

The potential of agri, food systems to create job opportunities for Africa's youth

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) director-general, José Graziano da Silva, Africa's youth have become key to achieving sustainable development across the continent. However, creating more jobs for them is of necessity particularly in that of the increasingly digitalised agriculture sectors. "We need to take action to make agriculture more attractive to young people. They must perceive agriculture as a remunerative and profitable sector and the dissemination of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in rural areas play an important role in this regard."



Jinrichard kagimu via [Wikimedia](#)

His remarks came at the opening of the international conference, *Youth Employment in Agriculture as a Solid Solution to ending Hunger and Poverty in Africa* in Kigali. The two-day event, which is co-organised by the Government of Rwanda, the African Union and FAO, has a special focus on youth employment, ICTs and entrepreneurship.

Other keynote speakers included Rwanda's Minister of Agriculture and Animal Resources, Geraldine Mukeshimana, African Union Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko, and the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation's director-general, Li Yong.

As Africa's population grows, so will the demand for food

Graziano da Silva noted that food demand in Africa is projected to grow by more than 50% in the coming years due to continued population growth, rapid urbanization, and dietary changes as household incomes rise. The World Bank expects African agribusinesses to create a market worth \$1tn by 2030.

The agricultural sectors have thus "an invaluable and untapped potential to address the youth unemployment challenge, but it is well-known that young people seeking to gain a decent livelihood from agriculture face numerous constraints," said Graziano da Silva.

He noted how young people are usually employed on a casual or seasonal basis, with limited access to relevant education and technical training; limited access to finance, information and markets; and low involvement in decision-making processes. "These constraints become a bottleneck that also impedes young people to start an agricultural business of their own. As a result, young rural people are migrating," he said.

Preparing young people to enter the job market

"In the coming years, more and more of the agricultural activities and employment will require digital skills," he said. Cooperatives or other forms of association represent "the best way to provide family farmers and young professionals with technical assistance, capacity building, and access to modern technologies".

Graziano da Silva also noted that there is a need to "think beyond farm jobs," and to explore employment opportunities across the agri-food chain. The increasing demand for high-value products in urban areas also offer multiple employment opportunities in processing, distribution, marketing and retailing of food products.

Achieving this requires "a new kind of rural transformation," which means equipping rural areas with basic services such as education, health, electricity, internet access and so on. "These services are themselves another important source for employment, especially for women and young people."

Graziano da Silva told conference participants that FAO will continue to strengthen its activities to support countries in realising the potential of agriculture and food systems to create more job opportunities for youth.

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