



Report: A+FS network consultation on youth policy alignment

Background

The SDC Agriculture and Food Security (A+FS) Focal Points recently concluded a consultation of network members on youth engagement & employment in agriculture and food systems, to inform them about network member perspectives on this topic. This is related to a set of policy recommendations recently drafted by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) for consideration by member states. The 4-page zero draft circulated by the CFS can be found in various languages [here](#). This report summarizes the A+FS network consultation process and key ideas discussed. The consultation consisted of a launch webinar on 7 February 2022 followed by a 3-week e-discussion.

Launch Webinar

The launch webinar opened with a brief presentation situating the zero draft within the global policy discussion process, after which webinar participants were separated into small groups to discuss the following question: ***What are the key issues to consider concerning youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems?***

A range of responses were captured from the discussion, including:

What/who is youth?

- When it comes to characterising youth, there is no internationally agreed age range (can be anywhere from 15-25 to 15-35).
- There is also a lot of diversity amongst youth (rural-urban, gender, education, ethnicity)

Agriculture/nutrition

- The agriculture sector in many contexts is not attractive to youth, there is a lack of technology, and the sector is not socially recognised
- There is a lack of consideration of nutrition, which mostly appears in reference to agriculture, not food systems as a whole

Engagement/Human Rights

- Youth should be protected to gain agency (principles of UNDROP)
- Support the findings of the HLPE report on youth engagement & employment in agriculture and food systems and strengthen the human rights dimension of it
- It is important for youth to be truly present and not just consulted – to contribute to decision-making. How to enable meaningful youth participation in policymaking should be explored
- Youth need access to education/capacity building to enable engagement
- Should foster inter-generational exchange of knowledge between youth and elders

Employment/entrepreneurship

- Programs should support new jobs and new kinds of jobs throughout food systems
- The rural-urban nexus should also be considered, and youth as a cross-cutting topic, not just in agriculture

E-discussion

The results of the launch webinar discussion were taken together with a consideration of the zero draft to arrive at a set of questions for the e-discussion covering the topics of:

- Youth and Diversity
- Agency
- Human Rights
- Attractiveness of Agriculture and Food Systems

The following sections take up each of the above topics in relation to what was mentioned in the e-discussion and how it relates to the zero draft.

Youth and Diversity

In terms of how youth is characterised, it was noted in the e-discussion that age ranges tend to be used as a proxy to specify youth as a category, with different stakeholders using different ranges (from 15-25 to 15-35), and this approach was endorsed. It was also pointed out that there is a lot of heterogeneity amongst youth (in terms of gender, levels of education, ethnicity, geography, etc.), and that youth can also be characterised as somehow being in a transitional state, between dependence and independence.

Key issues raised in the discussion around gender include the fact that women often face additional obstacles to effective engagement/employment, such as reduced mobility (due to social restrictions, motherhood, personal security) limited access to resources such as land and finance, and restricted access to educational opportunities.

Young men can face similar challenges in relation to access to land and productive resources, and there were several posts referring to the need to strengthen knowledge transfer as well as transfer of property between generations, something that requires a functioning pension system and often reform of land tenure practices.

Connection to the zero draft (including respective recommendation numbers):

The zero draft touches on many of the points raise above, including the heterogeneity of youth (1b) and it encourages greater efforts to gather labour market information to better understand the real situation and variety of activities of youth (1e). The draft also suggests that unpaid labour (including care work, which is mostly done by women) should be recognised and supported (e.g. through public childcare, parental leave, etc.) (2f). Finally, the zero draft mentions the need for support in the transition from school to work for youth across the dimensions of gender, ethnicity and citizenship (2d).

Regarding intergenerational aspects, the draft also touches on ways to support transfers of resources between generations through support for successions, startups and increased access to retirement systems (3b).

Agency

On the topic of enabling youth to exercise agency, to play an active role in society and in their own personal development, a number of crucial factors were raised in the e-discussion, including:

- **Equitable and secure access to land and a variety of other resources** (water, infrastructure to connect to markets, technology, finance, education, adequate nutrition) are necessary to put youth in a position to effectively participate
- The government has a powerful role to play in a variety of areas, including: **broadening access to (startup) capital, promotion of alternative modes of engagement** (e.g. contract farming, urban horticulture) and sensitisation (about good nutrition, potential of organic agriculture) that can improve prospects for youth in agriculture and food systems
- **Access to technologies and services** that could help open up new opportunities for youth in terms of employment and business and unleash creative potential
- That **networking and mutual support** (not only amongst youth, but between youth, family, government and society) should be more extensively developed in order to create better conditions for youth engagement
- Related to the above, is the potential of **'agripreneur' awards and other forms of recognition** for innovation to boost uptake by youth
- More generally, **integration of agriculture and food systems topics in educational systems** can help to generate energy at the same time as it contributes to a more positive image for agriculture and food systems amongst youth
- Governments and agencies need to be proactive in **inviting youth to participate in relevant public fora**. This could include financial assistance to support participation. Such participation can be strengthened by youth forming such things as networks or associations to facilitate collective engagement
- It is important to recognise that creation of an enabling environment for effective youth participation **also requires engagement from parents, civil society, the private sector**

