

# YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

## Policy Brief #2

Reaching young women with agrifood system training programs: Insights from Nigerian youth and private sector representatives

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Over half of Nigeria's 80 million young men and women aged 15 to 24 are un- or underemployed (National Bureau of Statistics 2016). Following the decline of its oil economy in recent years, Nigeria's agrifood sector is expanding to meet the increasing demand for domestic agricultural products that can substitute for imported foods, presenting important new opportunities for youth employment.

The Nigerian government and donor agencies are beginning to expand training programs with the aim of helping youth get the skills and experience they need for successful agrifood system employment

and entrepreneurship. A key question is how to ensure that training and employment opportunities are accessible to young women as well as young men.

This brief summarizes key findings about opportunities for young women in Nigeria's agrifood sector, constraints affecting their participation in agrifood sector training and employment, and options for addressing these constraints. The findings are drawn from a set of focus group discussions (FGD) held in May 2017 with youth and private sector representatives in Oyo, Osun and Ogun States of southwestern Nigeria. Focus groups were composed of separate

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groups of young men and women, and parallel groups of selected private sector representatives from the growing poultry, aquaculture, cassava, horticulture and oilseed value chains. Demand for these commodities is expanding rapidly, and with them, the potential for youth jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities (Allen *et al.* 2016).

Focus group participants were asked to consider opportunities and constraints for a target group of economically disadvantaged, out-of-school young men and women between the ages of 18 and 24. The questions covered three main areas: 1) characteristics of underemployed or unemployed youth; 2) youth awareness of agrifood sector employment and business/enterprise opportunities; and 3) training program characteristics and constraints affecting participation by young women and men. The key questions are summarized in Table A1 in the annex.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Characteristics of underemployed or unemployed youth and implications for program design and implementation

*Most young people aged 18 to 24 are still living at home*

Focus group discussion participants estimated that about two-thirds of young men and women between the ages of 18 and 24 are “dependent,” i.e., they live with their parents, guardians, spouses or

partners. For both men and women, parental, spousal or partner consent may be required or important in order to engage these youth in training programs and ensure their continued commitment. This is particularly true for young women aged 18–24, who may have restrictions on their movements and/or bear significant household responsibilities.

*Many young women in the target group already have children*

Male and female FGD participants across all three states emphasized that a high percentage—over half—of out-of-school young women were already mothers, either single parents or married, and noted that this was common in their age group. Single mothers may have special challenges that limit their ability to participate in training programs. Without family support, these women may be severely time-constrained or limited in the activities they can undertake outside the household. Participants said it would be helpful to undertake awareness campaigns targeting parents and guardians as well as potential trainees as part of initial outreach efforts on new training programs. Sharing information to help them understand the program being offered and the potential benefits for a daughter, sister or partner, may help to gain their approval and support for young women to participate.

In cases where young women applicants have small dependent children, new training programs may consider providing onsite child care facilities. In addition, programs may wish to give preference to eligible young mothers with a strong



family support system. Potential training participants could be asked, for example, to have a close adult relative accompany them to an informational session to learn about the program, and sign a consent form to explicitly indicate the family's support for the young woman's participation. The need for ongoing family support and/or onsite accommodations for child care at the training center or workplace will also have implications for formal employment or entrepreneurship opportunities that can be made available to young women with children.

*Ongoing household and family responsibilities make it more challenging for young women to enter the formal workforce*

The FGDs with young women highlighted the need for a flexible working environment—in terms of time required and location of businesses—that would allow them to participate in the income-generating activity, in addition to managing their household and family responsibilities. Young women with children may find entrepreneurship programs a better fit than programs which place them in formal sector employment, given that formal sector jobs tend to have limited flexibility on work hours and location. In addition, focus group participants noted that young women are more likely than young men to already have experience in business, running/managing small enterprises or working for businesses as sales girls, storekeepers, apprentices or hawkers. Based on this experience, the young women may already have some skills in entrepreneurship.

