

Global Food Security Strategy Technical Guidance for Youth

This is one of 18 technical guidance documents for implementing the U.S. Government's Global Food Security Strategy. The entire set of documents can be found at www.feedthefuture.gov and www.agrilinks.org.

Introduction

To achieve the objectives of the U.S. Government's [Global Food Security Strategy](#) (GFSS)¹ and [A Food-Secure 2030](#)² vision, we need to harness the creativity and energy of the world's largest generation of young people ever. There is a strategic imperative for investing in youth: Young people are critical to global stability, economic growth, and development today and into the future. Country by country, the youth demographic needs to be understood and mainstreamed into U.S. Government programming. To create better opportunities along agri-food systems, the GFSS prioritizes "Increased youth empowerment and livelihoods" across all objectives in cross-cutting IR 4.

This technical guidance describes ways to optimize the intentional inclusion of youth issues into policy and programming and promote young people's role in their design and implementation to reduce poverty, improve nutrition, and help men, women, and households become more resilient. It outlines how, in certain circumstances, youth-specific programming is needed to complement youth-inclusive activities and emphasizes empowering adolescent girls and young women.

Background

Rural youth and peri-urban youth face different issues from urban youth. They often have to make their own opportunities through self-employment or mixed livelihoods,³ often a combination of agriculture and non-agricultural activities. Their constraints may be lack of access to land to farmland, lack of capital, and, in peri-urban areas, lack of access to suitable space to start their own businesses. On the other hand, urban unemployment or underemployment may be caused by a lack of labor demand or a mismatch of opportunities with skills. Significant academic literature focusing on evaluating programs targeted at rural youth and understanding the contrasts with urban youth is still missing.

Rural economic transformation, an important part of economic development, involves the rural labor force moving into higher productivity activities through the application of technology and capital, as well as through migration to towns and cities. Youth with more education and more interest in new technology can be instrumental to this change, in both farm and off-farm activities.

Youth are important to rural economic transformation, and thus overall economic development, but there is little research and analysis on how best to involve them in the change process. This document includes emerging best practices and identifies four pathways to employment for youth in rural areas and towns, with the understanding that young people may routinely move between or combine these:

- Stay in rural area where born, work on family farm.
- Stay in rural area or migrate to town, find full-time wage employment (on large commercial farm or in agro-processing).
- Start own new farm (may involve migration to area where land is available).
- Start own new non-farm household enterprise in local area or through migration.

This guidance moves beyond the conversation about how to make agriculture more attractive to youth and considers how to make agriculture and food systems more lucrative for youth. Youth want to make money. If they see rural areas as a place to make more money than other opportunities, they may be more interested in staying in rural areas or working in the food system. In addition to economic security, we can consider personal security, land tenure and other such priorities as push and pull factors for youth as they decide where to live and work.

Terminology and Context

Understanding the following terms is critical to effective design and implementation of food security activities that empower youth.

Youth: A life stage when one transitions from the dependence of childhood to adulthood independence. The meaning of “youth” varies in different societies. For the purposes of this technical guide, we will use the 10-29 age range while keeping in mind the concept of “life stages,” specifically 10-14, 15-19, 20-24, and 25-29 years as put forward in the [USAID Youth in Development Policy](#).⁴ Feed the Future activities will primarily cover working age youth ages 15-29. Partners may have different age range definitions for youth based on their specific country contexts.

Youth Livelihood: A livelihood comprises the assets (natural, physical, human, financial, and social capital), the activities, and the access to these (mediated by policies, institutions, and social relations) that together determine the earnings gain by an individual or household.

Youth Engagement: [Meaningful youth engagement](#)⁵ is the active, empowered, and intentional partnership with youth as stakeholders, problem solvers, and change agents in their communities. Youth engagement contributes to more sustainable investments that end cycles of poverty; build resilient, democratic societies; improve health and nutrition outcomes; and strengthen economies.

