



# ENGAGING YOUTH IN NATURE-POSITIVE FOOD PRODUCTION

A pathway for safeguarding human and planetary health

## ACTION GUIDES FOR THE FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT

The goal of the [UN Food Systems Summit Action Track 3](#) is to boost nature-positive food production at the scale needed to meet the fundamental human right to healthy and nutritious food, while at the same time restoring balance with nature. Together with farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, local communities, policymakers, scientists, extension agents and the private sector, Action Track 3 will co-design game-changing solutions and collective actions that simultaneously work for nature, people, and the climate.

This series of Action Guides introduces agroecological approaches and regenerative practices that make food production systems more sustainable and resilient. The strategies and actions presented in these Action Guides are evidence-based, proven to be effective, and can be adapted to diverse settings.

Each Action Guide focuses on key elements that influence the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of food production: soil, gender, tenure, youth, drought and water scarcity, livestock and pastoralism, among others. Collectively, the series offers a systems perspective to guide regenerative actions for both small and large producers to promote nature-positive transformation.

## THE ISSUE

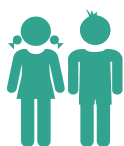
Many of the world's 1.2 billion youth (between 15-24 years) work, formally or informally, in food production - growing, harvesting, or processing. Yet young people are consistently among the least food and nutritionally secure in many societies: poorly or often unpaid, marginalized, or subject to abusive work relationships.

Today's young generation is the largest in history. They will inherit the lasting effects of environmental degradation and climate change, due in large part to the way we produce and consume food. Transforming food systems will take time, and the skills, energy and will of young people.

Faced with an uncertain future, youth lead several global movements calling for immediate action on environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change. However, in the field or along food value chains, their entrepreneurial potential is often untapped. In the future, youth can be at the forefront of driving innovative approaches to agriculture adapted to scarce resources and climate change.



# IMPACTS OF FOOD PRODUCTION ON YOUTH

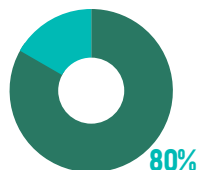


Of the world's 7.7 billion people,

**41%**

are below the age of 25 years

Source: UN DESA, Population Division, 2019, World Population Prospects 2019.

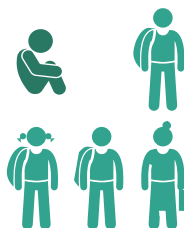


More than

**80%**

of youth live in developing countries

Source: UNFPA, 2014, The State of World Population 2014, The power of 1.8 billion adolescents, youth and the transformation of the future, New York.



youth are neither working, studying or being trained.

Source: ILO, 2020, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Africa.



In Africa, over

**60 million**

children work as agricultural laborers, mostly informally

Source: ILO, 2017, Global estimates of child labour: Results and trends, 2012-2016, Geneva.



In a survey of young people (13 to 29 yrs),

**50%**

stated that COVID-19 had decreased access to healthy food

Source: UNICEF, 2021, Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescent and youth nutrition and physical activity.



Of Asian university students, only

**4%**

are enrolled in agricultural studies

Source: AfDB, OECD, UNDP, ECA, 2012, African economic outlook 2012.



## Youth as partners in shaping the future

Young people today face an unstable and uncertain future. They are likely to experience lifelong impacts from climate change, biodiversity loss, widespread environmental degradation, and rising rates of poverty, hunger, and inequality. This worrying scenario is due in part to our current food systems.

Although nearly **80% of rural youth** are involved in agriculture, they are frequently excluded from food production decisions. Compared to adults, they face greater obstacles in **accessing land or the productive resources to start a farm**. This situation has been made worse by the **COVID-19 pandemic**. While recent high-profile youth-led social actions are working to address global challenges, their concerns are still underrepresented in food systems.

All social groups, including youth, are likely to need support to be empowered to create new and sustainable livelihoods, including new ways to produce, process, distribute, and consume food. Youth entrepreneurial activity is embedded within, and contingent upon, wider environmental, economic, and social contexts.

Acting on youth-critical issues and supporting engagement, entrepreneurship, and innovation can lead to nature-, people- and climate-positive outcomes. Advocacy and political will, along with targeted and sustained youth-focused initiatives, can support the capacity building, training, and education necessary to enable today's youth to make decisions that will shape their future.



