Youth in the Semi-Arid Tropics: A Strategy for Targeting and Engaging with Youth in Agriculture
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Introduction

Youths can play a significant role in dryland agriculture. The United Nations (2019) defines youths as between 15 and 24 years. Globally there are about 1.2 billion people aged between 15-24, i.e. 16% of the global population. It is projected to grow by 7% by 2030 to 1.3 billion and peak around 2065 with a population of 1.4 billion, or 14% of the global total (UN 2019).

Currently there are about 258 million people aged between 15 to 24 years in Africa (UN 2019). In Africa, about 10 to 12 million youths join the labour market every year, but only 3 million jobs are created annually, resulting in a lack of jobs (AfDB 2016). Of the employed youth, 17% have formal employment while the rest are self-employed or perform unpaid family work, especially in agriculture (AfDB 2016).

With rapid population growth, the demand for food is also increasing. Food security has been anchored in Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) which aims at zero hunger by the year 2030 by ending malnutrition, doubling agricultural productivity, ensuring sustainable food systems, maintaining genetic diversity of crops and ensuring efficient functioning of food commodity markets (United Nations 2015). Agenda 2063 of the African Union recognises the important role agriculture plays in economic growth; it aims to modernise agriculture by scaling value addition, improving intra-Africa trade by 50% of formal agricultural systems and by implementing affirmative interventions to ensure that at least 30% of agricultural credit is accessible to women (African Union 2013).

Why youth are important for achieving CRP-GLDC’s objectives

The drylands have several bottlenecks to youth participation in agriculture, including access to land, extension services, new agricultural technologies, financial and insurance services, value addition and markets. The idea that young people are not taking over farming then becomes a concern for the future of agriculture, food security and welfare for the drylands. There is also a narrative that the “youth are not interested in agriculture”.

The GLDC aims to achieve the expanded, resilient and inclusive production, value addition, trading and consumption of nutritious grain legumes and dryland cereals in target countries, and improved capacity and inclusivity of agri-food system stakeholders to collaboratively develop innovations that respond to the needs of women, men and youth. Youth are the catalysts of change in all CRP-GLDC activities, accelerating impact by engaging with the pioneers of tomorrow. To explore these issues, the CRP-GLDC team conducted a study with partners in Uganda, Tanzania and Ethiopia. This strategy is intended to be a guiding document for partners who work with youth, so they can deliver on this aspiration.
Method

Three tools were selected: 1) focus group discussions among young people (male, female and mixed groups) to learn about youth transitions, aspirations, their experiences with life in general and with agriculture, 2) Life histories of men and women aged between 17-70, to hear their personal stories of transition, and to understand who stayed in dryland agriculture and who left it, and 3) Key informant interviews with stakeholders who design and implement youth programs were held to learn about their experiences working with youth. Study sites were purposively selected to include areas where people practiced dryland agriculture and grew at least some crops of interest to ICRISAT (sorghum, millet, groundnuts, pigeon peas, and chickpeas). A similar method was used in all three countries. For the full country reports, see: Tanzania (Mwaseba et al. 2020), Uganda (Boonabaana et al. 2000) and Ethiopia (Endris and Hassan 2020).

Findings from the country studies

Local definitions of “youth” vary

While the United Nations (2019) defines youths as anyone between 15 and 24, local definitions of “youth” may not even take age into account. Each community in the study area defines youth differently. Communities in the study areas have social categories for people between childhood and full adulthood, which corresponds roughly to “youth”, but children as young as 11 could be considered “youths” in Ethiopia, while “youths” were at least 14 years old in Tanzania and 15 in Uganda.

This study focused on the transition realities, needs and constraints, aspirations, and opportunity structures of youth.

Transition realities: In the drylands, local definitions of youth are not based on any one factor. Communities applied age differently for boys and for girls, but in general, single males can still be considered “youth” when they are much older than females. Women or girls who are married or mothers are often not considered “youth” by the communities, so a married girl of 14 may be considered an adult, while a single man of 40 may be seen as a youth. Most dryland communities have a cultural rite of passage that marks the end of childhood and the start of youth.

Youth may also assume adult responsibilities and identities if their parents die, and the orphans have to start looking out for themselves and their younger siblings. Youth also transition to adulthood by marrying or becoming mothers. Most youth drop out of school after they marry, especially girls.

Staying in school prolongs childhood. Most young people want to excel in school, to proceed to higher education and prestigious careers. However, few attain this ideal. When young people pursue an education, they often find themselves delayed or unable to participate in some of the traditional rites of passage. Schooling also delays the age of marriage.