Positive Youth Development⁶ (PYD): The U.S. Government uses this approach to understand adolescents and engage youth, along with their families, communities, and/or governments. Policy and programs that incorporate these seven features of Positive Youth Development result in better outcomes for youth, as well as technical outcomes: skill building (technical, cognitive, and non-cognitive or “soft skills”); youth engagement and contribution; healthy relationships and bonding to positive adult role models; belonging and membership; positive norms, expectations, and perceptions; safe space; access to age-appropriate and integrated youth-friendly services.

Youth empowerment and livelihoods are critical to each of the three GFSS objectives:

Inclusive and sustainable agriculture-led economic growth (Objective 1): Youth engagement in agriculture, both now and in the future, requires concentrated effort to develop policies and intervention strategies that will promote young women’s and young men’s access to productive resources, access to capital, and improvement of skills using both formal and informal educational, training and innovative extension services to make agriculture the sector for employment growth (i.e., “absorb the youth bulge”). Supporting youth of both sexes in agriculture to increase productivity and improve market access is vital to making progress in creating jobs, reducing poverty, and growing the economy.⁷

Strengthened resilience among people and systems (Objective 2): Youth are already contributors to household resilience and including them ensures their maximum contribution. Improving youth entrepreneurship and employment both in and outside of agriculture is a pathway to diversifying livelihood risk and building resilience.⁸ Linking youth to these opportunities requires understanding the

aspirations, social networks, assets, and other resources that inform their choices as well as providing the support needed to overcome barriers to their success. Considering the long-term viability of institutions and successful succession investment in youth is essential.

A well-nourished population, especially among women and children (Objective 3): Optimal maternal and child nutrition is critical for physical and cognitive development, especially during the 1,000 day window of opportunity from pregnancy to a child’s second birthday. Recent evidence identifies addressing the well-being of adolescent girls as critical to ensuring good nutrition during this time. Given sufficient opportunity, including access to education, work, and empowerment, adolescent girls can contribute to improved nutrition and food security in their households and communities and become key contributors to the social and economic advancement of their countries. More broadly, good nutrition continues to play an important role in helping to keep youth — both boys and girls — healthy.

Designing Interventions

Consider “Youth-Inclusive” versus “Youth-Specific” programming: Youth-inclusive programs reach youth as part of a broader target by removing and/or accounting for barriers that may prevent or diminish participation of young people, and are the preference for Feed the Future efforts as they tend to be more cost-effective and scalable. (See program examples below.) There may also be need for youth-specific programming that intentionally targets youth, for reasons that include demographics, political imperative (i.e., fear of political uprising in case of youth employment), and/or disproportionate barriers to youth in that system.

It is essential to collect information about youth cohorts so that you are designing appropriate interventions. There are multiple permutations for how to conduct this analysis. At a minimum, take a **youth-inclusive approach** (“bring a youth lens”) to the other assessments you are doing, including value chain analysis and nutrition context assessment. Youth-inclusive is also referred to as “youth mainstreaming.” Consider a youth analysis and integrate youth into the entire program design from start to evaluation. Analysis should identify:

- Ways in which youth in different developmental stages can be optimally engaged and benefit from the program.
- Barriers and risks that disproportionately affect young people’s ability to enter into and profit from agricultural and production activities.

Conduct youth assessments (sometimes combined with a Gender or Inclusive Development Assessment): Assessments should be conducted at the beginning of the project or sufficiently early and have local and technical staff review findings of the assessment together to ensure the findings and recommendations were incorporated into the workplan. In particular, conduct a youth assessment before value chain selection and before implementation begins, so key decisions that may affect youth inclusion can benefit from the assessment.⁹ Ensure that the assessment accounts for important differentiating factors within youth like gender, age, education, partnership status, parental status, etc. For templates and other practice tools, look for USAID’s forthcoming *Program Design Guide for Youth in Agri-Food Systems*, or the [USAID Guide to Cross-sectoral Youth Assessments](#).

A good youth analysis can signal which negative unintended consequences might arise (e.g., older adults’ appropriation of a commodity controlled by youth when its profitability increases).

