
IFAD Rural Youth Action Plan 2026–2031

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Useful references: Report of the Consultation on the Thirteenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD13) (monitorable action #9) ([GC 47/L.5](#))

Action: The Executive Board is invited to take note of the updated IFAD Rural Youth Action Plan 2026–2031, which has been revised pursuant to the IFAD13 commitment.

Technical questions:

Juan Carlos Mendoza Casadiegos

Director
Environment, Climate, Gender and Social Inclusion
Division
e-mail: juancarlos.mendoza@ifad.org

Hisham Zehni

Lead Technical Specialist (Youth) and Social
Inclusion Cluster Coordinator
Environment, Climate, Gender and Social Inclusion
Division
e-mail: h.zehni@ifad.org

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Executive summary

1. Rural youth face disproportionate challenges, including limited access to education, finance, land and decent jobs. Most are informally employed in regions where climate change threatens agricultural productivity. Despite these barriers, rural youth show remarkable resilience and are increasingly leading the development of innovative technological solutions for agrifood system transformation. Harnessing this potential is critical for global food security and economic growth.
2. In response to the global context, IFAD has progressively increased its strategic focus on rural youth and made this focus the core of its programme of work. While significant progress has been made, several lessons have been identified that could further improve the effectiveness and impact of the Fund's work in this area.
3. The IFAD Rural Youth Action Plan (RYAP) 2026–2031 has been developed in response to commitments made under the Thirteenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources, specifically, monitorable action #9, which calls for the new action plans on youth, gender and nutrition. It is a six-year plan to strengthen IFAD's efforts to enable rural young women and men to benefit from increased remunerative employment, entrepreneurship and empowerment opportunities.
4. The action plan is structured around three strategic objectives: (i) enhance the relevance of IFAD's youth-sensitive programming to meet country demands; (ii) improve the effectiveness of youth-sensitive programming in IFAD's portfolio; and (iii) strengthen the decision-making, agency and empowerment of rural young people.
5. These objectives will be achieved through four interconnected action areas:
 - **Action area 1: Country programme delivery.** Embedding high-quality youth-sensitive design and implementation practices.
 - **Action area 2: Capacity development.** Enhancing the skills and tools available to IFAD teams and country partners, especially within project management units.
 - **Action area 3: Knowledge management and policy engagement.** Generating and applying evidence to improve programmes and influence policy.
 - **Action area 4: Partnerships and resource mobilization.** Strengthening collaboration with youth-led organizations and mobilizing funding for youth-focused initiatives.
6. Ultimately, RYAP 2026–2031 seeks to position rural youth not merely as beneficiaries, but as active co-creators of sustainable and inclusive rural transformations.

IFAD Rural Youth Action Plan 2026–2031

I. Introduction and context

A. Introduction

1. The **IFAD Rural Youth Action Plan (RYAP) 2026–2031** aims to strengthen IFAD's systems, processes and capacities to deliver high-impact results for young rural women and men. It sets out priorities for enhancing youth-sensitive mainstreaming across IFAD's country operations, policy engagement, knowledge systems and partnerships.
2. RYAP 2026–2031 has been developed in response to IFAD13 commitments, specifically monitorable action #9, which calls for new action plans on youth, gender and nutrition. It builds on the foundations laid by the Rural Youth Action Plan 2019–2021, which aimed to mainstream a youth focus across IFAD's programme of work. Importantly, this new action plan benefits from accumulated practical experience and lessons learned since 2019 and an updated analysis of the evolving context faced by rural youth. Its aim is to better position IFAD to deepen and scale up youth-focused outcomes within its operations.
3. The action plan's formulation was highly participatory and shaped by extensive consultations with a diverse range of stakeholders within and outside of IFAD. Crucially, the plan has been significantly strengthened by the direct input of young people, whose insights and priorities were actively sought and integrated, placing rural youth voices at the centre of its development.
4. RYAP 2026–2031 is closely aligned with IFAD's corporate strategies and action plans on targeting, gender, nutrition, climate, Indigenous Peoples, disability inclusion, private sector engagement and fragility. It also leverages South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) as a strategic modality for accelerating knowledge exchange, fostering peer learning and scaling up successful youth initiatives.
5. Through RYAP 2026–2031, IFAD reaffirms that meaningful youth engagement is a central driver of inclusive and sustainable rural transformation and commits to engaging with youth as co-creators of the future they aspire to build.

B. Global context: Challenges and opportunities faced by rural youth

6. **Rural youth represent a critical demographic facing urgent and interconnected challenges.** Today's global youth population exceeds 1.3 billion, with 89 per cent living in developing countries.¹ Nearly half reside in rural areas, with the proportion rising to over 60 per cent in low- and middle-income countries and up to 70 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.² Around 69 per cent of these rural youth depend on agriculture for their livelihood at a time when productivity is expected to decline due to climate variability.³ These pressures are further exacerbated by shortfalls in attaining decent work, quality education and productive resources.
7. **Decent employment remains largely out of reach for rural youth.** Youth unemployment rates are 3.5 times higher than those of adults,⁴ and in low-income countries, 95 per cent of employed rural youth work in the informal sector.⁵ This

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). 2025. *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems*. Rome.

² German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ). 2020. *Good practices and lessons from GIZ Programmes on rural youth employment*.

