

Youth Empowerment and Livelihoods in Food Systems

U.S. Government's Global Food Security Strategy Activity Design Guidance

This is one of several Activity Design Guidance documents for implementing the U.S. Government's Global Food Security Strategy. The full set of documents is at www.feedthefuture.gov and www.agrilinks.org.

Introduction

This document synthesizes key messages and information on how to integrate action with youth (ages 10–29 per U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) policy) into your Feed the Future work.

“There are a lot of opportunities and challenges [amid the food crisis].

We are very young and have a lot of energy to push.

We need a shoulder to step on ... Feed the Future, step in; let us feel you.”

—Youth agripreneur from Ghana, speaking with USAID amid the global food crisis in May 2022.

The U.S. Government's Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS) 2022–2026 is clear: youth need food systems, and food systems need youth. Agriculture, food, and water systems have the potential to provide needed employment opportunities and sustenance for millions of young people who face participation constraints due to their age and stage in life, gender norms, and other factors, including how development aid actors engage with youth. Young people's contributions, in turn, help drive the achievement of all GFSS strategic objectives. Achieving inclusion and equity, including with diverse youth, is a top GFSS priority.¹ This priority is elevated in the new strategy because exclusion and inequity are often systemic and are key drivers of low productivity, poverty, malnutrition, low resilience, and insecurity.

At more than 1.2 billion, the world's youth population (ages 15–24) is the largest in history. Almost a billion (nearly 90 percent) of these young people live in economically developing countries, including about half in rural areas and another quarter outside of densely populated urban areas. The number of youth is projected to increase 62 percent in the economically poorest countries by 2050, rising most rapidly in sub-Saharan Africa. Two out of three youth in rural areas live in countries with high agricultural potential. Young people's opportunities for healthy development and to be productive are shaped by many factors, including the state of structural transformation and the commercial and agricultural potential in the country in which they live. Youth opportunities are also shaped by their connections to people, markets, services and information, cognitive and noncognitive skills development, and their sense of agency.²

GFSS Crosscutting Intermediate Result (CCIR) 3: Increased youth empowerment and livelihoods, outlines the critical relevance of youth inclusion to the achievement of all GFSS Strategic Objectives (SOs) and the vision of A Food-Secure 2030.³ Progress on CCIR 3 across the SOs is closely linked to progress on all CCIRs and, in particular, CCIR 2: Gender equality and female empowerment,⁴ as young people are heterogeneous, and their intersectional identities and situations are inextricably linked. The prioritization of youth inclusion is in line with many other U.S. policies and strategies.

Terminology and Context

Youth and Its Developmental Stages: Youth is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood that is understood and experienced in diverse ways across cultures and societies. This guide refers to “youth” as ages 10–29. As previously noted, this age range encompasses key stages of human development from early adolescence through the transition to adulthood that are distinct from early childhood and older adulthood. As outlined in the [USAID Youth in Development Policy](#),⁵ developmental stages of youth, which reflect key stages of brain development,⁶ are: early adolescence: ages 10–14; adolescence: ages 15–19; emerging adulthood: ages 20–24; and transition to adulthood: ages 25–29.

Youth Bridge Our Program Population Categories: When you are developing strategies, setting targets, and reporting results, remember that youth are embedded within many populations. Youth ages 10–17 are also “children,” who, in a legal sense, are persons under age 18. Youth ages 18–29 are also “women” and “men,” who are legally adults starting at age 18. “Adolescents” ages 10–19 include both children (10–17) and adults (18–19). “Women of reproductive age” and “women and girls” include adolescent girls and young women. For example, the Feed the Future indicator called “FTF Context-21: Percent of women of reproductive age consuming a diet of minimum diversity” focuses on women of reproductive age (15–49 years). These women include adolescents (15–19), children (15–17), and youth (15–29). Feed the Future activities strongly focus on inclusive, enterprise-driven development and, thus, will tend to target working-aged youth (ages 15–29), avoiding child labor and promoting its elimination. Supporting a life cycle approach, our programs also impact and involve younger children, such as through farm-, family-, and household-centered approaches, and through school-based and other types of learning. USAID recognizes that partner countries have definitions of youth that often differ and are often highly culturally bound, especially considering parenthood, marriage, and sometimes government benefits.