Needs and constraints: Females are much less likely than males to inherit land in the study areas. Most youth are constrained by the access to land and capital (e.g. credit). Extension programs tend to be biased in favour of older men, at the expense of females and youth.

There is a critical group of young mothers, who may be landless, marginalised and left out of farming with few other opportunities for livelihoods. These vulnerable teenagers are among those who could most benefit from a youth project, but they are often considered adults by their community and by themselves.

Villagers understand that projects have their own notions of who is a youth. Project staff can tell a community, for example, “We want to work with everyone between the ages of X and Y, whether they are married or single, male or female, in school or not, whether they have been through the rite of passage or not.” The staff can negotiate the criteria for participating in the project with the community in a culturally-sensitive way.

Staying in agriculture

Aspirations: One of the most encouraging findings of the study is that young people in the drylands do not hate agriculture. For some youth, farming is their first option, while for others it is a second option, if they cannot study and get a good job in the city. Youth are specially interested in post-harvest activities, transport, marketing and quick maturing crops like vegetables.

Opportunities: About 80% of the key informant respondents eventually stayed in dryland agriculture, but in combination with other enterprises like business, and jobs. Some young people migrated to the cities, but returned to the drylands to farm. That experience of leaving and coming back elevated their farming standards and their engagement with the value chains, so some of them became role models in dryland farming.

Our study found that less than 5% of the total youth who leave agriculture are educated. Maybe because they are more vocal, and are considered youth for much longer, youth policies are designed with this 5% in mind, while most young people (male and female) who stay in agriculture are identified as farmers, rather than as youth.

For the complete, long version of this summary see Njuguna-Mungai and colleagues (2021).

Policy strategies, their effectiveness & institutional support

Policy strategies, their effectiveness and institutional support

The policy narrative on young people and agriculture is predominantly framed from the point of view of either “youth in peril” or “agriculture in peril”, resulting in oversimplified pictures of either agriculture as the saviour of young people or young people to the rescue of agriculture, informed by:

• The fact that bright, educated and ambitious young people do not find small-scale farming an attractive employment or career option.

• Challenges in the agricultural sector include the lack of land, poor climate conditions, high risks of farming, the drudgery of traditional farming, and the unglamorous promise of intense poverty and life in dull rural areas.

Policy makers and development professionals prefer agricultural investment for youth employment through group farming schemes, training in entrepreneurship, and engagement in agricultural value chains such as improved access to information, markets, micro-credit and leasing land. The unfortunate bit about these investments is that:

• The investments are usually in the best agricultural areas, rather than in fragile drylands.

• Over-focus on the fragility of land more than the economic well-being of people.

Theory of Change for GLDC Youth Strategy in Dryland Agriculture

A. Impact: Eastern African female and male youth in the drylands are actively participating and equitably benefitting from selected grain legumes and cereal value chains.

B. Main components:

i. Research and empowerment recognition and profiling, strategic youth and dryland agriculture research, human capacity building—technical, psychological, life skills and behavioural change and appreciating the diversity of youth.
ii. Service provision and infrastructure development: Female, male, rural, urban youth-friendly financing, technology dissemination, information communication, access to inputs, markets, processing and value addition infrastructure.

iii. Addressing social-cultural and political barriers: Land access, early marriage, school dropout, human rights, divorce and discriminatory policies, laws and by-laws. Conflicts and political instability.

iv. Strategic management, monitoring, learning and evaluation: Communication, dissemination, coordination, feedback mechanisms, reflection and learning.

C. Expected outcomes:

i. Empirical evidence gathered on youth and youth diversity in their communities.

ii. Youth agency and capacity to engage in dryland agriculture enhanced.

iii. Service provision and infrastructure development: female, male, rural, urban youth-friendly financing, technology dissemination, information communication, access to inputs, markets, processing and value addition infrastructure.

iv. Addressing social-cultural and political barriers: (land access, early marriage, school dropout, human rights, divorce and discriminatory policies, laws and by-laws. Conflicts and political instability).

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v. Strategic management, monitoring, learning and evaluation: (communication, dissemination, coordination, feedback mechanisms, reflection and learning).