³ FAO. 2025. *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems*. Rome.

⁴ International Labour Organization (ILO). 2024. *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024: Decent work, brighter futures*.

⁵ FAO. 2025. *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems*. Rome.

situation has contributed to high rates of working poverty, with 40.7 per cent of youth living on less than US\$2.15 per day.⁶ Job opportunities often fail to meet youth aspirations, particularly in rural areas where few businesses generate employment, and many employers are reluctant to hire young people.⁷ This disconnect fuels anxiety and a deep sense of uncertainty about the future.

8. **Skills and education gaps continue to limit opportunities for upward mobility.** Although 76 per cent of rural youth aspire to high-skilled jobs, only 13 per cent attain them.⁸ Completion of lower secondary education is significantly lower among rural youth compared with their urban counterparts.⁹ Participation in technical and vocational education training remains limited, with only 13.6 per cent of youth globally completing such programmes and just 9 per cent in Africa.¹⁰ Over one in four youth are not in employment, education or training, with young women disproportionately affected.¹¹
9. **Weak service delivery in rural areas and barriers to access to productive resources further constrain youth potential.** Access to finance, land, digital tools and other types of capital among rural youth remains limited. Only 66 per cent of youth aged 15 to 24 held a formal financial account in 2021, and legal age restrictions and social norms often prevent them from accessing credit independently.¹² Land ownership among youth is extremely low due to delayed inheritance, and even those who do own land face tenure insecurity.¹³ The digital divide also remains significant. Only 34 per cent of youth in traditional agrifood sectors use the internet, compared with 98 per cent in industrial sectors. This limits access to information, innovation, and income-generating and entrepreneurial opportunities.¹⁴
10. **As a result of the above, many young people are confined to low-paid, precarious jobs, leading to limited income security and deepening social and economic inequalities, pushing many to migrate in search of better opportunities.** Migration, in particular, is a growing global trend among rural youth – one that is often tied to key life transitions, such as entering the workforce, pursuing education or getting married. Such outmigration compromises generational renewal in agriculture, threatens the long-term sustainability of agrifood systems and hinders rural economic transformation by disrupting the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and skills.¹⁵
11. **Vulnerable youth, especially young women, face multiple layers of exclusion.** For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, young women experienced a 7 percent decline in employment, in contrast to a 3 percent increase among young men.¹⁶ Early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, literacy gaps and unpaid domestic responsibilities further limit young women's agency and opportunities. Additional vulnerabilities affect Indigenous youth, young migrants, adolescents, and those in fragile or conflict-affected settings, where access to education, decent work and services is even more restricted.¹⁷

⁶ ILO. ILO Policy Brief. 11 June 2024. *Elevating the potential of rural youth: Paths to decent jobs and sustainable futures*.

⁷ FAO. 2025. *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems*. Rome.

⁸ International Land Coalition. Youth: Challenge Youth Land Rights, accessed July 6, 2025.

⁹ FAO. 2025. *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems*. Rome.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ ILO. 2024. *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024: Decent work, brighter futures*.

¹² Ansar, Saniya; Demircuc-Kunt, Asli; Klapper, Leora; Singer, Dorothe.

The Global Findex Database 2021 : Financial Inclusion, Digital Payments, and Resilience in the Age of COVID-19 (English). Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099818107072234182>.

¹³ FAO. 2025. *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems*. Rome.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). 2024. *Global trends: Forced displacement in 2023*.

¹⁶ FAO. 2025. *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems*. Rome.

¹⁷ IFAD. 2019. Rural Development Report 2019. *Creating Opportunities for Rural Youth*. Rome.

12. **The agrifood sector holds strong potential to drive inclusive development.** The agrifood system remains the largest employer of rural youth, providing jobs to 44 per cent in 2021.¹⁸ With the right investments, the sector could contribute an additional US\$680 billion to global GDP growth.¹⁹ Opportunities extend across the entire value chain, including in farming, processing, logistics, marketing and retail. In Africa, where the food market is projected to triple by 2030, agriculture and agribusiness offer real potential to generate employment and reduce poverty.²⁰
13. **The transformation of agrifood systems and consequently of rural economies, as emphasis shifts from primary production to the development of the agrifood midstream and adjacent rural sectors, can multiply employment pathways and accelerate the creation of more and better jobs.**²¹ Realizing this potential requires prioritizing youth's access to land, finance and digital tools; ensuring their participation in decision-making; and implementing social protection systems that build long-term resilience.²² A coordinated, youth-responsive approach can transform the rural economy and create sustainable, inclusive futures.

II. Mainstreaming youth in IFAD – strategic orientation, key achievements and lessons learned

14. In response to the global context, since the launch of its first Rural Youth Action Plan in 2019, IFAD has progressively increased its strategic focus on rural youth, embedding “youth-sensitivity”²³ at the core of its programme of work.