*Target youth, especially young women, may have lower education levels and English language proficiency*

Level of education and English language skills are important considerations in the design of recruitment and curriculum materials. Young women in the FGDs generally had some primary school, with perhaps a year or two of secondary school education, and basic English language comprehension. Recruitment applications and curriculum materials—written and oral—would need to be carefully designed to reflect the language and comprehension levels of the target youth. It may be necessary, for example, to develop materials that use very simple English and pictures, or translate materials into pidgin English or local languages.

### **Youth awareness of agrifood sector employment and enterprise opportunities**

*Young men and women in rural and urban areas rely on different information channels*

The lack of awareness by youth may be related to how positions and entrepreneurial opportunities are advertised. FGD participants said that they use various channels to learn about existing job opportunities, and some gender differences were noted. Internet channels, including various forms of social media, and billboards, radio advertisements, word of mouth through friends and family, and handbills/flyers were identified as the most important sources of job information for young



women and men in the three states, especially in urban areas. Television, newspapers and door-to-door searches were also cited by young women as additional, but less important, sources of job information. In rural areas, radio was a key information channel for young women. Young men also indicated they get job information from civil society organizations, churches, mosques and job centers.

While many young people are likely to own or have regular access to a basic cellphone, young men were more likely to own smartphones than young women, enabling them to use social media as a key channel for accessing job information on available formal jobs. There was also a difference in information channels used by rural and urban youth. For example, in Ogun State, radio was the preferred source of job-related information for young women in rural areas, while urban-dwelling young women relied more on the internet.

*Other gender differences affect how young men and women receive and act on job information*

Youth participating in the FGDs perceived that young men have better access to information on existing agrifood job opportunities compared to young women. The participants attributed the differences to several interrelated factors. First, as a result of cultural/societal expectation that a man should provide for his family, young men feel more pressure to earn an income and are more aggressive and proactive at searching for jobs than young women. Young men in the focus groups felt that

the societal definition of a “responsible” young man as one who works (has a job) strongly propels young men to find employment.

Second, gender disparities in cellphone ownership (estimated by focus group participants as 80% for young men and 50% for young women in the 18–24 age group) suggest that young men may be more likely to have access to job information provided through this important channel. Third, the gender division of domestic roles and responsibilities makes it more difficult for young women to access job information. Cultural norms act to restrict young women’s movements and social networking outside the home. By contrast, young men have fewer domestic responsibilities, are able to travel more freely, and have more time for leisure and socialization, which makes it easier for them to be exposed to job-related information.

The focus group discussion findings summarized above suggest that training programs should use a combination of communication approaches to insure that the information reaches both young women and men across urban and rural areas. In particular, over-reliance on the internet and social media as a communication channel may limit outreach to economically disadvantaged young people of both sexes, particularly to those in rural areas and young women.



## Addressing constraints to youth participation in agrifood training programs

*Restrictions on young women's mobility should be factored into the selection of recruitment and training sites*

Youth FGD participants noted that it is difficult for young unmarried women, especially those of the Islamic faith, to leave their homes for social or educational obligations unless they are supervised by a man. Parents are far more likely to release young men to participate in activities outside the home than young women, due to religious, cultural traditions and security issues. These mobility restrictions reinforce the necessity of building in sufficient outreach to parents and other family members about training programs for which young women are being targeted. It may be helpful to consider building in safety measures to reassure the parents or guardians who will need to provide consent for participation. For example, training programs may consider providing transportation directly from candidates' homes to the training center.

*Provision of childcare may be necessary in order to facilitate young women's participation in training programs*

Training program designers will need to address the special needs of young women and men to retain them in training and through initial employment or business incubation periods. For example, focus group participants suggested that

the provision of childcare services and gender-friendly services such as transport during training, internships and business incubation can be instrumental in encouraging the interest and full participation of young mothers who might otherwise be restricted from participation due to household and family responsibilities and safety concerns.

