



# YOUNG PEOPLE AND AGRICULTURE

## Strategic Priorities for Impact

MAY 2017

### The Opportunity

Sub-Saharan Africa has the world's youngest population; it is home to 200 million young people and two out of every three Africans are under the age of 25. A majority of these young people live in rural areas where the agricultural sector remains the dominant source of employment and livelihoods: agriculture accounts for about 50% of employment in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>1</sup> and makes up about 20% of GDP.<sup>2</sup>

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1 World Bank DataBank, World Development Indicators database, accessed 01/09/17. <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=world-development-indicators>

2 Average across 38 countries and using latest available data for each (1983 - 2014) from ONE's analysis of the ILO's 2015 Key Indicators of the Labor Market database, accessed 01/09/2017; [http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/research-and-databases/kilm/WCMS\\_422402/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/research-and-databases/kilm/WCMS_422402/lang--en/index.htm).

**While the narrative around agriculture in Africa can invoke a story of back-breaking labor and subsistence, with agriculture seen as a last resort option for poor,<sup>3</sup> there is a much different story to cultivate.** Investing in agriculture growth is 11 times more effective for overall economic growth when compared to other sectors such as mining, utilities, and services.<sup>4</sup> In fact, estimates project that African agriculture and agribusiness could be worth \$1 trillion by 2030. Young people, with their creativity, drive and innovation, have incredible potential to revolutionize the sector and their economies, ensuring safe and reputable livelihoods alongside improved household and community food security. It is imperative that we continue to build a positive, reciprocal relationship in which young people are building a vibrant and innovative agriculture sector and, in turn, the sector offers opportunity for young people to build healthy, bright and safe futures.

### **How We Define Young People**

*Mercy Corps understands that young people are a diverse cohort with unique needs. Our definition of young people spans ages 10-24. More specifically, we differentiate between:*

- *Early adolescence 10-14 years;*
- *Late adolescence/youth 15-19 years; and*
- *Youth 20-24 years.*

*We adapt our program approaches so that they are age- and context-specific.*

In addition to strengthening their economies, young people can contribute to their household and community food security. To do so, Mercy Corps is investing in young people as agents of change across our food security and resilience portfolios. In Liberia and Niger, our food security programs recognize that the nutritional and economic status of adolescent girls is an investment in the future nutrition and well-being of their children and the broader community. That is why we target interventions for adolescent girls through Safe Space programming to ensure that girls, boys, and their families have access to information and the assets needed to support girls to stay in school, to delay marriage and pregnancy, and pursue safe livelihoods. In Ethiopia and Uganda, our systems-based approaches to food security and resilience adapt program activities to ensure young people are developing the capacities needed to pursue demand driven on-farm production, alternative off-farm or agri-pastoral livelihoods, or off-farm value chain engagement. These programs recognize that young people, in partnership with communities, are key to future community-level development.

Our **vision** is that young people play vibrant and diverse roles across the agriculture sector—accessing safe, profitable and dignified work throughout agricultural markets and value chains; contributing to the food and nutritional security of their communities; leveraging technology to revolutionize the field; and thriving within supportive environments, including their families, communities and markets.

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3 Maiga et al. (2015). "Are the Youth Exiting Agriculture en Mass?" Mimeo; see for summary: AGRA (2015), Africa Agriculture Status Report 2015: Youth in sub-Saharan Africa, [https://publications.cta.int/media/publications/downloads/1888\\_PDF.pdf](https://publications.cta.int/media/publications/downloads/1888_PDF.pdf)

4 FAO (2012). State of Food Insecurity in the World (<http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/i3027e/i3027e.pdf>) and L. Christiaensen et al. (2011). The (evolving) role of agriculture in poverty reduction: an empirical perspective. *Journal of Development Economics*, 96(2): 239–254.

## Theory of Change

*If young people have equitable roles in agriculture, leverage technology to revolutionize the field, increase skills and knowledge, and access profitable, dignified, and diverse opportunities throughout agricultural markets within an enabling environment, then they will improve the food and nutrition security of their families, increase the resilience of their communities, and drive their economies forward.*



## CAN YOU(TH) DIG IT?

Mercy Corps' AgriFin Accelerate initiative believes that one million smallholder farmers in Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia can have full access to client-responsive bundles of digital financial and informational services that significantly increase farmer productivity and incomes, delivered by growing ecosystems of diverse service providers. The initiative has a heavy focus on youth, using human-centered design approaches to understand their unique needs and perceptions towards agriculture. To generate excitement in farming for youth, the initiative recently launched a reality show '[Don't Lose the Plot](#)', which follows the lives of 4 young farmers. The youth receive guidance and practical insights from agriculture experts on financial planning, planting strategies, agricultural inputs and marketing. After 9 months the farmer with the most profitable and sustainable farm wins an agricultural investment worth \$10,000. Using youth-friendly, creative media, the initiative aspires to revolutionize the way young people perceive farming.