A. Strategic orientation

15. IFAD recognizes that investing in rural youth – by harnessing their energy, dynamism and potential – is key to unlocking productive and rewarding opportunities across agrifood systems. IFAD has centred its youth-sensitive interventions around the “3Es” framework: employment, entrepreneurship and empowerment. This framework aims to promote equitable access to opportunities for rural young women and men, especially those who face structural barriers to inclusion.
16. IFAD's programmes support rural youth through targeted actions in the following areas:
 - **Employment.** Supporting the development of technical, vocational and life skills; facilitating job-matching services; promoting digital inclusion; and expanding access to emerging opportunities in the green and blue economies.
 - **Entrepreneurship.** Enhancing access to business development services, business start-up and acceleration support, mentorship, financial services tailored to youth and investment in productive assets.
 - **Empowerment.** Promoting the active participation of youth in decision-making spaces at community, national, and global levels; building leadership and advocacy capacities; and supporting platforms that amplify youth voices, particularly those of young women and marginalized groups.

¹⁸ ILO estimates based on ILO modelled estimates, November 2023, in: FAO. 2025. *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems*.

¹⁹ FAO. 2025. *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems*. Rome.

²⁰ Kubik, Zaneta (2022): The challenges of rural youth employment in Africa: A literature review, ZEF Working Paper Series, No. 212, University of Bonn, Center for Development Research (ZEF), Bonn.
<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/264365/1/1801384487.pdf>.

²¹ ILO. 2022. *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022*.

²² Ibid.

²³ “Youth-sensitive” projects fulfil specific criteria: (i) they describe rural youth and context-based challenges and opportunities; (ii) they include a targeting strategy that explicitly targets youth, with specific objectives and activities to achieve impact in priority areas, expressed as part of the project's theory of change, approach and results framework; and (iii) they allocate resources to deliver activities.

B. Key results and achievements

17. Since the launch of IFAD's first Rural Youth Action Plan, the following key results have been obtained:

Youth in-country strategies

- One hundred per cent of IFAD's country strategic opportunities programmes (COSOPs) include youth-related considerations, ensuring rural youth priorities are integrated into country-level planning.

Youth-sensitive programming

- IFAD developed specific criteria to assess youth-sensitivity in project design, and supervision guidance was improved for measuring performance during implementation.
- Comprehensive guidance was developed to support the design of youth-sensitive projects, helping teams translate youth inclusion into actionable programming.
- IFAD11 (2019–2021): 86 per cent of new projects under IFAD11 were youth-sensitive (surpassing the 50 per cent target).
- IFAD12 (2022–2024): 70 per cent of new projects under IFAD12 were youth-sensitive (exceeding the 60 per cent target).

Youth-sensitive portfolio coverage and outreach

- Fifty-two per cent of IFAD's active project portfolio – 216 projects across 90 countries – are classified as youth-sensitive.
- Over 19 million rural young people are expected to receive benefits and services through IFAD-supported programmes.
- More than 550,000 jobs for young women and men are planned through IFAD-financed investments.

Flagship youth-focused initiatives

- The Agribusiness Hubs Programme created 59,046 decent jobs across nine African countries– more than double its original target of 22,550 – by providing agribusinesses and youth-led enterprises with business development services, access to finance and market linkages.
- The Rural Youth Alliance initiative has empowered youth organizations by establishing four national alliances in Colombia, Morocco, Rwanda and Senegal. These alliances have been instrumental in strengthening the skills of their members and enabling them to contribute directly to the design and implementation of IFAD projects and to engage with the broader development ecosystem in their countries.

C. Key lessons learned

18. Building on IFAD's experience, this section synthesizes key institutional, operational and technical lessons for enhancing IFAD's youth-sensitive programming. These key lessons are further elaborated in annex III.

- Align with country priorities.** Strategies must align with government priorities to ensure investments generate meaningful opportunities for youth.
- Foster supportive ecosystems.** Successful youth employment outcomes are achieved when interventions build synergies across diverse sectors and actors – the private sector, government, finance and training institutions.
- Promote multisectoral approaches.** Youth issues extend beyond agriculture, including to off- and non-farm sectors. Effective programming

requires coordination between ministries of agriculture, labour and youth and linkages to education and health.

- (d) **Expand access to finance.** A core barrier for youth, overcoming this challenge requires building youth's financial capability, supporting financial institutions in tailoring their products to youth and improving performance tracking.
- (e) **Enhance access to land and productive resources.** Secure access to land, technology, inputs and markets is essential. Youth face structural disadvantages, so solutions should support intergenerational land transfers, shared ownership models and access to inputs and digital tools.
- (f) **Use nuanced targeting approaches.** Youth are not a homogeneous group. Effective targeting must differentiate by age, sex, mobility and vulnerability, moving beyond outreach thresholds to develop specific strategies for diverse subgroups such as young women, Indigenous youth, and youth living in fragile contexts.
- (g) **Address underemployment and job quality.** Interventions must look beyond job numbers and seek also to improve job quality and stability. Given that many youth are in informal, low-wage jobs, project designs must integrate decent work standards.
- (h) **Focus on demand-driven skills training.** Programmes must offer market-relevant upskilling and apprenticeships, paired with job-matching support. Soft skills development is equally critical.
- (i) **Institutionalize youth participation.** To align with youth's aspirations, they must be included in programme design and implementation. Scaling up their engagement through youth advisory panels and IFAD's rural youth alliances has been shown to be effective.
- (j) **Strengthen institutional capacity and knowledge management.** Project design teams and project management units (PMUs) need clearer guidance and training, supported by stronger knowledge management systems to collect and analyse information on challenges facing youth and improve youth-sensitive design and implementation.
- (k) **Differentiate between wage and self-employment pathways.** Strategies must distinguish between these pathways, as they require different types of support to be effective – from skills and apprenticeships to finance and mentoring.
- (l) **Establish clear performance metrics.** The lack of standardized youth outcome indicators limits tracking. Job creation metrics must be simplified, and new AI-powered markers for youth outcomes, once validated, should be scaled up.