D. Main activities:

i. Profiling dryland youth and generating evidence that informs decisions and choice targeting.

ii. Awareness creation (youth, parents, religious and cultural leaders, teachers, policymakers and community leaders) on strategic issues – the potential of agriculture, climate change and coping strategies.

iii. Capacity building (dryland youth, researchers, service providers etc.) on basic, work-related and soft and life skills.

iv. Formulate mentoring, counselling and apprenticeship programs.

v. Carry out strategic youth and dryland agriculture research.

vi. Support youth groups and organisations for engagement in dryland agriculture (social capital).

vii. Develop, test and demonstrate new, youth-sensitive technologies.

viii. Develop context-specific financial, input and information access systems.

ix. Improve access to suitable output markets, inputs and extension services.

x. Advocacy and lobbying for policy changes.

xi. Forging collaborations and partnerships.

xii. Managing and coordinating the implementation of the strategy.

E. Key assumptions for the Theory of Change

Assumption 1: Successful engagement of female and male youth in dryland agriculture is determined by factors associated with their readiness and demand factors associated with local, socio-cultural, economic and ecological environment.

Assumption 2: Skills, competences, access (e.g. to resources and information) and support contribute to youth readiness to participate in grain legumes and cereal value chains.

Assumption 3: Female and male youth with a strong foundation of developmental assets, relevant technologies and infrastructure have increased likelihood to engage in dryland agriculture.

Assumption 4: Actively engaging female and male youth and supporting them to become active citizens with sustainable livelihoods will help break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Assumption 5: Attracting female and male youth in dryland agriculture and harnessing their potentials requires a multidimensional approach (education, research, modernising infrastructure, access to resources and advocacy for appropriate policies good governance and socio-political movements).

Strategic Interventions

Part 1: Strategic Direction

The Youth Strategy for CRP-GLDC seeks to provide vision and direction to the governments, development partners, academia and relevant stakeholders towards enabling youth targeting, inclusion and equitable benefits of agricultural programmes in the East African region. Unlocking the potential of youth in dryland agriculture requires understanding their needs, aspirations, transition realities, opportunity structures and prevailing constraints. This will enable youth to participate in value chains and an accelerated, commercial rural economy. The strategy envisons a transformative approach that is responsive to youth diversities so that no male or female youth is left behind.
VISION
Dryland rural communities where different youth categories actively engage in, and equitably benefit from the Grain Legumes and Dryland Cereal value chains

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
The strategy draws on a broader UN 2030 development framework structured around 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and targets. Six of the goals (2, 4, 5, 8, 10 & 13) reference the critical role of youth in development.

GOAL
Enabling active participation of female and male youth, and equitable benefits from the Grain Legumes and Dryland Cereal value chains.

OBJECTIVES
i. To build and maintain evidence of gendered youth trends in the drylands
ii. To start interventions that promote female and male youth active engagement in, and equitably benefit from the Grain Legumes and Dryland Cereal value chains
iii. To create an enabling environment that enhance youth engagement, inclusion and sustainable benefits of Grain Legumes and Dryland Cereal value chains.

Part 2: Proposed Strategic Interventions

Strategic focus 1: Youth recognition and evidence: Conducting strategic youth and agriculture research
Understand youth as a homogenous group. Establish sustained collaborations between research institutions, government, private sector, NGOs, and CBOs.

Strategic focus 2: Building human capacity
Raise the awareness among female and male about the potentials of agriculture to help them achieve their dreams and aspirations.

Strategic focus 3: Youth-friendly financial services
Ensure availability of locally adaptable rural finance, e.g. interest-free credit and affordable collateral. Eliminate complex bureaucratic procedures to access youth funds. Support the crop value chain enterprises that are most attractive to male and female youth. Depending on the country and region, these could be: sorghum, groundnut, beans, maize, green gram, pigeon peas, sunflower, rice, millet, soybeans, cowpeas, sesame, teff, mung beans, and cotton.

Strategic focus 4: Psychological, life skills and behaviour change training
Youth projects should include counselling and guidance for the youth that have to deal with personal, family, community and regional crises and traumas.

Strategic focus 5: Access to affordable technology & climate adaptation
Youth projects should include interventions and technologies that rebrand agriculture as an attractive sector for the youth. Promote innovative farming practices that optimise land use and climate resilience.

Strategic focus 6: Stimulate youth entrepreneurship and employment
Focus on the post-production, especially value addition and processing that the youth already consider to be lucrative. Nurture youth agri-businesses and market-driven enterprises. Link youth to supporting services and infrastructure for value addition; establish pilot demonstration units. Invest in rural agriculture infrastructure such as: solar-powered irrigation systems, rural electrification, feeder road networks and ICTs to accelerate innovation in agribusinesses. Support involvement of the youth and capacitate them as value chain actors such as brokers and service providers.