Positive Youth Development (PYD): USAID takes an evidence-based PYD approach to working with youth across development sectors. PYD promotes an asset-based approach that builds on the strengths and contributions of young people and their environment. USAID’s PYD framework focuses on four key domains: assets, agency, contributions, and enabling environment, that together foster healthy youth development and productive engagement.⁷ The updated [USAID Youth in Development Policy](#) underscores the need to focus on strengthening youth **access** to information, services, skills development, and job opportunities; youth **participation** in decision-making; and **systems** that engage and serve youth.

Children in Adversity: The evidence base for [Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity \(APCCA\)](#) is also foundational to consider in your work with youth in food systems. The [APCCA Strategy](#) envisions a world in which all children thrive within protective, loving families, free from deprivation, violence, and danger. It pursues three objectives: (1) build strong beginnings; (2) put family first; and (3) protect children from violence. These concepts are critical to youth, family, and societal resilience.

Age and Life Stage Matter: The contextual nexus for your work with youth in relation to agriculture, food security, nutrition, resilience, and water security, sanitation, and hygiene lies in understanding and strategically addressing the specific realities young people face due to their developmental stage in life and other intersectional issues, such as gender norms, while also reckoning with the realities of a country’s demographic structure and complex development circumstances.

Food Security, Nutrition, and Resilience Are Linked to Healthy Youth Development: USAID and other practitioners around the world conceptualize youth narrowly as a population subgroup that is experiencing the life stage that encompasses adolescence and early adulthood. This developmental stage involves physical, cognitive, social, and emotional transitions associated with brain development that present distinct needs and risks. It also presents opportunities for big wins; for example, reversing some of the impacts of early childhood malnutrition and mitigating current and preventing future malnutrition,

developing skills and capacities, setting healthy behaviors that can last a lifetime, overcoming gender inequality, and establishing a firm health and economic footing into adulthood, stemming the intergenerational transfer of poverty and poor well-being.

Large Youth Population: The world's largest-ever youth population poses challenges and opportunities for the succession of youth into more inclusive and sustainable food systems and the ability of young people to secure decent work and dignified livelihoods, healthy diets, and strengthened resilience. Many Feed the Future priority countries have populations with median ages under 20, and the demand is rising for nutritious food, access to information and resources of all kinds, more and better services, and jobs amid a crisis where many countries are not yet structured to generate enough quality employment.⁸

Moreover, the layered impacts of COVID-19, the ongoing global food crisis, and persistent gender inequality show once again that different people experience shocks and stressors, as well as development interventions, differently. At least 150 million more women than men were food insecure in 2021, and the gap is increasing.⁹ Women and girls, including adolescent girls and young women, were also 11 percent more likely to drop out of school than men and boys during the COVID-19 pandemic. This reversed girls' education gains, exacerbating child marriage, and risking long-term education, economic, and health impacts.¹⁰ The number of children involved in harmful child labor rose globally to 160 million in 2020, and 70 percent of child labor (approximately 108 million children) is in the agriculture sector.¹¹ Despite [one in seven people living with a disability globally](#), related food systems research and action are scant.

Youth Leadership Amid Crises: Youth have helped keep food systems running and built them back better amid layered crises as essential workers amid the COVID-19 pandemic, using many leadership and coping strategies through conflicts, climate change impacts, and other shocks and stressors.¹² Too often, youth have coped and shown leadership with little support and protection and in local contexts where gender norms and inequality negatively impact young women and also harm young men and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) youth.

Commitment to Youth: Our knowledge, experience, and commitments to working with youth in food systems are growing. Since the launch of Feed the Future in 2010, the release of the USAID Youth in Development Policy in 2012, and the release of the GFSS 2017–2021, USAID Missions have increasingly prioritized youth and women in Country Development Cooperation Strategies at Development Objective and Intermediate Result levels, in line with partner priorities, and undertaken youth-focused and youth-relevant programming. More systematic learning and action are needed to build on these investments, to assess our progress, and to better understand how the multidisciplinary evidence bases for PYD and APCCA (described above) relate to youth empowerment and livelihoods strategies.