Connection to the zero draft (including respective recommendation numbers):

The topic of Agency also found several parallels in the zero draft, including:

- Promotion of youth participation and leadership in relevant organisations and decision-making fora, from local to global levels (1d)
- The need to engage youth in research related to agriculture and food systems (4d)
- Supporting the key role of youth in promoting social innovation (through social and community enterprises, innovation platforms, etc)(5a)
- Develop digital skills of youth and engage them in co-designing digital solutions (5c)

Less directly, the draft refers to a variety of ways to support capacity development of youth, as well as adequate education, health, hygiene and nutrition (1c), as well as support for financial literacy and linkages with financial institutions (3b). As mentioned in the A+FS e-discussion, many of these things are necessary prerequisites for youth to be in a position to exercise agency.

Human Rights

Regarding human rights and youth, the following points were shared by e-discussion participants:

- There are **policy and research initiatives that address issues of child and youth rights**, most prominently the report of the CFS High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) on Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems, which forms the basis for the orientation of the zero draft, though the HLPE report's human rights-related recommendations are not fully reflected in the draft. There are also relevant rights-related initiatives from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and OHCHR's report on the human rights of youth, which recognises the rights to participation, to sexual and reproductive health and rights, to decent work) and from the International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture (a joint initiative of FAO, IFAD, ILO and IUF).
- There are also various **broader declarations, treaties and initiatives which could be referenced** in the zero draft in relation to human rights. Examples include:
 - UNDROP (UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other People Working in Rural Areas)
 - UNDRIP (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples)
 - UNDF (UN Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028)
 - CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women)
 - International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- It is important to **consider differences between the informal and formal sectors**, particularly as many youth are employed or have businesses in the informal sector. Governments should contribute to the recognition of skills and experience coming from the informal sector, and to support self-improvement of those with such experience

Connection to the zero draft (including respective recommendation numbers):

The draft does advocate taking up relevant global policy instruments and creating accountability mechanisms (1a), and refers to basic rights related to education, health, hygiene and nutrition (1c, 4a), and the promotion of safe and decent work (2e). It does not reference the above instruments directly, and does not fully incorporate the HLPE recommendations, though it does reference the CFS Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (CFS-RAI)(2c) and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (CFS-VGGT) in the context of youth access to land and other productive resources (3a).

Attractiveness of Agriculture and Food Systems

Discussions around this topic covered three main areas: access to productive resources; social recognition of agriculture, and; awareness raising on opportunities in the sector.

Regarding access, the following issues were raised as important to positively influence the attractiveness for youth to work in agriculture and food systems:

- Access to land and relevant inputs
- Access to capital
- Access to (both basic and vocational) education (often outside of the formal system because of availability issues)
- Promotion of new technologies (also relevant for recognition and awareness raising)
- Adequate investment in infrastructure that enables access to markets
- Further development of training offers tailored to youth and to young people's life situations (e.g. young mothers and their various constraints)

Regarding recognition

- Promotion of local products in markets
- Institutionalising youth representation in relevant decision-making bodies (from local to national to international level)
- Institutionalising youth (and broader) rights in agriculture and food systems-related policies and programs
- Investing in and highlighting youth-driven activities in the sector (also relevant for access and awareness)

Regarding awareness raising

- Better informing youth about (self-)employment opportunities, especially in broader food systems contexts
- Inclusion of agriculture and food systems in school curricula at primary and secondary levels
- Promote evolution of gender roles in relation to engagement in the sector in general and business development/ownership in particular
- Explore and promote potential career paths for young people to develop a better sense of actual possibilities (across food systems)

Connection to the zero draft (including respective recommendation numbers):

The draft contains references to many of the points mentioned above, for example: resource access through appropriate land tenure, succession and retirement systems (3a, also ref. CFS-VGGT, 3b); inclusion of agriculture and food systems in educational curricula (4b); adequate training and vocational education (4c) as well as engagement of youth in research (4d); support for digital services and infrastructure and development of digital skills for youth (5b, 5c, 5d).