# Principles for Engagement

Based on Mercy Corps' global experience in engaging young people in agriculture, we have learned that the following principles for engagement are critical for success:

- 1) **Intentional, nuanced approaches.** The needs, challenges, and aspirations of every young person are unique and vary across communities and contexts. We must seek to understand segments of young people by age and sex and promote intentional programming that resonates with these differences. We differentiate young people by male and female in the following groups to help guide the tailoring of program activities: early adolescence 10-14 yrs; late adolescence/youth 15-19 yrs; and youth 20-24 yrs. These age and sex distinctions are incredibly important with regard to promoting safe, decent, and meaningful work in agricultural value chains and beyond.
- 2) **Youth-led, market-led design.** Young people must be in the lead in shaping their futures; facilitating youth-led design and participatory processes is critical to ensure buy-in, a broader understanding of how market systems work, and thus sustainability. Youth need assistance in understanding, accessing and developing the many agriculture-related economic opportunities that exist beyond production. Our initiatives first identify the gaps and entry points for youth in agricultural value chains and market systems and then design appropriate interventions, ensuring that all of them, from skill building to accessing financial services, are based on the needs of the local market.
- 3) **Emphasis on protection and safety.** Youth, and especially adolescents and young women, are particularly vulnerable to pressure on their time, what they can or cannot do, and risks associated with violence. As such, providing an environment that allows safe access to markets, addresses time poverty, and challenges gender and social norms that limit girls' and women's engagement at the household and community levels is paramount if we are to truly empower whole communities. Throughout, Mercy Corps ensures that work within agriculture-related areas is safe, decent, and equitable.
- 4) **Strengthened ecosystems for young people to participation.** We cannot work with young people in isolation of other market actors. Mercy Corps engages parents, peers, teachers, private sector, government, etc. to ensure that young people receive the support they need in their pursuit of agricultural endeavors. Mercy Corps builds positive social capital of young people and their wider community. Addressing gaps in the enabling environment also includes understanding the formal and informal norms that prevent and promote young people to participate in agriculture, such as access to land, attitudes towards participation in agriculture, etc.
- 5) **Leveraging technology.** Young people navigate the world of technology better than any other demographic. As agriculture is increasingly influenced by technology, our programs must also ensure that these innovations are thoughtfully integrated into programming to enhance youth interest and success in the sector. Access to market information, connectivity with peers and economic actors, access to financial services, digital learning, and production technologies can all improve participation and motivation of young people in agricultural markets.



# A Framework for Impact

Young people have varying needs and capacities, as well as roles and responsibilities in their communities. Our strategy seeks to meet young people where they are and leverage their interests and abilities, while building their capacities and tapping into their potential. Our framework builds on our larger work in this sector and focuses on three distinct areas: 1) targeting adolescent girls for homestead production and improved nutrition; 2) targeting youth for improved on-farm production, with a focus on gender-sensitive interventions; and 3) engaging youth in off-farm economic pursuits within larger agricultural market systems.

## Empower Adolescent Girls (ages 10-19) for Nutrition and Food Security

**Why?** Fostering girls' involvement in homestead agriculture (i.e., increased access to and ownership of home gardens, including small ruminants) can have substantial impacts. Building girls' knowledge and skills around agriculture, coupled with life skills such as decision-making, nutrition knowledge and financial literacy, can contribute to improved nutrition and food security for households and communities. Investing in girls is also an avenue to cultivating more equitable gender norms that support their participation in their families and communities. When girls have access to basic skills, increased decision-making and economic opportunities including engagement in agriculture, they marry later, have fewer children, and are more likely to seek healthcare for their children. This is confirmed by one study that shows that young women with a basic education invest at least ten times more income into their families as compared to young men.

**How?** Mercy Corps works with families and community leaders to create *safe spaces*—girl only gatherings—for girls to discover, learn and build the social capital needed for healthy and fulfilling lives. Girls learn skills such as gardening, essential nutrition actions, animal care and processing of animal products, financial literacy and decision-making. We also work with “gate-keepers” (families and community leaders) to evolve gender and social norms so that investing in girls is seen as valuable.



### EMPOWERING GIRLS IN NIGER

Women and girls are especially vulnerable to the challenges of life in Niger. As part of our *Sawki* program in the Maradi and Zinder regions of Niger, Mercy Corps has enrolled nearly 5,000 adolescent girls in Safe Spaces. These girls, between 10 and 18, learn life skills—including essential nutrition actions, the risks associated with early pregnancy, and basic literacy—alongside activities like livestock management (i.e., goat production, poultry care, and animal health training); gardening activities; and savings and loans activities. This knowledge is being put to good use: girls report that they plan and prepare family meals, and often deciding what to make.