The challenge is to optimize the effect of the initiatives on youth without disadvantage to other target groups and individuals. Thus the “youth lens” does not merely try to identify how more youth will benefit from design changes but looks for synergies, complementarities, innovations, and partnerships to yield improved outcomes overall for youth.¹⁰

Track and analyze performance: GFSS indicators have an increased focus on the question of “are we reaching youth and do youth have equitable access?” Several of the GFSS indicators reflect this by directly measuring youth-related outcomes and by disaggregating by youth/non-youth. Programs specifically focused on youth are advised to additionally include custom disaggregates based by stage of life and by sex. National youth definitions can also be taken into account and tracked with custom disaggregates. At the program management level, for indicators that require youth age-disaggregation, consider statistical analysis to compare result for youth versus results for others. USAID has also developed [new measurement tools and indicators](#) for an array of positive youth development outcomes that can be linked to GFSS performance.

Reinforce the enabling environment and channel youth voices: Recognize and incentivize youth champions; engage local youth as consultants during the planning and design stage; participate in, or support the creation of, national or regional youth in agriculture and nutrition forums with youth participation.¹¹

Ensure Relevance and Inclusiveness of Agriculture Education¹²

Rural primary and secondary education that builds universal cognitive and noncognitive skills is the best preparation for stable employment in rural areas or for migration to jobs in urban areas.¹³ Unfortunately, basic education in low-income countries is too often of poor quality. Post-school training, formal and informal, is important to raise productivity. Most post-school agricultural training in the agricultural sector consists of short-term training, which often is made available through agricultural extension and advisory services, contract farming firms, producer organizations, or wholesalers. In addition to these structured or organized educational activities, informal or “on-the-job” learning also occurs through informal exchange among value chain actors in the community. Deliberate efforts should be made to organize or target youth groups, including young females, to bring them into these informal learning networks. Youth often lack capital to invest in raising productivity. To counteract this, programs could expand efforts to increase youth access to technologies that provide quick returns on investment (e.g., hand oil palm presses, rice hullers). Anecdotally, it has been observed that youth often are early adopters of new technology and their potential to be innovation leaders should be nurtured.

The importance of “second chance” opportunities to learn functional numeracy and literacy cannot be overstated as these skills are foundations to economic and social advancement. Collaborations with educational and other initiatives are worth considering.

Evidence shows that using a **Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach** achieves positive multi-sector outcomes in the areas of crime and violence prevention, delay of sexual activity, increased academic and soft skills (non-cognitive skills), increased community engagement, substance abuse prevention and improved relationships with peers and adults.¹⁴

Engaging Youth to Improve Nutrition: Agriculture plays a key role in improving the nutrition of women and children. While increased production and productivity can increase the availability of food for consumption, increase incomes, and decrease the prices consumers pay, these alone do not automatically translate to nutritional gains. Nutrition-sensitive agriculture can help ensure access to and availability and consumption of diverse, nutritious foods by positively affecting the food available for household

consumption as well as the price of diverse foods, generating income for expenditure on food and non-food items, and increasing women's empowerment. Research shows that adolescence is a key window to target and reach youth, especially young females, to invest in their health and nutrition and in the health and nutrition of future generations. Targeting youth as early adopters of improved nutrition practices and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) practices may positively influence their peers, family, and community. The *GFSS Technical Guidance for Nutrition* provides additional information on how to best design and implement nutrition approaches.¹⁵

Common Youth Constraints and Ways to Address Them¹⁶

Female Inequality. Young women and girls have different challenges and opportunities than young men and boys. Young women and girls are often more disadvantaged in access to resources, services, and education and economic opportunities and are more vulnerable to violence and early marriage. Programming needs to account for these differences in order to benefit from young women's contributions. Working with young people creates an opportunity for them to re-shape norms about gender roles in families, communities, and the world of work that can improve food security and nutrition.¹⁷ In particular, empirical evidence suggests that empowering women improves nutrition and overall health for mothers, their children, and other household members by positively affecting women's use of income for food and non-food expenditures, the ability of women to care for themselves and their families, and women's energy expenditure.¹⁸ The *GFSS Technical Guidance for Advancing Gender Equality and Female Empowerment* outlines and gives references for gendered analysis, design, and implementation.¹⁹