## Unlocking the door for young farmers

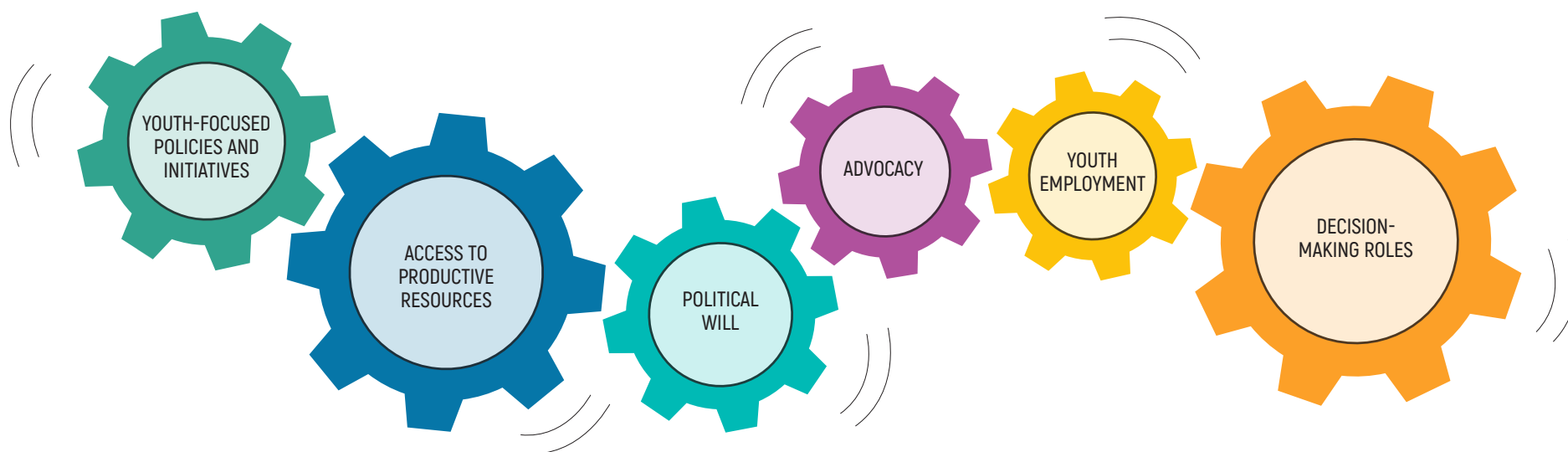
Today's food production systems are not sustainable, depleting finite resources and contributing to catastrophic global environmental change. If young people are to play a meaningful role in shifting to more sustainable food production, a comprehensive toolbox of integrated solutions is needed to kick start positive change.

Removing barriers to engagement is critical. It is also vital to stem the drift of young people to urban centers. Farming is widely seen by youth as a [low status livelihood](#) for old people – and encouraging young people to participate in the agricultural sector poses a significant challenge. Understanding their motivations and aspirations can help develop youth-tailored enablers, incentives, and entry points into food value chains that are attractive to young entrepreneurs.

*Finding ways to attract younger generations to agriculture, with mechanisms to reward and support them, is key to sustained, positive change.*

By providing youth with experience, knowledge, and skills, they can make use of [agroecological strategies](#) and nature positive practices to transform food production. Showing that youth can marry sustainable farming with food value chain businesses to give a stable, secure, and productive future will reward all of society.

### Enabling young food producers and agri-entrepreneurs





## Give youth a seat at the table



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Actually listening to youth and giving them meaningful opportunities to share their views can help them have more of a say in their future. Encouraging [advocacy or direct youth participation](#), for example in delegations, conferences, and working groups, helps amplify youth voices within international, national, and local decision-making as well as within civil society agendas and processes.

At the same time, capacity development, awareness raising, and fit-for-purpose training can help [youth build important skills in advocacy](#), networking, fundraising, entrepreneurship, and the technologies that will help them become food system entrepreneurs.



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Providing space for youth participation also means addressing a widespread policy disregard for their interests, especially those of rural youth, in development programmes. The unfortunate consequence for many countries has been a widespread and [systemic marginalization of young people](#) from agriculture.

The [business case for engaging youth's](#) entrepreneurial energies is compelling, and includes the potential to radiate social, economic, and environmental benefits across both rural and urban communities. Highlighting these returns on investment can spur collaboration across age groups, and the willingness to co-design approaches and practices that integrate traditional and modern methods of food production.



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Designing inclusive policies and programs is an important part of giving youth a seat at the table. However, so too is addressing hidden barriers. Difficulties in accessing land, finance, extension services, education, and technologies may be less obvious, but remain obstacles to fully unleashing the potential of youth.

