



LANDLESS YOUTH:

A BARRIER TO AGRICULTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

The rapid spread of mobile phones across Africa has ignited hope that technology will play a crucial role in adapting the continent's agriculture sector to climate change. Information Communication Technology (ICT) holds immense potential for farmers: from providing [updated weather forecasts and market price information](#) to [diagnosing crop diseases](#) and offering [tips on best practices](#), ICTs provide farmers with access to information necessary to adapt to climatic uncertainty. However, taking a closer look reveals that current farmers may not be well positioned to utilize these technologies.

Lost in the frenzy of attention on Africa's youth bulge is the fact that the average African farmer is [60 years old](#). Usage of mobile phones, especially ones that access the internet, varies significantly by age group: those aged 18-25 have mobile phone internet access ([57%](#)) at nearly triple the rate of those aged 56 and above ([20%](#)). Additionally, [86%](#) of those 56 and above never use the internet, greatly limiting the potential rate of ICT adoption for the older age groups that control the majority of farmland. These statistics, in addition to [higher levels of education for the younger generations](#), suggest youth are better positioned to realize the full range of benefits ICTs can bring, yet youth are increasingly [turning away from agriculture](#).

Despite a common misperception that youth are not interested in farming, data suggests that they would be *but for* structural impediments such as a lack of secure access and rights to land. In fact, many researchers point to lack of secure land rights as the number one reason youth have not engaged in farming in Africa.



Obstacles to Youth Land Rights

There are [six key challenges](#) that constrain youth from accessing secure land to help modernize African agriculture and create jobs:

- Unfavorable land tenure systems and customary practices;
- Over reliance on inheritance, which limits choices in terms of timing, size, quality and location of land;
- Undeveloped land rental and sales markets;
- Lack of resources to buy or rent land;
- Inadequate access to information and lack of legal protection of land rights for the youth; and
- Lack of provision for youth in state-sponsored land redistribution programs.

Customary land systems offer few options for youth to control land while their parents are still alive, and sub-divided plots among siblings are often too small to support viable livelihoods. Discriminatory cultural barriers, social norms and customary rights make it even [more difficult for young women to access land](#).

Places in Africa with functioning market-based land systems offer few opportunities as youth struggle with [low savings and limited access to credit needed to access these markets](#). In Ethiopia, where the government distributes land, youth have historically received [far less land than their share](#). Integrated [market- and government-based policy](#)

[actions](#) are required to improve youth access to land, financial services, and entrepreneurial skills needed for viable commercial farming.

When youth are unable to access land, and are therefore not farming, innovations aimed at improving agricultural productivity in Africa face an uphill climb. This has enormous implications for donors, who collectively pour millions of dollars into agricultural programming aimed at reducing poverty and food insecurity, increasing household incomes, and sparking value chain development that can promote socio-economic growth in rural areas. Likewise, it is difficult to imagine vibrant and dynamic uptake of efforts to combat and adapt to climate change in many regions of Africa when youth are excluded from ownership and control of the land upon which these efforts are based.

In short, efforts to increase productivity and bolster climate adaptation across sub-Saharan Africa must include the re-engagement of youth in agriculture. Doing so will require embracing new and innovative approaches to land markets and customary systems that have widely excluded youth in the past.

Across the continent, [agricultural cooperatives](#) have emerged as a viable way to give youth access to land and allow them to develop skills necessary to be successful farmers. Innovative solutions outside of cooperatives include allowing youth to act as [ICT trainers and consultants](#) for older farmers in the community, giving them a source of income while they await access to land; and using agricultural technologies to maximize young people's use of small land parcels as in [greenhouses and vertical gardening systems](#).

How have African governments responded to youth landlessness and what more can be done?

Major commitments to improving youth access to land have been made by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) in coordination with the African Union Commission and African Development Bank. Through the [African Declaration of Land Issues and Challenges in Africa](#), governments resolved to ensure the development of land laws and policies that promote equitable access to land for youth and other landless groups. Additionally, the [Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods](#) made a commitment to institute appropriate policies to create job opportunities for at least 30% of the youth in agricultural value chains by 2025. As full implementation across individual countries will require further political support, looking at the youth land access issue as a necessary step towards increased ICT usage may be helpful in framing the important role youth can play in modernizing African agriculture.

Lessons learned from IFAD-supported projects point to potential [long-term solutions](#) to address youth landlessness and land tenure insecurity. These long-term solutions include:

- Strengthening of legislation, local institutions and legal services for youth to ensure that their rights to land are recognized and defended;
- Development of youth-oriented advocacy;
- Development of land markets as mechanisms for providing access to land, along with transparent regulatory frameworks that help to ensure broad-based access to these mar-

LANDESA'S HISTORY

Landesa is an international non-governmental organization based in Seattle that fights poverty and provides opportunity and security for poor rural women and men through the power of land rights. Insecure land rights are a leading factor in extreme poverty, food insecurity, gender inequality, conflict, environmental destruction, and sluggish economic growth. Additionally, more than one billion poor rural people around the world lack legal rights to the land on which they depend to survive.

Landesa has partnered with governments and civil society to develop pro-poor and gender-sensitive laws, policies & programs to help secure land rights for 180+ million families in more than 50 countries over 50 years. Landesa currently has active projects in Brazil, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Myanmar, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

kets by youth, women, and others;

- Creating more options for rural youth to participate in off-farm employment along the value chain, from selling inputs to farmers to engaging in processing and post-harvest work;
- Identification and promotion of small, land-intensive farming activities that target young people; and
- Strengthening of rural youth organizations and youth's participation in policy-making processes.

The above solutions are supported by emerging lessons learned from a global USAID [YouthPower](#) review of what works in youth and agriculture, food security, and nutrition projects. The most promising youth and land interventions are those that seek to strengthen (a) youth organizations and youth participation in land policy making processes, (b) support for education and awareness-raising activities for youth to understand their land rights, and (c) youth access to legal services to enhance youth's capacity to recognize and defend land rights.

In Kenya, Liberia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, [Landesa](#), is working with local partners to promote youth access to farmland through various initiatives including youth land tenure assessments and land rights tool development, civil society capacity building, land rights awareness and educational campaigns, review of land laws and policies and strengthening of young women's land rights. As African governments continue to develop inclusive land and agricultural development policies, concerted efforts are needed to enhance youth access to land and land tenure security to promote effective youth engagement in farming.