Designing Activities

Key Lessons Learned

- **Believe in and listen to youth.** This is fundamental. Effective work with youth in food systems stems from recognizing the importance of listening to youth's voices, nurturing their contributions, and addressing their needs by improving their access to services, participation in decision-making, and strengthened systems. Youth need care in order to care for themselves and others.
- **Understand youth and youth development.** Learn about youth diversity, their aspirations and circumstances, and the implications of the dynamic phase of human development that youth are experiencing. Every generation and context is different. Do you know who today's youth are, their circumstances, and how this relates to the work you would like to do?

- **Focus on jobs: their number and quality, who gets them, and their potential to deliver greener outcomes.** Increasing agricultural productivity in ways that expand opportunities for decent work and dignified livelihoods and deliver greener outcomes is a key feature of how Feed the Future decreases poverty and malnutrition and strengthens resilience, including for climate adaptation. We aim to:
 - Improve the quality of on-farm work, increase the productivity and earnings of youth and women, and create more demand for labor, increasingly off the farm as agricultural transformation occurs.
 - Facilitate inclusive, *youth- and women-focused*, and *jobs-rich* agricultural transformation for poverty reduction, improved nutrition, strengthened resilience, and sustainable development, including for outcomes that are green and climate-resilient in countries that will face increasing challenges because of climate change and other shocks.
- **Address youth needs and cultivate youth roles in advancing nutrition.** Build evidence for how to engage adolescents and youth, including young mothers and fathers, in nutrition-sensitive agricultural interventions to improve nutrition outcomes, specifically to improve diets.
- **Strengthen individual youth resilience.** Youth resilience influences the resilience of households, societies, and food systems. Facilitate youths' adaptive, absorptive, and transformative capacities by mitigating their risks and risk-taking, and strengthening their enabling environments.
- **Be intentional, bold, and flexible.** Tailor approaches to young people's specific context, and embrace new ideas. Articulate youth, gender, and intersectional targets (e.g., youth with disabilities, LGBTIQ+, and Indigenous youth), theories of change, and strategic approaches; train staff; budget accordingly; pursue shared value partnerships, including with the private sector; gather data; and measure results. Adapt, pivot, and apply learning through transformative knowledge management.
- **Collaborate across sectoral investments** that address multiple dimensions of young people's enabling environment.
- **Leave no one behind, particularly not adolescent girls.** Pursue integrated approaches to programming that work together to overcome key risks that occur in adolescence, particularly for young women, including lost education, early marriage and pregnancy, and violence.
- **Think big and act urgently.** The scale of the challenge and opportunity for youth engagement in agriculture, food, and water systems is enormous. Precious resources must be catalytic, sustainable, and reach as many young people as possible and as quickly as possible. Youth need support now.
- **Engage youth directly and in partnership as part of our commitment to localization.** Plan and budget for participatory approaches that address youth heterogeneity and that engage youth as partners and program participants, not as passive beneficiaries. Emphasize youth capacity strengthening, including soft skills development. Listen to and communicate regularly with youth.
- **Leverage international consensus.** Consult and use the [Committee on World Food Security Policy Recommendations on Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition](#) to which the United States contributed and fully endorsed at The 50th Plenary Session of the Committee on World Food Security in 2022.
- **Celebrate success!:** Working deliberately with young people is an investment in sustainable impacts that can last throughout their lifetimes and generations.

Key Takeaways

The following are important considerations in pursuing activity designs and implementation with youth.

GFSS Objective 1: Inclusive and sustainable agriculture-led growth. Objective 1 must deliver more and better jobs for youth and women, uphold workers' rights, and eliminate harmful child labor. Feed the Future's focus on increasing agricultural productivity must center on labor productivity, who benefits from the labor, and how. Increased agriculture-led growth must not simply deliver higher yields and better

incomes and diets for a small, elite group. Impoverished and marginalized people, including youth within rural farming households, must increase their profits and derive more well-being. Jobs drive development.