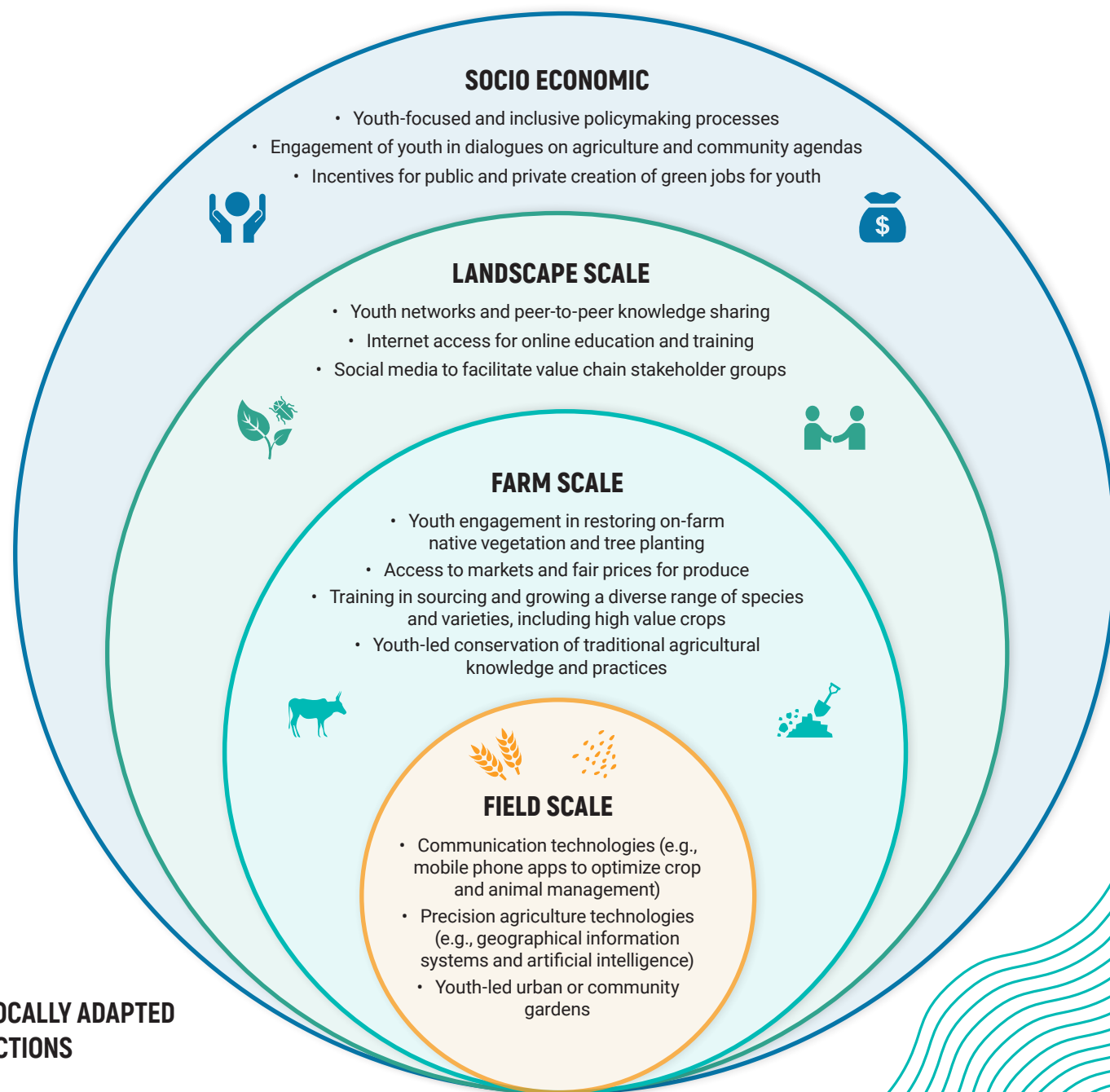
Youth-focused and youth-led initiatives are most successful when they recognize the diverse experiences of youths and their unique circumstances. Well-targeted initiatives can create entrepreneurial and employment opportunities within the wider agricultural sector, giving youth the confidence they need for the future.

## Future land stewards

Today's youth-led campaigning to reverse anthropogenic climate change demonstrates their potential to drive a shift towards regenerative, climate-resilient agricultural practices, such as no-till farming, organic agriculture, or integrated crop and livestock management. Celebrating successes using these methods can inspire a new generation of young farmers and pastoralists as they strive for secure livelihoods.