III. IFAD Rural Youth Action Plan 2026–2031

A. Strategic alignment

- 19. RYAP 2026–2031 is a cornerstone of IFAD's commitment to advance rural youth empowerment, employment and entrepreneurship. It aims to strengthen IFAD's support to countries in achieving progress towards rural youth-related objectives in their national development strategies and towards relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth).
- 20. RYAP 2026–2031 is aligned with key IFAD corporate policies, strategies and other action plans, including those on targeting, gender, nutrition, Indigenous Peoples, disability, environment and climate, the private sector, fragility and SSTC. It also strengthens the nexus between youth and IFAD13 priorities – in particular those

related to climate and biodiversity, private sector engagement and fragility – while maintaining flexibility to contribute to the realization of the priorities of subsequent replenishments.

B. Theory of change

21. The RYAP theory of change is built on a robust vertical logic (see figure in annex I) that shows the causal pathway for addressing the underlying challenges and institutional bottlenecks to achieve the goal of the action plan: rural young women and men benefit from increased remunerative employment, entrepreneurship and empowerment opportunities.
22. To achieve this goal, RYAP calls for work in four action areas: (i) country programme delivery; (ii) capacity development; (iii) knowledge management and policy engagement; and (iv) partnership and resource mobilization.
23. Work in the action areas will be directed towards the achievement of three strategic objectives (SOs):
 - **SO1. Enhance the strategic relevance of IFAD's youth-sensitive programming to meet country demands.** This objective aims to encourage greater investment from governments and private actors by harmonizing IFAD's youth mainstreaming goals with the demand-driven priorities of IFAD clients.
 - **SO2. Improve the effectiveness of youth-sensitive programming in IFAD's portfolio.** This objective focuses on maximizing the impact and value for money of IFAD's investments in rural youth by strengthening project design, start-up and implementation through improved knowledge management, streamlined systems and processes, and enhanced capacity of staff and partners to deliver results.
 - **SO3. Strengthen decision-making, agency and empowerment of rural young people.** This objective ensures that rural youth are engaged as active agents in their own development by improving stakeholder feedback mechanisms, building strategic partnerships with youth-led and youth-serving organizations, and fostering structured mechanisms for meaningful participation by youth in project and policy decisions that affect them.
24. Ultimately, the realization of the RYAP's strategic objectives will create the enabling environment that is essential for transformative change.
25. The theory of change is underpinned by a series of interconnected assumptions about the enabling environment and the key actors involved.
 - The theory of change is fundamentally grounded in the belief that the broader rural economy has the potential for growth and can generate sufficient jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities to absorb a better-skilled and more empowered youth workforce. This belief is supported by evidence that agrifood systems – which already employ 44 per cent of working youth – are poised to be key drivers of rural economic transformation. The sector's potential is underlined by projections of a 35 to 56 per cent increase in global food demand by 2050, and by estimates that integrating youth into agrifood systems alone could contribute an additional US\$680 billion to global GDP.²⁴
 - Furthermore, the theory of change assumes that rural youth possess the potential and desire to participate effectively in agrifood system transformation and that their ability to do so can be sufficiently strengthened through targeted support and structured engagement mechanisms. Indeed, youth are recognized for their "innovative spirit",²⁵ and a significant

²⁴ FAO. 2025. *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems*. Rome.

²⁵ ILO. 2024. *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024: Decent work, brighter futures*.

proportion – up to 40 per cent of young people in some African countries – express a clear desire to pursue entrepreneurial ventures within the food and agriculture sector.²⁶

- The theory of change also assumes that governments will maintain or increase their commitment to rural youth employment. This assumption is borne out by the fact that 71 per cent of national agricultural strategies now explicitly include youth, showing a clear trend toward country ownership and alignment, which increases the likelihood of cofinancing.^{27,28}
- Alongside government commitment, the theory of change posits that private sector actors can be incentivized to engage with and invest in rural youth if effective partnership models and a compelling business case and return on investment are presented. The evidence shows that the private sector is highly responsive to clear economic incentives and de-risking mechanisms. As the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) notes, targeted public investments can incentivize private sector engagement, promote value addition and transform agrifood systems into a dynamic sector where youth can thrive.
- A final assumption underlying the theory of change is that sufficient resources can be mobilized to scale up youth-sensitive programming if IFAD effectively demonstrates to donors and partners the impact and value for money of its investments. This assumption is supported by a persistent global call for more and better investments in youth employment²⁹ and specific United Nations and G20 initiatives aimed at increasing funding.

C. Action areas

26. RYAP 2026–2031 will be implemented through four interconnected and mutually reinforcing action areas (AAs): (i) country programme delivery; (ii) capacity development; (iii) knowledge management and policy engagement; and (iv) partnerships and resource mobilization. Recognizing and leveraging synergies between these action areas will be essential to addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by country teams and PMUs.
27. A set of key outputs will be pursued in each action area. Each of these outputs, in turn, will be achieved through a set of detailed activities.