A “missing jobs” crisis. Amid a global technological revolution, youth aspirations for their lives and livelihoods have increased, but labor supply for good-quality jobs often outstrips labor demand. Just 20 percent of youth in low-income countries and 34 percent of youth in low- and middle-income countries have wage and salaried jobs, which are typically more stable, safer, and provide higher earnings.¹³ In Africa, 12 million new entrants to the labor market each year find just three million formal job opportunities.¹⁴ While these economies transform over time and high-quality wage employment created by firms is scarce, youth will more likely find informal work through self-employment on and off the farm and in nonfarm household enterprises. Rural transformation is an important part of economic development, involving the rural labor force moving into higher-productivity activities through the application of technology and capital, and migration to towns and cities. Youth entrepreneurship can also create jobs.¹³

Youth need better working conditions. Economically poor youth in developing countries cannot afford to be unemployed, and ultimately experience a “combination of underemployment, low productivity, informality, vulnerable, and precarious employment and generally low incomes and harsh working environments.”¹⁵ For young women, employment terms and conditions tend to be even worse. Unequal status and power dynamics in labor markets often leave young women vulnerable to violence and harassment. That, along with pregnancy and the marginalization of young mothers from programming, contribute to many young women dropping out of the labor force.¹⁶ Youth with disabilities often face severe constraints to education and job opportunities amid a persistent focus by others on what they cannot do rather than what they can do. Stakeholders instead can focus on shaping “disability-confident” companies that put policies into practice to engage youth with disabilities.¹⁷

Eliminating child labor¹⁸ is imperative, and it helps shrink the gap between labor supply and demand.¹⁵ Child labor places children’s health and mental health at risk and impacts their rights to education, adequate housing, and a healthy environment. Child labor often stems from racial and other forms of discrimination. Whether or not particular forms of work can be called child labor depends on the child’s age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions under which it is performed, and the objectives pursued by individual countries. Improving incomes of parents and strengthening social protection and access to services, such as secondary education, are key to eliminating child labor.¹¹

The [USAID Employment Framework](#) and its accompanying [Playbook](#) provide detailed information on how to develop employment strategies. Each country will require jobs diagnostics and youth, gender, and climate risk analyses to determine what strategies fit for generating youth employment.¹³ Understanding the state of structural transformation of the country is essential for determining the kinds of job opportunities in which most youth and others are likely to engage within food systems and how to invest in youth-inclusive job creation and job quality improvements over time, including for greener outcomes and to uphold workers’ rights and foster a just transition.

Youth are able to contribute to economic transformation and to their own well-being when they have access to productive resources. Productive resources include digital and other technologies, services, and capital, and opportunities to strengthen their skills and capacities through formal and informal education, training, and to public and private sector-driven extension and advisory services. Improved youth employment outcomes often require an enabling environment for firms that drives increased demand for labor, and for youth agricultural entrepreneurship and other forms of self-employment, while advancing safety and health standards for workers. Youth also rely on freedom of movement and from violence, including at the household level, as well as social support, encouragement, mentorship, and opportunities for voicing their thoughts and ideas. The jobs youth obtain in agriculture and food and water systems must ultimately be decent work.¹⁹ Work is generally considered decent when

it pays a fair income and guarantees a secure form of employment and safe working conditions. USAID recognizes [menstrual health and hygiene](#) as a vital part of the health and dignity of women and girls.