Access to Productive Assets: Land and Capital. Rising pressures on land have left many youth with less access to land and limited decision making powers over land use; females are less likely to own, rent, and operate land than males.²⁰ Training youth on land rights, giving them the skills and confidence to participate in decision-making concerning land use, and assisting them to gain secure land access and titles can empower youth. Youth can also be trained to work across the value chain, such as in marketing, extension, and inputs supply. Insufficient access to finance and financial literacy also constrain youth, creating barriers to entry, frustrating their aspirations, and capping growth opportunities in the agriculture sector. Focus on youth savings mechanisms, especially for young women. This can incentivize individuals and groups to seek alternatives, including those associated with participation in violent extremism.²¹

The *Youth Engagement in Agricultural Value Chains Across Feed the Future: A Synthesis Report*²² provides strategies and real examples of technical approaches to these additional common constraints

- Functional Literacy and Numeracy
- Social Networks and Entrepreneurial Confidence
- Selection Processes
- Opportunities for Adolescent Heads of Household
- Indigenous and Other Marginalized Youth (Ethnic and Religious Minorities or Refugees)

Programming in Practice

Youth-Inclusive Programming

Adopting New Technologies: In Guatemala, leading agricultural company Popoyán is prioritizing youth when recruiting lead farmers and hiring distributors of biological pest control products as part of a Feed the Future-supported private sector partnership. Youth tend to be more open to new technologies such as

biological products, which also provide them with a healthier way to treat their crops. Popoyán has discovered that youth are overwhelmingly more willing to adopt new technologies and practices, and the company has developed a targeted marketing strategy focusing on youth as a result.²³

Forming Cooperatives: In Nigeria, Babban Gona is targeting youth for its farmer cooperatives. Cooperative members are eligible for services such as management training, loans, and input purchasing, and are able to get lower prices for inputs and higher prices when selling their crops. This Feed the Future partnership in Nigeria encourages youth — a significant and growing population in Nigeria — to join these groups through a targeted marketing strategy, and Babban Gona is providing them with an opportunity to professionalize their agricultural activities.²⁴

Ensure Relevance and Inclusiveness of Agriculture Education: In Zambia under a Feed the Future partnership, MRI-Syngenta is setting up seedling production and propagation facilities that are owned and operated by entrepreneurial “young plant raisers” who will conduct extension, training, and marketing field days for smallholder farmers. By supporting these young plant raisers, MRI-Syngenta is providing economic opportunities for youth while also addressing a lack of quality seed stock in Zambia and increasing farmers’ awareness and appreciation of the value of hybrid seeds.²⁵

Youth-Specific Programming

Access to Productive Assets and New Technologies: In Guatemala, with limited education and employment opportunities at home, many youth seek to migrate to the United States. The AgriJoven program expands access to savings and credit for youth while encouraging young farmers to allocate their resources toward agricultural technologies and services that improve productivity, agriculture education, and training content. Lack of access to credit further constrains entrepreneurship and income generation among youth. This Feed the Future partnership links youth to agriculture technology trainings and direct market access through a horticulture exporter, connecting training and economic opportunities.

Formal Education: In Liberia, USAID’s Food and Enterprise Development (FED) program responds to the challenges of both youth unemployment and food insecurity by providing opportunities for youth to turn traditional agriculture practices into viable, self-sustaining businesses. A two-year National Diploma in Agriculture curriculum was introduced in consultation with the Ministries of Agriculture and Education to standardize agriculture education curricula. Additionally, the project facilitates linkages between private firms, trade associations, and youth clusters to further support growth of youth innovations and enterprises.

