

# EMPOWERING YOUTH TO SUCCEED IN MARKET-DRIVEN AGRICULTURE

Youth in many developing economies are plagued by high unemployment, particularly in rural areas where job opportunities are scarce. In Africa, for example, youth account for 60 percent of all unemployed. In countries like Botswana, Republic of the Congo, Senegal, and South Africa, youth unemployment rates exceed 30 percent.<sup>1</sup> Reducing poverty and stemming rural-urban migration requires strengthening youths' prospects for economic engagement and increased income in market-driven agriculture.

*Making agriculture attractive to youth.* Transforming the way youth view and engage in the agricultural sector is key for significantly increasing employment, improving livelihoods, and — in the long run — building rural economies that expand in step with fast-growing urban centers. Often, rural youth do not see agriculture as a viable career option, having grown up witnessing small-holder farms struggle against unfavorable market and environmental factors for precious little profit after hard physical toil. Constraints that youth face engaging in the sector reinforce these perceptions. Approaches that leverage technology, education, land-rights reform, access to financial and information resources, and creation of entrepreneur networks can make agribusiness profitable and scalable for youth, making the sector more attractive. Integration of these approaches can enhance their impact and sustainability.



## A Crosscutting Approach to Empowering Youth to Succeed in Agriculture

In Nigeria, the project Maximizing Agricultural Revenue and Key Enterprises in Targeted Sites (MARKETS II) is addressing constraints in the agricultural value chain to improve rural farmers' performance, income, and food security. To change how young Nigerians view and engage in the sector, MARKETS II promotes agriculture as "agribusiness," engaging youth not just in farming, but in other opportunities along the agricultural value chain; for example, as youth service providers. MARKETS II aims to have at least 30 percent of participating farmers be

<sup>1</sup> Ighobor, K. (April 11, 2013). "Africa's youth: a "ticking time bomb" or an opportunity?" *Africa Renewal*. Retrieved from, <http://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2013/africa%E2%80%99s-youth-%E2%80%9Cticking-time-bomb%E2%80%9D-or-opportunity>. (Accessed September 27, 2016).

29 years or younger. Youth participation is encouraged in all training activities, and many participating youth are lead farmers who represent their states.

Key objectives of the project are to improve small-holder farmers' access to: increased income, ready markets, better inputs, adequate finance, better water and pesticide management, appropriate technology, and extension services. The project centers on an agricultural enterprise curriculum that is tailored to enhance literate and non-literate farmers' understanding of productivity, revenues, and profits. The project also aims to improve farmers' skills in finance, record-keeping, market analysis, and planning. The ultimate goal is to empower youth to recognize how pivoting from "sell what you can produce" to "produce what you can sell" can improve agricultural opportunities. Key project levers include:

- Providing better **applied education on best-practice modern production** techniques and technologies (e.g., soil testing, fertilizer use, pest control, and Climate-Smart Agriculture), as well as **practical business analyses** (e.g., capturing additional profit pools through vertical integration or diversification.)
- Supporting **improved access to land and financial resources** (e.g., microloans and crop insurance) to build startup capacity and resilience, and to overcome socioeconomic and cultural barriers that youth — particularly female youth — often face.
- Developing understanding of market economics (e.g., push-and-pull factors, what will sell, and how to generate profits) and fostering strong, **youth-driven networks and technology platforms** to promote information sharing and create linkages among farmers and input suppliers, middle value chain actors, exporters, processors, traders, and farmer organizations.



To date, MARKETS II has empowered 231,884 Nigerian youth and honed their sense of pride in the agricultural sector.

## Key Findings

Results of the actions described above suggest a positive multiplier effect of concurrently deploying knowledge, resource access, and market information interventions.

Success stories abound, and include a 25-year-old girl in the northern town of Kano who benefited from capacity building training on fish farm management, and transformed her life with just two plastic fish ponds. Further, the understanding she gained of production techniques and the market enabled her to diversify into sales of fish medication and capture an additional revenue stream. Another example is a young person from Kaduna state who participated in a Microenterprise Fundamentals Curriculum that covered a range of business topics through theoretical facilitation, group and individual exercises, and business simulations. Within three months of completing the training, he progressed from selling live chickens to selling slaughtered, de-feathered, and packaged chickens for nearly a five-fold increase in profit.

"[The training] really changed my business orientation. Previously I had a challenge with selling my birds, but the training equipped me with the skill to identify and utilize the opportunities around me."

— Japhet Barnabas, Kaduna state  
Microenterprise Fundamentals  
Curriculum participant from  
MARKETS II

Converging support factors can thus enable young farmers and smallholders to understand and exploit demand signals across multiple nodes of the value chain, efficiently produce and process higher-value agricultural goods, and craft the relationships required to successfully commercialize their outputs to generate higher and more reliable incomes.