*Gender stereotypes and perceptions condition available job and enterprise opportunities*

According to focus group participants, available job and enterprise opportunities that are attractive to young men outweigh similar opportunities for young women. For example, women are less likely to be considered or hired for jobs that are physically demanding because of the belief among the employers and women themselves that they are weaker and may not have the physical energy required to undertake some of these jobs. Yet young women in the focus groups indicated that they would be interested in taking advantage of non-traditional opportunities if they are provided with the appropriate technology, or if the activity is mechanized to ease labor demands.

Gender awareness training can help to address gender-based stereotypes by helping participants, including young women, examine their assumptions about the stereotypes, norms, traditions and taboos that affect young women's participation in value chain activities. Through the training, potential employers and youth can be made aware of the consequences of gender-based discrimination on individuals and society,



and become sensitized to stereotypes they may hold unconsciously, such as that young women can only be sales clerks or mainly engage in domestic/household chores. Providing examples and access to female role models in non-traditional jobs and enterprises is an important part of training and continuing support to young women trainees.

*Strategies to open traditionally male-dominated activities to young women*

Just as agricultural opportunities have to be made “cool” to increase youth participation, it will also be important to consider ways in which traditionally male-dominated activities can be made more attractive to young women. This might be achieved, for example, through the introduction of technological improvements, including mechanization (labor-saving, simple to operate machines). For example, the Sing with Me Happily Charity conducts trainings and assists young Ugandan women to become tractor drivers, an alternative to traditionally male-dominated land clearing activities.

FGD participants also recommended working with potential employers to map existing opportunities for employment in their companies and skills required, detail the methods used in each task (manual labor, machinery, mix), and identify specific opportunities to expand female participation. The training program may target skills transfer to young women who are interested in taking up these opportunities. In collaboration with government or donor programs, training

programs may be able to provide incentives to employer “first adopters” who offer opportunities to young women to take up non-traditional jobs.

*Youth, especially young women, find it difficult to access start-up finance*

According to focus group participants, it is difficult for young people in general to obtain financial resources to start new businesses. In addition, despite the prevailing perception that women are more trustworthy and less likely to default on debt repayments, young women have even fewer options for raising capital to start businesses than young men. The cultural perception that it is the responsibility of young men to provide for their families makes it more socially acceptable to lend money to young men than to young women. Young men also belong to larger social networks through which they can access small loans. In addition, inheritance patterns that disadvantage women, and patriarchal culture more generally, make it easier for young men to provide land title as collateral for a formal bank loan.

Findings from the FGDs suggest that training programs have an important role to play in supporting youth- and gender-equitable access to business start-up resources. One of the most critical functions for training programs is to help build relationships between youth and potential lenders, starting with identifying potential resources and building lender confidence that youth going through the training programs will have the required skills and ongoing support to succeed



with their businesses and repay the loans. Lending institutions may, for example, be consulted on key skills and experiences needed by young women and men, and invited to contribute to module development and class instruction.

The training program may also put emphasis on developing private sector mentors who can work with young men and women on business plan development and provide ongoing advice to solve problems. As lenders come to know and trust the training program and as results are tracked, they may be encouraged to provide youth greater access to loan funds.

*Building soft skills for all youth, and self-esteem for young women, are key training priorities*

Private sector focus group participants noted their perception that young men and women in the age range of 18–24, economically disadvantaged, and out of school had very weak soft skills, including leadership, teamwork, self-presentation, decision-making skills, communication, and self-discipline. The FGD participants viewed these skills as essential for improving youth success as employees or entrepreneurs, and recommended that training programs dedicate substantial time to improving soft skills in addition to technical agriculture and business skill training.