Strengthening youth empowerment and livelihoods in food systems will likely require “push/pull,” intersectoral, and integrated approaches. These approaches address both supply and demand for youth labor and other contributions, as well as the multidimensional aspects of youth development. It is not enough to facilitate a system change that creates an economic opportunity for youth if youth are not able to take that opportunity because of a range of constraints, such as lack of assets and agency (e.g., confidence, capacity, or familial support). “Push/pull” approaches account for these realities by working on both sides of the equation (see this [USAID framework](#) for practical examples). Other holistic approaches to youth programming in food systems involve creating cooperation across sector investments, for example, where an agricultural program incorporates referrals for youth to youth-friendly reproductive health services. Wraparound services may also be integrated into a single activity. Resilience programming focused on economic inclusion, for example, incorporates aspects of the evidence bases for PYD and APCCA and involves tailored, family-centered approaches, where links to agricultural job creation, nutrition, life skills development, social and child protection, and psychosocial support are sequenced and layered.

Youth- and gender-focused market systems development (MSD) approaches can support improved youth and gender-equitable employment outcomes in food systems. MSD approaches that target and engage young women and young men, consider labor market dynamics, and are tailored to the local context can address multiple labor market constraints in an integrated way. These approaches will be iterative and will involve learning by doing with a diverse set of partners and will contribute to further evidence and experience in this area. The Advancing Women’s Empowerment (AWE) mechanism conducted a [landscape analysis and case studies of youth- and women-focused MSD programs in agriculture and supporting markets](#), showing tactics for inclusive MSD across the program cycle.

Green jobs. As stated in the [USAID Climate Strategy 2022–2030](#), USAID recognizes that job creation and transformation efforts can address the climate crisis, and green jobs will be critical for partner countries to meet their workforce needs and climate targets. “Green” jobs are those that are more climate-resilient and help drive the change for systems to become more inclusive and lower-carbon, including but not limited to those requiring less land and water. Green jobs must foster a just transition by intentionally integrating measures that ensure they are inclusive and provide decent work and sustainable livelihoods while respecting workers’ rights. The literature on green jobs within agriculture, food, and water systems largely focuses on on-farm agricultural practices, such as climate-smart agriculture.²⁰

GFSS Objective 3: A well-nourished population, especially among women and children. Youth are crucial in nutrition. Adolescence, the life stage between the ages of 10–19, is a time of increased nutritional requirements. Often called a “second window of opportunity,” growth in adolescence is faster than at any other time in an individual’s life, except for the first year.²¹ Adolescence is also a time when poverty and inequality are passed from one generation to the next through poor nutrition and health, especially for young women of childbearing age.²² Adolescence is a critical window for interventions to influence long-term health outcomes, including the health of women during pregnancy, which in turn affects the health of future generations. Adolescents increasingly exercise their agency and make important decisions related to their [diet, eating, and self-care practices](#). Adolescent girls are more likely to be malnourished than other members of the household because gender inequality distorts the intra-household distribution of food and they often eat less and last.²³ Nutritional and development interventions in adolescence have high rates of return due to improved health, nutrition, and cognition, leading to improved physical, reproductive, cognitive, and economic performance in later years.

Soft skills are key to young people’s social and economic development. The wide set of skills, behaviors, and personal qualities known as soft skills (e.g., problem solving, critical thinking,

decision-making, self-control, communications, and social skills) help people successfully navigate their environments, relate well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals. Soft skills are in demand by employers and are crucial for finding and keeping jobs. Evidence from a study in sub-Saharan Africa showed that “leadership, conflict resolution, negotiation, and management skills have long-term positive effects on self-employment,” particularly for women.²⁴

Design Guidance

Refer to the [Feed the Future Project Design Guide for Youth-Inclusive Agriculture and Food Systems](#) and the AWE [Youth, Women, and Market Systems Development in Agriculture](#) study for technical guidance on inclusive programming with youth across all stages of the program cycle.

