



# The Potential of Agroecology for Youth in Rwanda

Identification of key stakeholders, constraints and opportunities

Executive summary of a mapping study by AgriProFocus



The Youth in Agroecology and Business Learning Track Africa (YALTA) programme aims to support young agripreneurs to apply agroecological<sup>1</sup> 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. To inform future programming and decision making, a mapping was done in these 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 summary provides the key findings of the mapping in Rwanda.

## Rwandan Context

### Lack of job opportunities for Youth

Over the period 2000-2016, the economy of Rwanda grew by an average of nearly eight percent per year, GDP per capita increased from \$242 to \$729 and the poverty rate fell from 60 to 39 percent. Yet a major concern is the ability of youth to participate in this growth. In 2018, the number of youth aged 16 to 30 years old not in employment nor in education or training was over 1 million (of which 670,000 aged 16-24yrs); each year, about 300,000 youth seek to enter the workforce. Agriculture is an important economic activity for youth: many youth are farming (45 percent), or do wage labor on farms (16 percent). Young men work in various capacities in the agricultural sector, while young women mostly work on family farms.

**+300,000  
young people  
on labor market  
each year**

### The Rwandan government supports growth of agriculture

The agricultural sector seems to offer opportunities for further employment for youth. There is strong government support for growth of agriculture and livestock plus a new land policy that aims at securing land tenure. Investments in agribusiness are encouraged, while there is an ambition to enable youth employment in these sectors too. At the same time, even if Rwanda's altitude, climate and rainfall regimes are favourable for many crops, agricultural productivity is generally low on rain fed croplands due to poor soil quality (e.g. soil acidity, nutrient depletion, low organic matter levels, erosion).

## Constraints identified in the study

The development of agribusiness in Rwanda meets a number of general challenges, including lack of product certification, lack of post-harvest facilities, un-tarmacked feeder roads and

<sup>1</sup>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. <http://www.fao.org/agroecology>

counterfeit fertilizers or seeds. Another challenge is the limited interest of the financial sector in agriculture, and the lack of appropriate financial products including insurance.

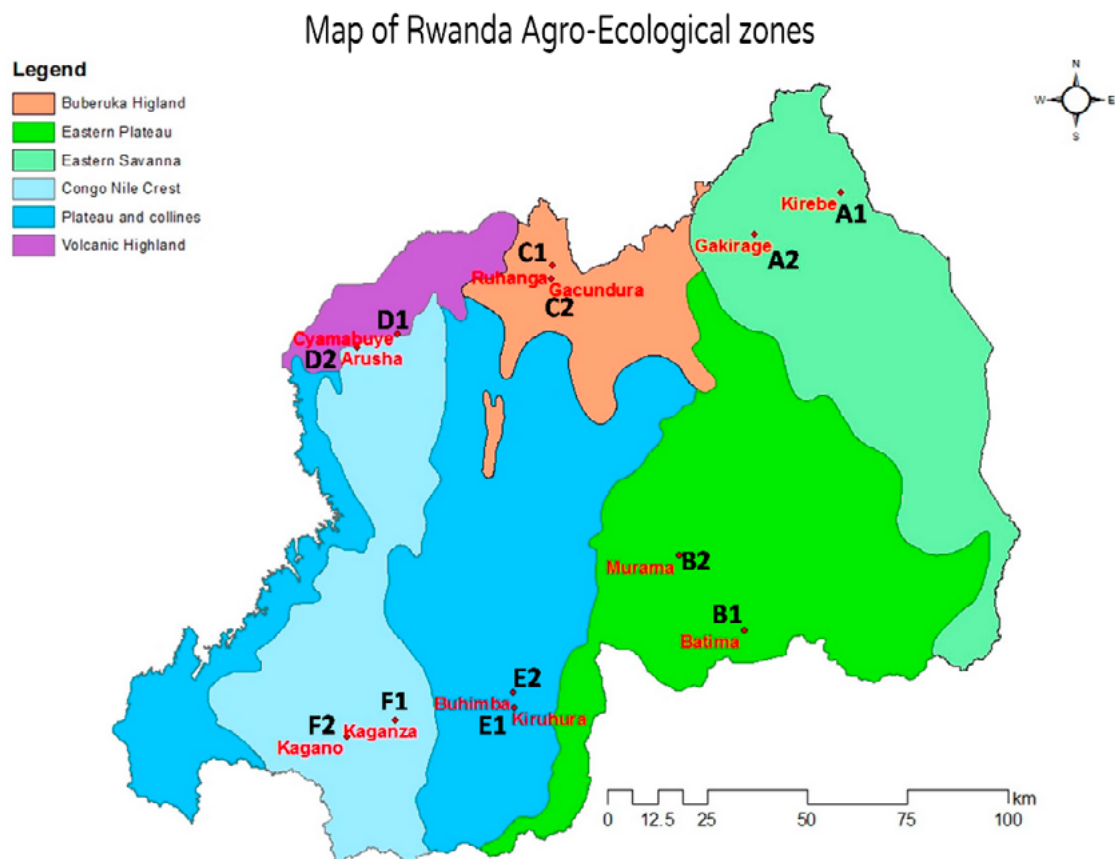
### Economic challenges for Youth lead to social consequences

