFocus and IKEA Foundation and convenes a wide range of stakeholders consisting of agripreneurs, practitioners, policy makers and experts. From seed distributors to academia. And from farmers to policy makers. Sharing a wide range of knowledge and experiences to push for collective advancement. By connecting to a broad base of youth networks in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, the initiative will ensure the inclusion of youth every step of the way. From identifying the major issues to co-developing solutions.

Contact us

If you would like to receive the full mapping reports. Or if you are interested in further information about the YALTA Initiative, participation in the programme, and/or participation in the Reference Groups, please contact us. Follow us also on [Facebook.com/yalta.initiative](https://www.facebook.com/yalta.initiative)



**Sarah
Assefa**

Regional Content and
Community Manager
& Ethiopia Project
Coordinator

sassefa@
agriprofocus.com
+251 (0) 919 313 031



**Richard
Mugisha**

Country Project
Coordinator Uganda

rmugisha@
agriprofocus.com
+256 (0) 752 960 057



**Thacien
Munyamahame**

Country Project
Coordinator Rwanda

tmunyamahame@
agriprofocus.com
+250 788 235 357



**Samuel
Kariuki**

Country Project
Coordinator Kenya

skariuki@
agriprofocus.com
+254 717 897 912



**Bente
Meindersma**

YALTA
Regional Manager

bmeindersma@
agriprofocus.com
+31 (0)6 4076 6911



YALTA

Youth in Agroecology
and Business
Learning Track Africa



IKEA Foundation