Consider “youth-focused,” “youth-relevant,” and “youth-led” programming. Youth-relevant programs reach youth as part of a broader target population by removing and/or accounting for barriers that may prevent or diminish participation of young people. Youth-focused programming instead targets youth as primary participants. Analysis of Feed the Future efforts spanning from 2010–2020 show that most often, programming is youth-relevant and integrative rather than principally youth-focused. All programming should consider and provide resources for youth leadership at all project cycle stages. A youth-led activity is one in which youth are the primary implementers. A youth-led organization focuses on youth-led development, promotes youth participation, and often has youth as staff.⁵

Conduct youth assessments and youth-focused analyses, combined with gender, inclusive development, market, employment, and other analyses. In addition to assessments for periodic review during the life of an activity, conduct assessments before activity design to incorporate attention to youth within specific strategic approaches. Perform the required gender analysis with an intersectional lens that captures interactions with youth; disability; situations affecting the LGBTIQ+ community; Indigenous Peoples; people of different races, ethnicities, and clans; and other marginalized groups. Ensure all assessments account for youth heterogeneity regarding age, education, marital status, parental status, etc. Ask, “What are key opportunities and barriers for youth overall and in relationship to the areas of focus of the activity?” Create spaces and processes for results to have influence on decision-making, including with women. Ensure market analyses consider the impacts of climate change on the [agriculture](#) sector and downstream economic opportunities to ensure skill sets will be relevant for the future.

Leverage cocreation and youth-led implementation research. Analysis also occurs during cocreation processes and can be beneficial at the start of programming, including, for example, to hone in on points of leverage, to incorporate the knowledge and experience of partners, including youth, and to build strategic approaches based on real-time market opportunities. Consider also incorporating formative, youth-led implementation research during implementation. See the [Youth Excel](#) website for more details.

Plan Feed the Future investments that impact youth with job diagnostics as an essential prerequisite. Given the centrality of achieving more and better jobs for youth through Feed the Future investments, jobs diagnostics that feature the implications for youth employment, including through a gender lens and for greener outcomes, should be undertaken or consulted. See [Solutions for Youth Employment](#).

Understand your demographic structure. If the total dependency ratio is favorable (i.e., when for a limited time there are more working-age people than dependents), partner countries may be able to take advantage of a demographic dividend with the right policies and programs. In that situation, agriculture-led economic growth that expands the demand for youth labor and strengthens education and skills development opportunities can accelerate economic growth, increase incomes, and reduce poverty in countries experiencing this window of opportunity. Countries with other demographic structures must

plan accordingly. The [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\) notes](#), “...countries that fail to generate sufficient jobs for large cohorts of young adults are prone to social, political, and economic instability.”

Develop and use youth-focused theories of change. The vast majority of Feed the Future programs are youth-relevant. Yet, very few programs have youth-specific theories of change. Feed the Future activities also often focus principally on impacts at the household level, which can obfuscate important differences among individuals, including heterogeneous youth subgroups, women, and other household members. See examples in Annex 1 of the [Feed the Future Project Design Guide for Youth-Inclusive Agriculture and Food Systems](#).

Track and analyze performance. Despite increased programming with youth and the Youth in Development Policy’s call for age-disaggregated data, these data are not yet consistently captured. GFSS indicators focus on the question of “are we reaching youth, and do youth have equitable access?” Several of the GFSS indicators reflect this by directly measuring youth-related outcomes and by disaggregating by youth or nonyouth. Programs specifically focused on youth are advised to additionally include custom disaggregates based on stage of life and sex. Practitioners can track national youth definitions with custom disaggregates. Consider statistical analysis to compare results for youth versus results for others and by sex. [Measurement tools and indicators](#) for PYD outcomes can be linked to GFSS performance.

Reinforce the enabling environment and channel youth voices. Recognize and incentivize youth champions. Engage local youth as consultants during the planning and design stage, and to participate in, or support the creation of, national or regional youth in agriculture and nutrition forums.²⁵

Foster improved supply and demand of relevant and inclusive education and skills development opportunities. Rural primary and secondary education that builds universal cognitive, noncognitive, and soft skills is the best preparation for stable employment in rural areas or for migration to jobs in urban areas.²⁶ Amid ongoing gaps in education quality and access, diversification of education products and services is needed to deliver education opportunities at scale. These include, for example, pluralistic extension and advisory services, on-the-job, and apprenticeship learning, mentorship, and coaching. Intentional outreach to youth groups and young women is needed to facilitate inclusive learning networks.