Youth respondents noted that most young women lack self-confidence, which is reinforced by gender-based discrimination and prevailing stereotypes. Participants recommended two

approaches to address this problem. First, the training curriculum should include ample background materials, discussions and exercises to help young women understand the causes and consequences of poor self-esteem, and give them tools to overcome it. Second, training programs should identify women who can serve as role models and mentors. These relationships can provide an ongoing source of advice and support, and help young women to develop business networks, improve their confidence and access information on business opportunities.

*Design and delivery of gender-sensitive training*

The FGDs with young people and private sector representatives led to additional discussions among the authors of this brief about specific actions that training programs can take to help counteract the prevailing gender bias in agrifood sector employment and contracting. We make four recommendations.

First, the language and content of the curriculum should be sensitive to gender specific needs and not reinforce stereotypical behavior and roles. For example, pictorial representation and language used in written and oral presentations should explicitly address and promote both genders as being equal and equally proactive.

Second, there is a need to build gender capacity for the trainers to ensure that trainers have the capacity to deliver training in a gender sensitive manner, including ongoing coaching and



monitoring to harmonize attitudes and continue to strengthen gender sensitivity among trainers.

Third, the curriculum should include periodic monitoring, feedback and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that gender training objectives are being met.

Finally, we recommend that training programs commit to providing the same quality of training, including internship and enterprise incubation opportunities, irrespective of gender or physical strength.





Table A1: Key Focus Group Questions

<b>Questions on employment opportunities and challenges</b> <i>(with probes for differences by gender and education)</i>	<b>Questions on entrepreneurial opportunities and challenges</b> <i>(with probes for differences by gender and education)</i>
1. What barriers hinder you from finding and hiring youth?	1. What specific obstacles or opportunities would youth have in operating new enterprises? And in getting a sales order from your business?
2. What support or programs (government, NGO, private sector) are <u>available and effective</u> to assist the underemployed or unemployed youth to develop skills or find a job? And to assist/encourage/support you (i.e. potential employers) to hire youth? What gaps in support exist?	2. What support or programs (government, NGO, private sector) are <u>available and effective</u> to assist the development of youth enterprises? What support gaps exist?
3. What are the 5 most important ways that a training program can help in preparing youth for jobs?	3. What are the top 5 ways that a training program can help in developing successful youth enterprises?
<b>YOUTH SPECIFIC GROUPS</b>	
EMPLOYMENT	ENTREPRENEURSHIP
1. Are you aware of job opportunities in this value chain?	1. Are there opportunities for business/enterprise development that are attractive to young women/young men along this value chain? Which are these opportunities?
2. How do you access information on available job opportunities in this value chain?	2. What skills do you need to take advantage of these enterprise development opportunities?
3. Who is more likely to have information about employment opportunities? Young girls? Young boys? Why?	3. How easy or difficult is it for young women/young men to demonstrate these skills?
4. Where are the opportunities for employment along these value chains that are more (or less) attractive to young women/young men?	4. What resources are needed to take advantage of these enterprise opportunities?
5. What major challenges/constraints are specific to young women (young men) in accessing these existing employment opportunities? In your opinion what should be done to address these constraints?	6. What other factors based on your gender affect your ability to take advantage of these opportunities? In your opinion, what should be done to address these factors?
7. Are there jobs along these value chains that girls/boys <u>cannot</u> be recruited for? For each job type, why?	8. Are you aware of any <u>job or entrepreneurial training programs</u> targeted to young men/women in this area?
9. Are there jobs along these value chains that girls are <u>more likely</u> to be recruited for? For each job type, why?	9. If yes, describe these programs? (Who, when, where, what.)
	10. How do you access information about these programs?
	11. What are the main pros and cons of these types of training programs?
	12. What suggestions would you have to make these programs more accessible to young men/women in this area?



## Resources

Allen, A., Howard, J., Kondo, M., Jamison, A., Jayne, T., Snyder, J., Tschirley, David, and Yeboah, Kwame Felix. (2016). Agrifood youth employment and engagement study (AGYEES). Report for Mastercard Foundation. East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University.

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