Youth face additional particular challenges in agriculture: they lack access to land, capital and knowledge, and are confronted with scarce employment opportunities. They also often lack interest in agriculture, and are often viewed as not mature enough to farm or run businesses. Female youth face even greater challenges, because unequal power relations leave them with limited decision-making power and fewer resources. The economic problems that youth face also have important social consequences, as young people are unable to advance into adulthood, marry or start families.

### Enhancement ecological sustainability hampered

Efforts to enhance the ecological sustainability of agricultural practice are hampered by limited policy attention and low farmer investment capacity. The development of agroecological practice encounters a number of additional challenges. These include the generally limited awareness of the existence of organic products and the lack of certification, the lack of market limiting the production of organic products, the limited involvement of the private sector, the research and policy gaps in agroecology, and lack of financing for those wishing to enter the sector.

Practitioners need further capacity building and connections with others including other youth, possibly around local demonstration plots of organic farming or specific business centers for organic products.



## Opportunities identified in the study

At the same time, the study identified that there are a series of opportunities in the domains of agroecology, youth employment and agribusiness sector growth, which could be built upon by the YALTA programme.

### Agroecological practices seen in Rwanda

The study identified a series of promising practices in the domain of agroecology, or in the related sustainable agriculture domain, by different institutions and companies, which could be an entry point for further action:

- The government of Rwanda invested in integrated soil fertility management, including soil analyses, zonal differentiation and using fertilizer-enriched compost.
- IFAD implemented 'Pilot Actions through Innovative Models' projects, which intensified research and extension services on sustainable land use practices.
- REMA. The 'Greening Schools Programme' mainstreamed environment and climate change for sustainability within the education system, at over 200 schools.
- An eco-schools programme took place in 100 schools in 4 districts, by civil society organisations, ARAMA and FSDS.
- From 2009-2014, farmer field schools reached 80,000 farmers in all 30 districts, covering 12 different commodities. This helped raising productivity and farmer incomes, as well as reducing carbon emissions and advancing resource efficiency.
- Higher education and TVET institutions integrated sustainability in their curricula.

### Youth employment in the agribusiness sector

The inventory also found a number of examples of agriculture sector companies that offer employment for youth in particular:

- Entrepise Urwibutso: successful agro processing industry in Northern Province, Rulindo District. Processing flours from cereals and tubers, spices and beverages. Majority of the employees (85%) are from the area and are youth; while the sourcing farmers could add value to their crops and increase household incomes.
- Inyange Industries Juice producing industry in Kigali, serving local and regional markets. Entered into a partnership with farmers' cooperatives' milk collection centers which generated a revenue increase for cattle keepers.

Another interesting sector for youth is beekeeping. Currently, 40% of beekeeping actors (producers, beekeepers & those involved in value addition) are youth. In addition, several youth are involved in waste management as a business, vermicomposting, and composting. For example, youth supported by Agriterra Rwanda produce compost, which they sell or use for crop production, and this enables them to make money.

Experiences in youth programming indicate that training and learning are key for youth to benefit from agriculture and agribusiness, and that youth, particularly those with low literacy levels, fare best in experiential settings that build on their previous knowledge and facilitate learning skills. Farmer field schools and short agricultural productivity and farm service training are good options. Intergenerational learning and mentoring can play a role in connecting youth to the community and motivating them.