Strategic focus 7: Address social-cultural barriers
Sensitise communities on negative aspects of discriminatory social norms, and practices that inhibit female and male youth from engaging and benefiting from development programmes. Enforce implementation of existing laws that guarantee inclusive development, keeping young people in school and against early and forced marriages.

Strategic focus 8: Building youth-friendly social capital and strengthening local institutions
Make an inventory of local support groups male and female youth use to mobilise resources. The inventory should identify the different types of mutual support groups and the types of services (resources) they provide to the different types of male and female youth. Strengthen and work with these support groups.

Part 3: Key Stakeholders and Actors
Effective implementation of the youth strategy requires multiple actors to address the various needs. This requires effective, efficient and well-co-ordinated institutional mechanisms that run from national to the local government level, including public works, gender and youth, and local government, with the Ministries of Agriculture taking the leading role. The strategy also targets local government administration officials, technical teams and committees, development partners, research institutions, civil society organisations and the local community men and women, girls and boys. See Table 1.

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<th>Key stakeholders</th>
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<td>National Ministries of agriculture</td>
<td>Coordinating agency, will provide leadership, coordination, monitoring-&amp;-evaluation, and technical support</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Ministries of Gender, Labour and Social Development</td>
<td>Ensure that programmes are gender-responsive, and leave no one behind by facilitating gender awareness and collaborations to reduce social gender inequalities</td>
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<td>National Ministries of Education</td>
<td>To work in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture to implement education and capacity building interventions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Ministries of Justice</td>
<td>To provide legal oversight and support</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Ministries of Finance</td>
<td>To provide sufficient resources in the national budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Ministries of Local Government</td>
<td>Local government will offer the primary structures for the implementation of the strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development partners e.g. FAO, DFID, EU, ICRISAT</td>
<td>To provide financial, and technical resources and play a monitoring role</td>
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<td>CSOs</td>
<td>Operational partners to implement the strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>National research institutions, universities, NARIs etc.</td>
<td>To provide technical advice and conduct local and regional research and knowledge generation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community members (men, women, cultural and religious leaders)</td>
<td>Key gatekeepers of social norms and practices. They will be the major implementers, support links and beneficiaries of the strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dryland youth: male and female</td>
<td>Key actors and beneficiaries of the strategy, engaged in all activities to benefit from dryland cereal and grain legume value chains</td>
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Part 4: Information Flow and Feedback Mechanisms

Proper information flow and feedback while implementing the strategy will help to resolve uncertainty, ensure stakeholder interests are met and assure quality. The national Ministries of Agriculture in the East African region will produce quarterly and annual reports to document the extent to which the set targets of the strategy are being achieved. The reports shall be circulated to all stakeholders. The agriculture ministries shall also put in place arrangements for communication with other stakeholders. They will define, document and control the quality of the reports produced. Review meetings will be conducted to assess progress, quality of programs, roles of different actors and reporting relationships.

Part 5: Coordination and Collaboration Mechanisms: National and Sub National

The national Ministries of Agriculture will be the overall coordinator for implementation of activities. A coordination unit under each ministry will be established and supported to spearhead the implementation and monitoring of the strategy. In each country, the coordination unit will be headed by a senior officer with wide experience on youth, gender and dryland agriculture. The unit should be financed within the ministry financial framework and provided for in the medium and long-term government budget. The coordination unit will popularise the youth strategy, mobilise stakeholders to implement it, coordinate annual work plans and budgets, prepare performance reports, monitor and evaluate the programs, and coordinate the development, and dissemination of information and publications about interventions.

References


Endris GS and Hassan JY. (2020). Youth realities, aspirations, transitions to adulthood and opportunity structures in the drylands of Ethiopia. Report submitted to ICRISAT


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About CRP-GLDC
The CGIAR Research Program on Grain Legumes and Dryland Cereals (CRP-GLDC) brings together research on seven legumes (chickpea, cowpea, pigeon pea, groundnut, lentil, soybean and common bean) and three cereals (pearl millet, finger millet and sorghum) to deliver improved livelihoods and nutrition by prioritizing demand driven innovations to increase production and market opportunities along value chains.

http://gldc.cgiar.org

About the CGIAR
CGIAR is a global research partnership for a food-secure future. CGIAR science is dedicated to reducing poverty, enhancing food and nutrition security, and improving natural resources and ecosystem services. Fifteen CGIAR Centers in close collaboration with hundreds of partners, including national and regional research institutes, civil society organizations, academia, development organizations, and the private sector carry out its research.

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