

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH IN RURAL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN AGRICULTURE

Key Messages

- Include gender-specific provisions in policies on climate resilience, a green economy and digitization of agriculture to increase opportunities for women and youth and enhance gender equality.
- Create inclusive opportunities in the agricultural sector to tackle the inequalities in accessing opportunities in agriculture that affect women, youth with disabilities, and youth in rural and remote areas.
- Narrow the digital divide by increasing access to digital skills and digital technologies among women, youth with disabilities, and youth in rural and remote areas.
- Secure women's rights to land and livestock and access to financial resources and business skills to ensure women's empowerment and equal opportunities in climate resilience and a green economy.

Introduction

Emerging governance models and innovations support the digitization of agriculture (Agriculture 4.0), climate resilience and a green economy. The models create new opportunities for youth to engage in developing and applying digital technologies and innovations to make data-driven decisions in the production, processing and marketing of agricultural produce. A green economy also provides youth employment and stewardship opportunities – namely, opportunities to restore and regenerate ecosystems while preventing degradation of natural resources. These opportunities are critical to the agricultural sector in Mozambique, where more than 45 per cent of the population is below the age of 15 years, and in Rwanda and Uganda, where youth make up more than 50 per cent of the population.

These opportunities could have an increased impact on improving livelihoods when coupled with efforts to address gender gaps in agricultural productivity.

Gender gaps often emanate from women's low level of access to agricultural inputs, gender norms biased against women, and women's low level of access to and application and use of digital technologies such as mobile phones and the Internet. Closing the gender gaps in agricultural innovation can play a critical role in poverty reduction across countries in Africa.

This is an opportunity to support governance models and innovations that promote inclusiveness and correspond to local needs and constraints. Pursuing innovation agendas without addressing the gender gaps in accessing digital technologies and acquiring business skills, and women's heavy dependence on natural resources for food security and energy sources, could reinforce existing gender inequalities. Proactively addressing these gender gaps is a prerequisite for the success of initiatives towards Agriculture 4.0 and a green economy. This policy brief summarizes the key findings of a study on youth opportunities from a gender equality and social inclusion standpoint.

Approach

The brief is based on a study conducted in 2020 to identify entry points for youth opportunities and women's empowerment in agriculture. A desk review was conducted to identify the emerging governance models and innovations in agriculture, and to assess the policy context in the fisheries and aquaculture, livestock, renewable energy and agroecological farming sectors in Mozambique, Rwanda and Uganda. Key informant interviews were also conducted with 33 key informants, of whom 40 per cent were women and 60 per cent were men, from the three sectors across the countries. Data were collected using online Microsoft forms because of COVID-19-related travel restrictions.

Key Findings



1 National rural development policies should emphasize increased youth opportunities and women's empowerment in agriculture.

- A comprehensive review of national rural development policies provides evidence that development plans and agricultural policies in Mozambique, Rwanda and Uganda affirmatively support youth employment in agriculture and acknowledge the potential of youth in transforming agriculture through technologies and innovations.
- The policy frameworks support a green economy by enabling efficient use of water resources, the use of renewable energy in agricultural activities and agroprocessing, and restoration of degraded landscapes, among other things.
- There is a gap in the policy framework of Mozambique; policies should pay more attention to specifically targeting women's and youth involvement across agricultural subsectors.

- There is potential in the policy framework of Uganda to further address gender-specific provisions for engaging in a green economy and digitization for agriculture.
- The dairy strategy and the investment plan for the poultry and meat industries in Rwanda provide an opportunity to better align activities for increased investment in initiatives supporting a green economy.

2 Employing approaches that are responsive to the specific needs of women and youth stimulates gender equality.

- The findings of the needs assessment highlight that opportunities for youth in the aquaculture and fisheries, livestock, renewable energy and agroecological farming sectors differ based on their gender and socioeconomic background.
- Most of the job opportunities in high-value products and services are taken by educated youth and youth who reside near towns; this points to the criticality of foundation education for girls and boys.
- Women, youth with disabilities and youth who reside in rural and remote areas are excluded from opportunities in agriculture because of problems with accessing land, lack of access to finance, lack of capacity development efforts near their area, lack of access to digital technologies and low digital literacy.
- Pursuing initiatives without addressing gender gaps could reinforce existing gender inequalities and undermine women's empowerment.

3 Addressing the digital divide enables youth opportunities and gender equality in agriculture.

- Findings reveal that youth could benefit from developing innovations and digital technologies that support agroecological practices such as blockchain technologies for quality assurance and supply management, and digitized certification of standards in organic farming.



- However, access to information and communication technology (ICT) is minimal, especially in rural and remote areas, and not customized to the needs of actors in the agricultural sector in Africa. The lack of inclusive processes for engaging youth and women in the design, development and application of digital technologies could also limit the success of these technologies in agricultural transformation.
- Gender gaps prevail in accessing digital technologies and acquiring business skills. Youth with low-income levels and with only primary education often have difficulties in accessing advanced digital technologies.
- Gender norms limit the opportunities of women in digital agriculture, as women have different needs, opportunities and constraints regarding accessing information, tools and skills. It is likely that women, most of whom do not have the skills to cope with changes in the labour market, will not have equal access to employment opportunities in the digitization of agriculture.

4 Diverse and inclusive opportunities for entrepreneurship and business in agroecological farming are crucial to climate resilience and a green economy.

- Findings reveal that youth opportunities in a green economy focus on involving youth in developing and applying technologies and innovations enabling sustainable management of natural resources. Innovations and technologies in clean and renewable energy schemes, solar-powered dryers, certification and standards for organic products, and the circular economy have a positive influence on youth employment and the environment.
- The initiatives so far lack inclusiveness, and more could be done to consider the interests of

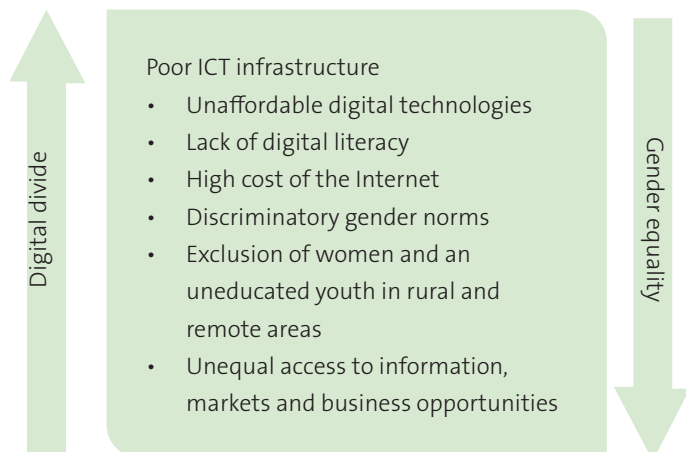


different gender groups in the initiatives. For instance, women's heavy dependence on natural resources for food security and energy sources could reinforce existing gender inequality if not addressed.

- Innovations and technologies used to promote a green economy should embrace the diversity of youth and promote the accessibility of 'green jobs' by youth of different genders and backgrounds. However, youth engagement in Agriculture 4.0 is minimal, despite the fact that youth reveal a general interest in the practice for resilience and sustainability.
- This could be attributed to gender inequality, the digital divide and a low level of ICT, access to markets, and other infrastructure issues. Besides, a green economy could also deprive women of their means of livelihoods, unless the design and implementation of initiatives take into consideration the need for capacity development and empowerment of women.

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