Urgently expand youth access to capital to invest in raising productivity. There is a significant gap in financial inclusion between youth and older adults. Youth often lack collateral for formal loans and right-sized, youth-targeted finance, including for youth migrants grappling with economic dislocation. Solutions range from strengthened youth engagement in Village Savings and Loan Associations, and membership in cooperatives, to expanded access to digital solutions, and blended finance models, coupled with technical assistance. See the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations’s (FAO) [Promoting Access to Agricultural Finance for Youth in Developing Countries](#) for an overview of agricultural financing strategies for youth. Intentionally targeting youth for access to finance is essential.

Engage youth to improve nutrition. Agriculture plays a key role in improving the nutrition of women and children. While increased production and productivity can increase the availability of food for consumption, increase incomes, and decrease the prices consumers pay, these alone do not automatically translate to nutritional gains. Nutrition-sensitive agriculture can help ensure access to and availability and consumption of diverse, nutritious foods by positively affecting the food available for household consumption, as well as the price of diverse foods, generating income for expenditure on food and nonfood items, and increasing women’s empowerment. Research shows that adolescence is a key window to target and reach youth, especially adolescent girls and young women, to invest in their health and nutrition and in the health and nutrition of future generations. Targeting youth as early adopters of improved nutrition practices and water, sanitation, and hygiene practices may positively influence their peers, family, and community. Please see the GFSS Activity Design Guidance for Diets and Food Safety for more information.

Common Youth Constraints and Ways to Address Them

Gender inequality. Young women, young men, and LGBTQI+ youth who self-identify in a variety of ways often have different challenges and opportunities within agriculture, food and water systems that programs must address. Working with young people creates opportunities for them to reshape norms about gender roles in families, communities, and the world of work that can improve food security and nutrition.²⁷ Evidence suggests, for example, that empowering women improves nutrition and overall health for mothers, their children, and other household members by positively affecting women’s use of income for food and nonfood expenditures, the ability of women to care for themselves and their families, and women’s energy expenditure.²⁸ The GFSS Activity Design Guidance for Advancing Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment and the [AWE analysis of youth- and women-focused MSD](#) include detailed guidance for integrated action on gender inclusion, incorporating age considerations.

Access to productive assets: land and capital. Rising pressures on land have left many youth with less access to land and limited decision-making powers over land use. As detailed in the GFSS Activity Design Guidance for Diversifying Livelihoods, Resilience, and Pathways Out of Poverty, women are less likely to own, rent, and operate land than men. Training youth on land rights, giving them the skills and confidence to participate in decision-making concerning land use, and assisting them to gain secure land access and titles can empower youth. Youth can also be trained to work across system functions, such as in marketing, extension, and inputs supply. Insufficient access to finance and limited financial literacy also constrain youth, creating barriers to entry, frustrating their aspirations, capping growth opportunities in the agriculture sector and fueling youth vulnerability to extremism and manipulation.

Inattention to balancing supply- and demand-side approaches to youth employment. Millions of youth and their countries face a crisis of [missing jobs](#), as previously described. Addressing supply-side deficits—training and capacity strengthening for youth labor—will not on its own create employment. High-intensity facilitation, or direct service programming, is also often unsustainable and will not achieve scalable impacts. Supply- and demand-side approaches must be balanced according to the context, including through tailored push/pull approaches.

Programming in Practice

The five-year [Feed the Future Tanzania Advancing Youth \(AY\) Activity](#) that concluded in August 2022 utilized a push/pull approach, leveraging USAID/Tanzania’s investments in employment, education, agriculture, governance, and health to create a youth-centered project to build the capacities of young people ages 15–35 and ultimately engage them in greater economic opportunities. AY incorporated PYD and gender-transformative approaches across four components: (1) livelihoods (increasing entrepreneurship and workforce readiness skills), (2) leadership (strengthening leadership and positive community engagement), (3) life skills (enhancing life skills for healthy living and future planning), and (4) partnerships (with the private sector, local and national governments, and civil society). The activity not only trained 44,200 youth (58 percent female, 42 percent male), but it established or improved 5,567 youth-led microenterprises (65 percent female, 35 male), produced 4,000 informal and formal jobs, and established 350 youth savings and lending associations (YSLA) with a total savings of \$1.2 million, involving 6,120 youth (71 percent female, 29 percent male).