Action area 1: Country programme delivery

28. AA1 focuses on ensuring that IFAD's country-level programmes and projects consistently integrate evidence-based and results-oriented youth-sensitive approaches. This specifically involves measures to improve design quality, processes, operational requirements, indicators and performance monitoring tools.
29. **AA1 outcome:** IFAD's country-level programmes and projects consistently integrate evidence-based and results-oriented youth-sensitive approaches, supported by robust planning, measurement and adaptive management mechanisms.

Key activities:

30. At the regional strategy level, IFAD social inclusion officers, together with relevant technical officers, will introduce integrated mainstreaming coordination meetings. These will be held from the outset of the COSOP and project pipeline development process to ensure the coherent integration of considerations related to gender,

²⁶ Kubik, Zaneta (2022): The challenges of rural youth employment in Africa: A literature review, ZEF Working Paper Series, No. 212, University of Bonn, Center for Development Research (ZEF), Bonn.
<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/264365/1/1801384487.pdf>.

²⁷ FAO. 2025. *The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems*. Rome.

²⁸ GIZ. 2020. *Good practices and lessons from GIZ Programmes on rural youth employment*.

²⁹ ILO. 2024. *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024: Decent work, brighter futures*.

nutrition, Indigenous Peoples, disability and youth, along with relevant technical considerations (rural infrastructure, finance, land, agroecology). In at-risk regions, these considerations will be informed by specialized fragility and conflict analyses.

31. During project and programme design, youth-sensitive design criteria will continue to be applied, with periodic reviews of all social inclusion-based criteria (including gender and nutrition, as outlined in the Gender Action Plan and Nutrition Action Plan). A youth-sensitive design toolkit will be made available to provide design teams with adequate guidance, including tools for identifying unique threats and opportunities for youth in fragile and conflict-affected settings.
32. To enhance effective implementation, a performance monitoring tool, using machine learning and an early risk diagnostics dashboard, will be developed to track implementation of youth-sensitive projects. Analysis of performance will draw on both quantitative and qualitative measurements, retrieving data from logical framework results; supervision and implementation support indicators, including specific indicators related to youth resilience and social cohesion in fragile settings; and follow-up actions on all aspects relating to youth. "Youth clinics" will be organized to provide implementation support to country teams seeking assistance on improving the performance of youth-sensitive projects. The feedback loop for project design and implementation will also be strengthened by promoting tools for better disaggregation of data on youth – especially young girls and Indigenous youth – in project logframes, and by undertaking regular reviews of youth-sensitive project completion reports with a view to applying the resulting insights.
33. To ensure consistency and quality of youth mainstreaming across IFAD, an interdivisional network of designated youth focal points ("champions") will be set up within all regional divisions and IFAD country offices to promote improved coordination and knowledge exchange.
34. Finally, to demonstrate the value of youth-targeted investments, business cases by region will be developed. Economic and financial analysis guidance for assessing the return on investment of youth-sensitive projects will also be developed.

Action area 2: Capacity development

35. AA2 focuses on building technical capacities to deliver high-quality youth-sensitive projects. This involves providing not only contextualized demand-driven training but also clear guidance for design and implementation teams and facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges for collaborative learning. To maximize efficiency and reach, capacity development initiatives will be based on and responsive to needs assessments and will also be appropriately scaled, utilizing the most cost-effective regional, subregional or country modalities.
36. **AA2 outcome:** IFAD and PMU personnel and key partners possess enhanced knowledge, skills and access to practical tools to effectively design, implement and monitor youth-sensitive projects that align with corporate priorities.

Key activities:

37. The cornerstone of this action area is a comprehensive capacity-building programme for PMUs and partners, focused on practical, solution-oriented learning. This programme will feature tailored training at the country and regional level, including essential modules on navigating the complexities of fragile situations. Where relevant, these trainings will be delivered jointly with other teams (e.g. nutrition, gender and private sector teams) to ensure an integrated approach.
38. To ensure ongoing access to specialized expertise, a shared social inclusion roster of vetted regional and in-country consultants will be established, including consultants with youth-specific expertise, prioritizing the ability to work through intersectional approaches (e.g. consultants with expertise on both youth and Indigenous Peoples, youth and gender, youth and nutrition, etc.).

39. E-learning training courses will be developed, compiled and disseminated, including a core course on measuring employment outcomes. A dedicated guidance toolkit for measuring employment outcomes will also be developed. To ensure integration across IFAD's core priorities, thematic guidance notes on youth engagement will be prepared – for example, in relation to access to finance, land and markets, and to information and communications technologies for development (ICT4D). These efforts will also align, where relevant, with nutrition, gender, and climate action plans and strategies to ensure coherence across institutional commitments.
40. Capacity development initiatives will be strengthened through SSTC activities, building on successful models such as the Latin America and the Caribbean regional peer-to-peer learning networks for implementation teams and adapting them to country-specific priorities and contexts.