By embracing regenerative practices, new and existing farmers can work together and be part of a food system that enhances biodiversity and ecosystem functioning, from field to landscape scales. Highlighting the benefits from sustainable agriculture will attract upcoming generations of environmentally conscious food producers. Such a surge will be needed to meet demands from likeminded young consumers, driving positive changes from both ends of the food supply chain.

### LOCALLY ADAPTED ACTIONS





## Youth and urban agriculture

By 2050, 70% of the world's population will live in cities. The pressure to produce and distribute adequate food supplies to urban populations will create opportunities for youth employment and 'agripreneurs' in and around many cities. The [Green Savers Association](#) in Dhaka, Bangladesh is one example. Focusing mainly on urban youth, it offers training and workshops, and conducts research on, and advocates for, urban agriculture and community forestry.

The Association has already supported the establishment of over 3,600 rooftop gardens and 360 model school gardens. It has created some 24 new jobs for 'plant doctors', to provide guidance and expertise on establishing and managing these gardens.

Enabling young people to pursue a career in urban agriculture has given them the credibility and self-confidence to become change makers. Otherwise limited urban employment opportunities have been expanded. The Association also focuses on schools by supporting environmental education on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction and management.







## Youth-led innovation to produce 'more with less'

The smart phone and 'direct to mobile' revolution show how **information and communication technologies** (ICT) are already a huge part of everyday life for youth across the world.

Alongside the '**e-agriculture**' revolution, this offers an innovative pathway for integrating hi-tech solutions alongside regenerative and traditional agriculture in youth-led farming.

The use of AI, drones, GIS, GPS, and other precision agriculture techniques has transformed modern, large-scale food production. Some may consider hi-tech approaches to food production incompatible with agroecology approaches

In Zambia, young entrepreneurs helped

# 20,000

farmers tackle crop pests and diseases using web- and mobile-based services

*Source: FAO. 2019. Youth in motion for climate action! - A compilation of youth initiatives in agriculture to address the impacts of climate change. Rome.*

In Tanzania, youth's agricultural returns increased

# 60%

when private and public partnerships supported links to agribusiness markets

*Source: International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2013. Smallholders, food security, and the environment, Rome.*

In the Philippines,

# 12,000

young people engaged with rice farmers to distribute practical information on climate change adaptation

*Source: FAO. 2019. Youth in motion for climate action! - A compilation of youth initiatives in agriculture to address the impacts of climate change. Rome.*

and regenerative practices or unsuitable for small-scale producers. But developments like '**precision agroecology**' can help produce food in a manner adapted to traditional and local practices, maximizing resource-use efficiencies to generate the higher yields associated with hi-tech agriculture.

*Today's youth are the changemakers of tomorrow, able to guide smallholder agriculture and blend technological innovation with traditional practices.*

Leaders in national and traditional governance, educators, not-for-profit actors, and the private sector can all play a role in ensuring youth have the ICT skills they need for emerging employment opportunities in production and agri-food value chains.





# Allowing youth to shape their future

Youth can provide the **innovation and entrepreneurial drive** needed to accelerate the transition to nature-positive food systems.

Empowering young people to take 'a seat at the table' will help ensure actions that **safeguard climate**, biodiversity, and broader environmental health.

It will also help a range of youth-related issues, including **under- and unemployment**, forced migration, and a need for inter-generational equity around the use of land resources.

**Meeting challenges with opportunities** – The rapid growth in youth population, particularly in developing countries, offers a chronically under-utilized resource for tackling today's global challenges. Youth's leadership in action to halt climate change, reduce inequity and biodiversity loss, offers real momentum for the food systems transformation agenda.

**No one silver bullet** – Opening the door to meaningful youth engagement in the transformation of food systems requires public and private support for policy initiatives and actions. Reform will be needed to break down barriers, including social norms, if youth are to be prepared as tomorrow's leaders.

**Welcoming 'agripreneurs'** – Attracting young people to careers and livelihoods in the agri-food sector is challenging. Incentivizing youth with entrepreneurial talents, ICT capabilities, and creativity requires investments in education and training, safe working conditions, and dignified employment opportunities. Ensuring that youth have access to markets and receive fair prices is vital.

**Diversity in voices** – Recognizing the wide range of motivations and concerns in young people is needed so nobody is left behind. Diverse platforms and mechanisms for participation and advocacy can be implemented to reach all youth and meet their demands for 'nothing about us without us'.



**United Nations**  
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