

Youth Employment in the Agri-Food Sector in Western Kenya

Sustainably promoting employment opportunities

The challenge

Agriculture is the mainstay of Kenya's economy. In approximation, 70 % of all Kenyans live in rural areas and highly depend on the sector to provide food production and employment opportunities. Nearly 80 % of the rural population work in the agri-food sector, showing its great importance and potential for creating income and absorbing the youth bulge of the labour force. Three-quarters of the Kenyan population is below 35 years, with 69 % living in rural areas. Every year, 1.3 million young people enter the labour market. While the overall unemployment rate is around 10 %, unemployment among youth, defined as 18 to 35 years, reaches more than 25 %.



Even though the agri-food sector offers great income potential, rural youth tend to avoid the sector, perceiving agriculture as high-risk and a career of last resort. Kenyan national and county governments are increasingly emphasising the importance of promoting employment, developing skills and realising the economic potential in the agri-food sector for young people. However, there is still no particularly supportive environment for increasing or realising the existing potential of the agri-food industry to reduce youth unemployment. Access to competence-based education and vocational training equipping youth with employment relevant skills sought-after by the private sector is insufficient, thereby preventing higher employment levels.

Project name	Youth Employment in the Agri-Food Sector in Western Kenya (YEA)
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) of Germany
Project region	Counties of Bungoma, Kakamega, Siaya and Vihiga
Lead executing agency	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Cooperatives (MoALFC)
Duration	01/2020 to 03/2022

Our objectives

The project's overall objective is to improve training and employment opportunities for rural youth along selected value chains of the agri-food sector. In numbers, the project aims at enhancing the employability of 5,000 people in rural areas in Western Kenya, and 700 youth between 18 and 35 shall find new or additional employment.

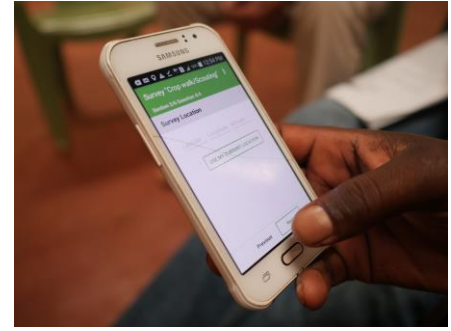
By supporting youth organisations in the counties, the project seeks to enhance the economic and political participation of 1,500 young people in the agri-food sector.

Our approach

The project aims to improve the qualification and employment situation of small-scale producers and MSMEs in the agri-food sector, especially young men and women (18–35 years).

The project forms the initiative "Agri-Jobs 4 Youth" together with the global project "Rural Employment with a Focus on Youth (RYE)", financed by the Special Initiative *ONE WORLD – No Hunger* (SEWOH) of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Jointly they implement an integrated approach to employment promotion to enhance youth employment prospects in selected districts in Western Kenya by increasing the demand for labour and improving labour market functioning and matching mechanisms.

Enhanced capacities of governmental and non-governmental actors and the private sector will enable them to respond to the needs of rural youth who are unemployed or underemployed. The facilitation and support of sustainable networks and platforms allow rural youth to overcome limiting factors such as access to information, land or finance. The project addresses the needs of different target groups, with special attention to the needs of women and young adults (18–23).



Further, the promotion of good governance in county institutions and youth organisations aims to improve service delivery. The project approach also seeks to enhance youth resilience to the vulnerabilities induced by climate change through promoting climate-smart agricultural technologies, innovations and green jobs for sustainable livelihoods, thus contributing to the objectives of the National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP).

Our achievements

More than 50 agricultural value chains were systematically reviewed to identify those with the highest youth employment potential in Western Kenya. The objective is to select five priority value chains to be promoted by the project. The selection is based on the depth, capacity and potential of the VACs, inclusiveness, market potential, steady cash flow, innovation potential and required land.

Further, an agreement was signed for close cooperation with the Agricultural Sector Network (ASNET) of the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA). This association provides youth organisations and MSMEs from Western Kenya opportunities to network nationally with potential business partners.

Together with the social enterprise Fruited Plains, the project has initiated contract farming for 600 youth in Bungoma. The youth farmers receive inputs (including quality seedlings), accompanying advice and market access to local, regional and export markets in fruit and vegetable value chains such as passion fruit, avocado, peppers, and honey.

Strengthening labour supply

In parallel, the piloting of training and advisory activities has taken place: 78 ATVET trainers, and representatives of youth groups were trained in didactics in a blended learning course by the Kenya Technical Trainers College (KTTC) under the Ministry of Education,

Science and Technology. This course empowered trainers to effectively deliver vocational training courses through adult learning techniques and other innovative methods such as e-learning.

In cooperation with the national research institute Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organisation (KALRO) in Alupe (Busia) and representatives of the target groups, a concept for youth-oriented agricultural extension was developed

Labour Market Foundations and Framework Conditions

Since self-organisation is a crucial principle for rural development, the project supports strengthening youth-led umbrella organisations in the partner Counties. About 1,600 young people have organised themselves in three youth-led organisations in Kakamega, Siaya and Bungoma. More than one third of them are young women. The organisations are continuously supported in organisational and business development as well as improved internal service delivery. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the project facilitated online peer-to-peer training and bulk SMS to members to maintain the information services despite the ban of public gatherings. In Vihiga and Kisumu, the establishment of youth-led organisation is underway.

In line with strengthening the youth's voice at the County level, the project supports the partner Counties in operationalising the national Youth in Agribusiness Strategy (2018–2022) and the National Climate Change Action Plan (2018–2022). Policy Development Task-forces with youth representation were nominated in each of the partner Counties with a mandate to drive the participatory policy development process. For this purpose, the project further conducted Champions for Change (C4C) training with 66 County officials and seven youth representatives. The seven youth representatives who participated in the C4C training are now significantly involved in the policy development process through their task force membership.

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