# Engage Youth (ages 15-24) to Revolutionize On-Farm Production

**Why?** The farming population is aging – the average age of farmers in the world is 60. The population demographic is increasing and changing - we need to increase our production of food by 70% by 2050 to nourish the world's population. Simultaneously, agricultural productivity is stalling; and young people do not always see a lucrative future in agriculture but prefer to seek employment in urban areas. To meet the world's food needs in a sustainable manner, we need innovative and motivated youth engaged in agriculture production. And on-farm production needs young people to grow and transform. This necessitates creative solutions that transform production into an interesting, profitable, and prestigious livelihood for young people.

**How?** First, agriculture needs a new reputation. One that speaks to the economic possibilities it holds and gives it the prestige it deserves. This means exposing young people to agribusiness success stories to improve their perceptions, and building on role models' successes to transfer main messages. This also means working with the broader community to obtain their support. And this means supporting agriculture activities at a young age, through non-formal or formal education. Second, young people need improved access to appropriate resources including land, inputs, infrastructure, age- and sex-appropriate financial services, age- and sex-specific extension services, and ultimately market-driven knowledge and skills. Integrating technology into this learning and information sharing is often a powerful way to ensure we are engaging young people through youth-friendly mechanisms, rather than traditional, antiquated methods. Third, it is key to promote integrated and efficient farming systems where young people's need for "quick money" can be met with short-cycle crops (such as vegetables) paired with long-term income opportunities like tree crops. Finally, building youth social capital and encouraging collective action will strengthen their self-confidence, negotiation power, and voice so that agriculture policies become more friendly to young people generally and young women in particular.



## YOUTH & TECHNOLOGY IN GUATEMALA

With the goal of deterring youth from migrating to cities, Mercy Corps helps youth in Guatemala's Western Highlands adopt appropriate agricultural practices, including drip irrigation and other modern technologies, and provides rigorous agricultural education, skill development and mentoring. With a start-up capital to purchase drip irrigation kits, Mercy Corps assisted 150 young smallholder farmers to adopt technology that would advance their production. Youth were enrolled in Youth Savings and Loans Associations (YSLAs) to allow them to finance investments in additional technologies. To spur demand, a local partner organized information and communications technology (ICT) workshops for young men and women, during which participating youth created videos highlighting the use of modern agricultural production technologies. These videos are made available on mobile-friendly websites and social media. Youth group technical exchanges such as field trips and activities to and with the Ministry of Agriculture, extension services, universities, successful local farmers, and civil society organizations continue to generate interest.

# Beyond the Farm: Unlock Opportunities in Agriculture Markets for Youth (ages 18-24)

**Why?** Agricultural markets extend far beyond the farm. However, when some young people consider work in 'agriculture' they often focus solely on work in the fields and not on the full scope and offerings of a given value chain and larger agricultural systems. Due to limited market information, lack of networks, and constrained mobility, among others, many young people are not aware of the variety of income opportunities that exist along the way from farm to consumers. Mercy Corps believes that identifying specific, appropriate entry points for male and female youth along agriculture markets and unlocking these economic opportunities are critical to strengthening the agricultural and food sectors and increasing incomes. For example, in a palm oil market, male youth may be engaged at the front end (as producers) and females at the end (as sellers), but they may not be aware of or capitalizing on the diverse income opportunities along the way, such as processing, packaging, transportation, and storage. Quite often, a wide array of overlooked or undiscovered employment and self-employment off-farm opportunities await youth in any given value chain.

**How?** To improve and increase participation of male and female youth across agriculture markets, Mercy Corps first works to uncover the full suite of processes and activities within any given agricultural system, with a focus on the gaps that exist to make this market efficient and inclusive. Youth-led labor market assessments can help youth identify those gaps and turn them into business opportunities. Focusing on equipping youth ages 18-24 with entrepreneurship skills, information about market dynamics and prices as well as business registration and access to financial services among others, will enable them to develop their enterprises to fill the market gaps, and thrive within agricultural systems. Additionally, creating exposure and mentoring opportunities between young people and successful, thriving professionals in these areas is a powerful way to enable youth to see the full potential of these economic opportunities.



## › GROWING OPPORTUNITY IN UGANDA

The Driving Youth-led New Agribusiness and Microenterprise (DYNAMIC) program in Uganda is taking a *Making Markets Work for Youth (M4Y)* approach to enabling young people ages 15-24 to thrive in the agricultural sector through both on-farm and off-farm opportunities. The program is engaging 128,980 out-of-school male and female youth in eight districts of Uganda. Through youth-led market research during the program's inception phase, young people discovered the most viable profit income opportunities along select value chains. As identified through the market analysis, young people will be engaging in opportunities such as transport, processing, and retailing in value chains including piggery, cassava, and honey. Local private sector actors are conducting technical trainings to ensure that young people are learning market-relevant skills as well as building their professional networks.

## CONTACT

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### **About Mercy Corps**

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



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