Action area 3: Knowledge management and policy engagement

41. AA3 centres on ensuring that IFAD generates, uses and disseminates operationally relevant knowledge, information and learning around youth engagement to further bolster and support AA1 and AA2. In addition, using internal and external evidence, policy products will be developed to enable country teams to engage with decision makers. AA3 also places emphasis on strong communication and advocacy for rural youth.
42. **AA3 outcome:** IFAD's stakeholders consistently access and apply evidence-based knowledge on rural youth development, enhancing programme quality, fostering a culture of learning, and strengthening IFAD's influence in global and national policy dialogues.

Key activities:

43. IFAD will leverage the existing Rural Solutions Portal and build on ongoing SSTC initiatives to compile practical, easily accessible thematic guidance notes (as mentioned above) on youth-relevant themes, such as youth entrepreneurship; access to finance, land and markets; and ICT4D).
44. To ensure systematic learning, annual stocktaking reports analysing the youth-sensitive portfolio will be produced, complemented by periodic deep dives into select projects to document best practices by region or topic. This information will be translated into evidence-based policy briefs to be used to promote active policy engagement.
45. Finally, to incentivize excellence and sharing of best practices, an awards programme recognizing best-performing youth-sensitive projects will be established.

Action area 4: Partnerships and resource mobilization

46. AA4 centres on fostering and strengthening strategic partnerships among youth-led and youth-serving organizations and networks and mobilizing resources to complement lending operations. In particular, emphasis will be placed on enhancing engagement with youth-led and youth-serving organizations in the context of the Rural Youth Alliance initiative, collaboration with existing institutional partners (e.g. Indigenous Peoples' and farmers' organizations), and wider civil society organization engagement, while resource mobilization efforts will focus on flagship initiatives such as the Agribusiness Hubs Programme.
47. **AA4 outcome:** IFAD effectively leverages strategic partnerships and mobilizes resources, enhancing the scale, reach, and participatory nature of its youth-sensitive programmes and strengthening youth's collective voice in decision-making forums.

Key activities:

48. At the country level, IFAD will support youth-led development by fostering partnerships between rural youth organizations and IFAD-supported investment

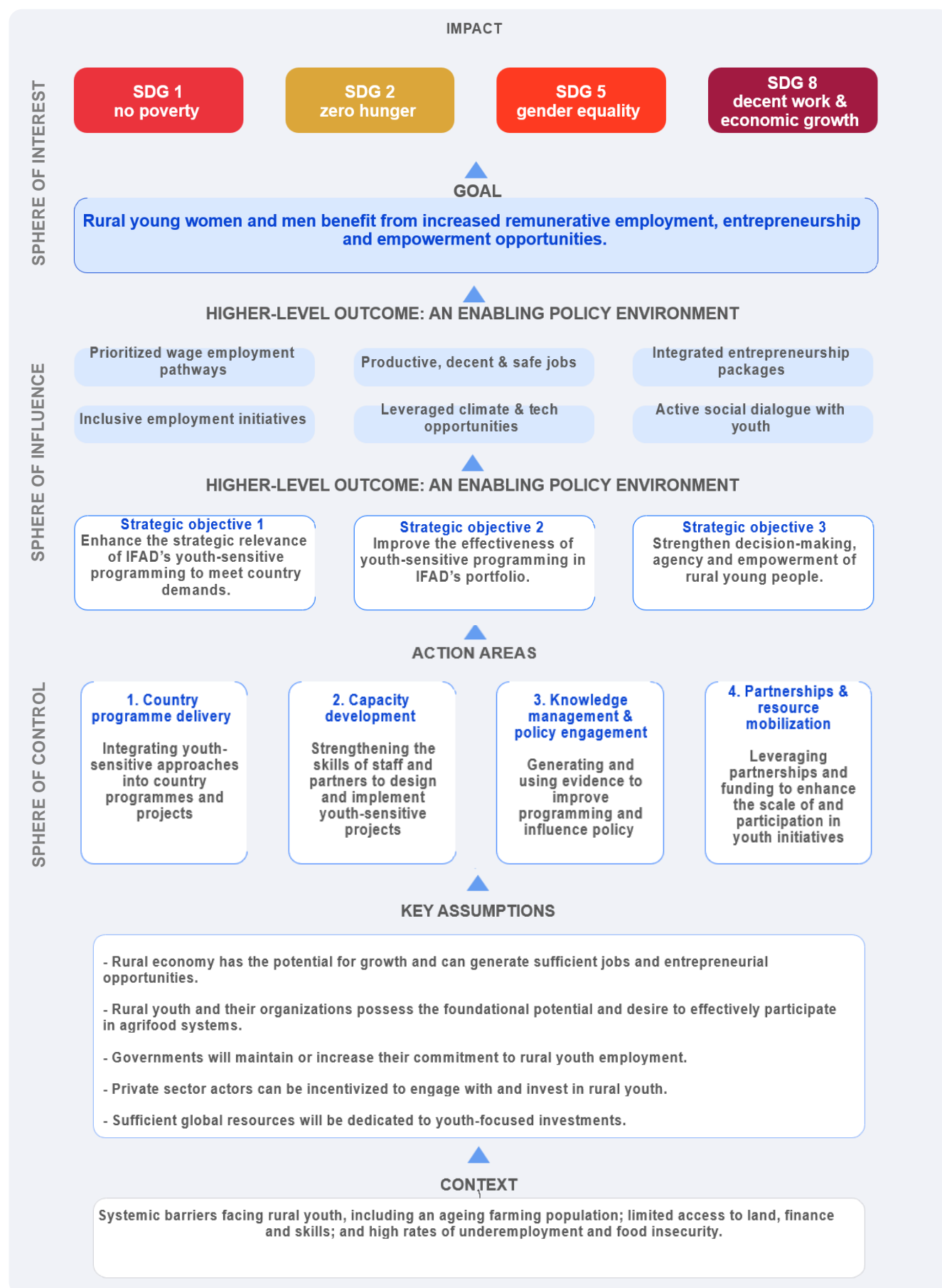
projects, including by strengthening existing rural youth alliances and establishing at least three new ones by 2027.