Reinforce the enabling environment and channel youth voices: In Uganda, the Feed the Future Uganda Youth Leadership for Agriculture (YLA) activity is increasing economic opportunities for approximately 350,000 Ugandan female and male youth ages 10 to 35 in agriculture-related fields in order to increase their incomes and build entrepreneurship, leadership, and workforce readiness skills. It targets in-school and out-of-school youth and leverages the private sector to ensure buy-in and sustainability. The project builds relationships with organizations that have the capacity to reach youth at scale. Youth serve as mentors and facilitators in trainings, through youth-friendly outreach and technologies promotion, and youth-led research that in turn provides a framework through which the community and partners can respond to youth needs.

Engaging Youth to Improve Nutrition: In Uganda, the Uganda Nutrition Fellowship invests in young nutritionists to nurture the next generation of skilled, creative, and innovative nutrition leaders. This Feed the Future-supported effort places recent nutrition graduates with host organizations where they are provided with work experience, professional development, and mentorship to promote skill-building in leadership, teamwork, communication, and nutrition technical topics. Through this experience, fellows

put their theoretical knowledge into practice in a real-world setting while enhancing the critical skills needed to reduce malnutrition, a necessary step for Uganda to achieve its vision to become in a middle-income country.²⁶

Reinforce the enabling environment and channel youth voices: The MasterCard Foundation Youth Think Tank engages a diverse network of young researchers across East Africa to design and conduct research on the challenges and opportunities facing young people as they enter the labor market. This sets an example of youth leadership and demonstrates the roles that young people can play in identifying solutions to the challenges they face and informing programming and policies that affect youth.²⁷

Questions about this technical guidance can be addressed to ftfguidance@usaid.gov.

References

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- ⁸ The GFSS Technical Guidance for Livelihoods and Pathways Out of Poverty provides additional information on strategies for diversifying livelihood risk.
- ⁹ Resources include: USAID Guide to Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessments, 2009 http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadz234.pdf. Also see examples and templates in the forthcoming “Design Guide for Engaging Youth in Food Systems and Global Food Security Strategy.”
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- ¹¹ Resources include: Youth Power Six Tips for Increasing Youth Engagement. <http://www.youthpower.org/resources/six-tips-increasing-meaningful-youth-engagement-programs>
- ¹² The GFSS Technical Guidance for Market Systems and Value Chain Programming <https://feedthefuture.gov/resource/global-food-security-strategy-guidance-market-systems-and-value-chains>
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- ¹⁵ GFSS Technical Guidance on Nutrition https://feedthefuture.gov/sites/default/files/resource/files/GFSS_TechnicalGuidance_Nutrition.pdf
- ¹⁶ The LEO Report No. 46: Youth Engagement in Agricultural Value Chains Across Feed the Future: A Synthesis Report[#] provides strategies and real examples of technical approaches to these additional common constraints: Functional Literacy and Numeracy, Social Networks and Entrepreneurial Confidence, Selection Processes, Opportunities for Adolescent Heads of Household, Indigenous and Other Marginalized Youth (Ethnic and Religious Minorities or Refugees) <http://www.acdivoca.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/LEO-Youth-Engagement-Ag-VCs-Across-FTF.pdf>
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²¹ See the GFSS Technical Guidance on Livelihoods and Pathways Out of Poverty for more information.

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²³ More information available via “Developing Innovative Pest Control Products in Guatemala” blog, April 2016

<https://agrilinks.org/blog/developing-innovative-pest-control-products-guatemala>

²⁴ Read more about Babban Gona on their website <http://www.babbangona.com/>

²⁵ Read more about this example on the Feed the Future Partnering for Innovation website <http://partneringforinnovation.org/mri-syngenta.aspx>

²⁶ Read more about this example on FANTA’s website: <https://www.fantaproject.org/news-and-events/impact-story-preparing-young-nutrition-graduates-lead-fight-against-malnutrition>

²⁷ The most up to date research findings of the Youth Think Tank will published online annually, the most recent report is entitled "Insights into Youth Economic Opportunities in East Africa" and is available for download from <http://www.mastercardfdn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/MCF12013-Youth-ThinkTank-Report-digital-final.pdf>. The Youth Think Tank can be contracted to work with agencies and partners to understand and improve how they’re doing youth engagement as well as collaborate on research.