To address issues of youth access to markets, the [Feed the Future Partnerships for Innovation Activity, AgriJoven](#), facilitated formal partnerships between youth groups and other parts of the supply chain to provide young farmers (ages 15–24) with increased market opportunities for them to profit from their combined marketing, including with the introduction of digital technologies for improved production practices. Many of the youth were from Indigenous communities, and the AgriJoven project connected youth savings and loan groups with horticulture exporter Fair-Fruit, providing a buyer and end market for

their produce. AgriJoven organized 65 groups, totaling 1,060 females (49 percent) and males (51 percent), and introduced them to digital strategies aimed at improving the dissemination of innovative farming methods around the country. Youth participants learned video production and editing techniques in multiday workshops, which they used to develop training videos on topics ranging from pest management practices to how to install irrigation systems. Participants then use social media and the Internet to [share the training videos with farmers in surrounding communities and elsewhere in Guatemala](#). The videos instruct and inspire future generations of young farmers and show that [young people can be change agents](#). This Agrilinks [blog](#) has a first-hand account of youth involved with the AgriJoven project.

Additional Resources and Tools

- Agrilinks Webinar: [Balancing Market Approaches to Better Youth Employment Outcomes](#).
- MarketLinks blog on [Exploring Key Themes Supporting the Urgent Advancement of Youth Employment](#).
- Agrilinks blog on [Creating Better, Decent and Greener Jobs for Youth in Sustainable Agrifood and Other Sectors](#).
- [Integrated Youth Employment Programs: A Stocktake of Evidence on What Works in Youth Employment Programs](#). World Bank.
- [Decent Jobs for Youth](#).
- [New Handbook: Youth Active Citizenship for Decent Jobs](#). Institute of Development Studies.
- [A Rough Guide to the MSD Approach for Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Operational Guidance](#). Building Effective and Accessible Markets (BEAM) Exchange.
- [Youth Engagement in Agricultural Value Chains across Feed the Future: A Synthesis Report](#). USAID.
- [Africa Agriculture Status Report 2021: A Decade of Action Building Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems in Africa](#) (See Chapter 8). Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA).
- [Youth and Gender Analysis Toolkit: Tools for Economic Growth Activities](#). USAID.
- [Gendered Market Analysis](#). BEAM Exchange
- [Inclusive Growth Diagnostics](#). USAID.
- [Jobs Diagnostics Guidance: Why, What and How?](#) World Bank.
- [USAID Implementation Toolkits](#).
- [Policy Alignment and Social Impact Diagnostic](#) (for USAID staff only).
- [Feed the Future Project Design Guide for Youth-Inclusive Agriculture and Food Systems \(Volumes I and II\)](#). YouthPower2.
- [Guide to Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessments](#). USAID.
- [What Works in Youth and Agriculture](#). YouthPower2.
- [YP2LE Presents—Exploring the Evidence: Youth in Agri-Food Systems](#).
- [Ending Child Marriage in Africa](#). Girls Not Brides.
- [Engaging Youth in Agriculture through Information and Communication Technologies](#). USAID.
- [Youth and Agriculture: Key Challenges and Concrete Solutions](#). FAO.
- [Rural Youth Employment](#). Global Donor Platform for Rural Development.
- [Agricultural Finance and the Youth: Prospects for Financial Inclusion in Uganda](#). FAO.
- [Agricultural Finance and the Youth: Prospects for Financial Inclusion in Kenya](#). FAO.
- [Water and Development Technical Series](#). GlobalWaters.
- [Menstrual Health and Hygiene](#). USAID.
- [Water and Jobs](#). United Nations (UN) Water.
- [Adolescent Nutrition](#). The Lancet.
- ResilienceLinks Newsletter: [What Is Youth Resilience, and How Can It Be Nurtured?](#)
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