49. Alliances with key global/regional youth organizations will be strengthened to amplify rural young peoples' voices in relevant forums and foster local-to-global cooperation and dialogues with country-level rural youth alliances.
50. SSTC partnership, policy and knowledge exchange initiatives will be promoted, tailored to the expressed needs and priorities of countries and implementing partners.
51. Resource mobilization efforts will be pursued to scale up innovative and successful programmes, such as the flagship Agribusiness Hubs Programme, which connects youth-led enterprises with private sector actors, mentors and finance providers to foster sustainable growth.

D. Implementation of the Rural Youth Action Plan 2026–2031

52. Implementation of RYAP 2026–2031 represents a corporate endeavour requiring commitment and collaboration among all relevant departments and divisions, with the Environment, Climate, Gender and Social Inclusion Division (ECG) having an overall coordination role with respect its delivery, monitoring and reporting.
53. Implementation will follow an adaptive approach, guided by regular progress assessments, responding to emerging challenges, opportunities and iterative learning, with updates to the action plan effected as necessary. Implementation progress will be monitored through internal management systems. Management will report progress highlights, including against relevant replenishment commitments and targets, through the annual Report on IFAD's Development Effectiveness (RIDE).
54. Thanks to the adoption of streamlined delivery modalities, implementation of RYAP 2026–2031 is not expected to involve any significant additional costs. It will largely be funded by IFAD administrative budgets approved from year to year. As outlined in action area 4, efforts to mobilize additional resources to support new or existing strategic initiatives will be pursued as needed – for example, through IFAD's grants programme and when relevant partnership or supplementary funding opportunities arise.

Theory of change



IFAD Rural Youth Action Plan 2026–2031

Each action listed will be implemented in close coordination with the relevant IFAD departments and divisions to ensure technical alignment, complementary inputs and shared ownership of results.

ACTION AREA 1: COUNTRY PROGRAMME DELIVERY	
ACTIONS	TENTATIVE TIMEFRAME
Output 1.1. Integrated mainstreaming coordination meetings held from the outset of COSOP/project pipeline development, led by social inclusion and technical officers, to ensure coherent integration of youth issues.	Continuous (by business planning cycle)
Output 1.2. Network of designated and oriented youth focal points (champions) established and active within IFAD regional divisions and ICOs to facilitate coordination and knowledge exchange	By 2027
Output 1.3. IFAD's youth-sensitive design criteria reviewed and optimized.	By 2028
Output 1.4. Youth-sensitive design toolkit developed and deployed.	By 2026
Output 1.5. QAS review notes monitored for feedback to improve future youth-sensitive designs.	Continuous
Output 1.6. Performance monitoring and early warning system (including a dynamic dashboard) developed and operational to track the performance of youth-sensitive projects.	By 2027
Output 1.7. Implementation support "clinics" established to provide targeted assistance for youth-sensitive problem projects.	By 2031 (ongoing)
Output 1.8. Regional/country-level business cases and economic and financial analysis guidance developed to evaluate the return on investment of youth-sensitive projects.	By 2029
ACTION AREA 2: CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT	
ACTIONS	TENTATIVE TIMEFRAME
Output 2.1. Regional technical trainings for PMUs, ICOs, and consultants delivered to improve youth-sensitive project design and implementation.	Continuous and demand-driven
Output 2.2. Accessible roster of vetted regional and in-country consultants with youth inclusion expertise established.	By 2028
Output 2.3. Comprehensive and accessible e-learning collection (i.e. a repository of courses) on rural youth established, featuring both curated external content and IFAD Operations Academy courses.	By 2029
Output 2.4. User-friendly course on measuring employment outcomes developed and made accessible.	By 2029
Output 2.5. Thematic-based guidance notes on youth engagement developed and disseminated in coordination with fragility, climate/biodiversity, and private sector (including rural finance and value chain) teams.	By 2028
Output 2.6. Regional peer-to-peer learning and SSTC networks for implementation teams (PMUs, partner implementing institutions) established and active, fostering knowledge-sharing and collaborative problem-solving on social (youth) inclusion.	By 2029
ACTION AREA 3: KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND POLICY ENGAGEMENT	
ACTIONS	TENTATIVE TIMEFRAME
Output 3.1. Public knowledge repository, including how-to-do notes and best practices on key youth-related themes (e.g. value chains, access to finance), created and made accessible to stakeholders.	By 2030
Output 3.2. Annual stocktaking reports, analysing the performance and status of the IFAD youth-sensitive project portfolio, prepared and submitted as a formal input to the RIME.	By 2031 (ongoing)
Output 3.3. Periodic deep dives into select youth-sensitive projects, documenting best practices and lessons learned, published and disseminated.	By 2031 (ongoing)