### Existing policy and market mechanisms

The existence of the following investments and policies can be considered as enabling:

- Rwanda policy has promulgated a number of important policies and programmes to promote and develop the sector of agroecology, while several international agreements favour more sustainable and climate resilient agricultural practice, e.g. the Kyoto Protocol and the Malabo Declaration.
- The Crop Intensification Program (CIP) has now noted that Sustainable Intensification (SI) of Rwanda's rain-fed (80%) and labor intensive (deep tillage twice a year) agriculture requires an agro-ecological approach to increase the availability of soil organic matter.
- The East African "Organic" certificate is in the pipeline.

### Existing financial mechanisms

The following mechanisms have been identified to enable better access to finance:

- Business Development Fund (Gov Fund) provides credit guarantees to farmers to improve access to finance; it supports viable agriculture projects to minimize default risks, and has a programme focused on women and youth in rural areas.
- Fonerwa, Africa's biggest environment and climate change fund. It provides technical and financial support to the best public and private projects selected for their alignment with Rwanda's commitment to green economic growth and climate resilience.
- Creating awareness about on the existence of MFIs and Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOs) in the rural areas is also an important entry point, as most of their client base is rural and active in some kind of agriculture activities.
- Well-organized cooperatives are very important to the growth of the sector and may play a role in accessing finance or subsidies to farmers.

## Potential areas for enhanced youth employment

The agricultural subsectors that need to be developed to employ more youth are the following:

- Horticultural production to serve growing global, regional and local demand for fruit, flowers and vegetables, such as beans, peas, horticultural specialties and exotic fruits. The horticulture sector is expected to provide more jobs to youth in all the value chains. E.g. two commercial avocado plantations; Gishali Flower Park and Rulindo flower project.
- Investment opportunities in the animal feeds sector. Livestock development sub-sector in Rwanda contributes about 10% to the agricultural GDP. There are indications of increasing demand for animal products that attracts private sector investments in quality commercial feed production for marketing especially in peri-urban poultry and piggery production.
- Poultry products for local & regional markets: an increasing consumption of eggs and poultry meat and potential to substitute imports with local produce.
- Products for local & regional markets: increasing demand for pork products in domestic market, while potential market in East Africa and the Great Lakes
- Investment opportunities in the irrigation sector, creating good conditions for production of high value exportable irrigated cash crops
- Sericulture (= silk production). A national and four provincial sericulture centres, 27 active sericulture cooperatives, and several private sector initiatives exist (including a factory).

- The development of terraced land followed by compost making practices.
- Clean energy: Resource Efficient and Cleaner Production Centre. Established 2008, it works with SMEs to build capacity on energy saving measures.

## Stakeholders

Based on their degree of influence and importance in relation to YALTA project's objectives and goals, over 60 potential key stakeholders are identified as suitable for partnership in the implementation of YALTA project. This group can be used as a starting point for any follow-up stakeholders' consultation workshops. The stakeholders are categorized in 9 groups: Private sector & industry (19) | Financial service providers (3) | Government (7) | Civil society (NGO), non state actors (18) | International development partners and multilateral organisations (10) | R&D institutes and universities (2) | ICT solution providers in agriculture (1) | Media (1) | End market stakeholders, (organic) market (2).

## Recommendations

In order to ensure that youth are active contributors and beneficiaries from agroecology in Rwanda, the authors recommend action in the following areas:

- Agro-ecological research in collaboration with farmers, including on the process of transition to agro-ecology.
- Holistic food policies fostering nutrition security, climate change resilience, sustainability and agricultural biodiversity; which support agroecological practice.
- Strengthen farmer and consumer associations, youth forums and multi-stakeholder forums.
- Building upon indigenous and local knowledge systems of farmers, integrating agro-ecology in agricultural extension services and in the curriculum of education.
- Strengthen capacities of farmers, both on business and marketing skills and on good agricultural and agroecological practice, for example through study tours and demo plots.
- Raise awareness among consumers about nutritional and other benefits of agro-ecology.
- Provide incentives to the new investors in agro-ecology and involve more youth.
- Strengthen the market of seeds, fertilizers and produce, amongst others the farmer managed seed systems; the local markets and marketing channels for local produce and farmers' access to those; and shorten the food chain.

**This is the executive summary of a mapping study about Youth in Agroecology in Rwanda. Commissioned by AgriProFocus with financial support from the IKEA Foundation. Please send an email to Thacien MUNYAMAHAME at [tmunyamahame@agriprofocus.com](mailto:tmunyamahame@agriprofocus.com) to request a copy of the full report.**



# YALTA

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