Output 3.4. Evidence-based policy briefs developed and used to promote active policy engagement on youth issues at country, regional and international levels.	By 2031 (ongoing)
Output 3.5. Awards programme recognizing best-performing youth-sensitive projects established and implemented.	By 2031 (ongoing)
ACTION AREA 4: PARTNERSHIPS AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION	
ACTIONS	TENTATIVE TIMEFRAME
Output 4.1. Existing project-level rural youth alliances strengthened and at least three new alliances established by fostering partnerships between rural youth organizations and IFAD-supported investment projects.	By 2027
Output 4.2. Strategic partnerships with key regional and global youth organizations active in rural development established to facilitate policy and technical cooperation and joint advocacy efforts.	Continuous
Output 4.3. Visibility of IFAD's youth operations strengthened within key global forums (e.g. communities of practice, youth forums, knowledge-sharing platforms).	By 2031 (ongoing)
Output 4.4. Additional resources to support youth employment and empowerment programmes, such as IFAD's flagship Agribusiness Hubs Programme, successfully mobilized.	By 2026
Output 4.5. SSTC partnership, policy, and knowledge exchange initiatives promoted, tailored to needs and priorities of countries and implementing partners.	Continuous

Key lessons

1. Based on IFAD's experience in youth engagement and a deeper understanding of related institutional, operational and technical elements, several lessons have been identified. The lessons presented here, drawn from extensive consultations with IFAD staff and consultants and analysis of internal data, reflect a strategic assessment of what is required to enhance IFAD's youth engagement efforts. They provide key insights into where the most significant opportunities lie to enhance IFAD's systems, processes and products, thereby achieving even greater impact for rural youth.
 - (i) **Aligning with country-specific priorities.** Youth employment strategies must be devised on the basis of prevailing local contexts and government priorities. Intervention strategies should be demand-driven and developed in close coordination with governments and other key stakeholders, with a focus on identifying agrifood employment and entrepreneurship opportunities that investments supported by IFAD can create or enhance.
 - (ii) **Building supportive ecosystems.** Projects have been found to return a higher success rate when they facilitate sustainable rural youth employment and entrepreneurship through synergies and complementarities among diverse stakeholders, including private sector actors, industry, finance providers, governments, policymakers and training institutions. Stakeholders, particularly in fragile contexts, require carefully tailored support to achieve such synergies. There is growing demand for guidance and best practices on meaningful partnership development for youth employment.
 - (iii) **Emphasis on multisectoral approaches.** Investments in non-farm and off-farm employment opportunities provide further prospects for rural youth in a range of sectors. Multisectoral approaches entail working with multiple ministries beyond agriculture, in particular those that deal with matters related to youth, such as ministries of youth and sports. However, successful investment in rural youth requires broader interministerial coordination and collaboration, including, for example, between ministries of agriculture and ministries of labour, health, education, and development and social inclusion.
 - (iv) **Access to finance.** Access to finance is a critical challenge for rural youth in IFAD projects, often limiting their ability to launch or expand their businesses. Despite its importance, there is less focus on financing solutions in youth-related programmes than on other interventions (e.g. skills-building). Addressing this gap is essential to empower young people, particularly in agriculture, where initial financial capital is vital for success. In addition to building young people's financial capabilities, targeted support is required to enable financial services providers to deliver affordable, accessible and responsible financial products tailored to the needs of youth through "know your customer" strategies. While IFAD has garnered considerable experience in access to rural finance, the nuances of youth financial products can be further strengthened. Non-sovereign private sector operations, in which youth already make up 30 per cent of project participants on average, provide another potential source of financing for rural youth. However, participating financial institutions also need better capacities and systems to track rural youth-related performance and close the feedback loop.
 - (v) **Access to land and productive resources.** Access to land is fundamental to enable rural youth to engage meaningfully in agriculture and entrepreneurship. Beyond agricultural production, secure access to land is closely linked to other critical inputs such as credit, infrastructure and technology. However, young people often face systemic barriers, including

restrictive land tenure systems and limited access to complementary resources. Moreover, youth are becoming late inheritors of land and inheriting smaller parcel sizes.³⁰ Without recognized land rights or tenure security, youth are frequently excluded from financing opportunities and unable to invest in improved inputs or integrate into value chains. Importantly, productive resources also encompass emerging technologies and digital tools that can revolutionize agricultural practices and expand market access. IFAD's experience shows that overcoming these challenges requires supportive legal frameworks and policies, mechanisms for intergenerational land transfer, access to communal land and inputs, productive machinery leasing, shared ownership models, and youth-responsive land governance and management practices. Planning processes must harness the full range of productive resources and ensure that they are accessible to young people. There is also opportunity for more policy engagement initiatives around land access.

- (vi) **Young women.** Young rural women face additional constraints that may hinder them from gaining the agency and attaining the extent of productive engagement they need to prosper in the economic activities they wish to pursue. Ensuring young women's inclusion in youth entrepreneurship programmes requires deliberate efforts to enhance their access to productive assets and services (financial and non-financial) and markets that account for their needs. Wage employment programmes require proactive recruitment strategies and tailored placement mechanisms and selection criteria, including affirmative action. They should also consider for women's unique challenges, such as the childcare needs of young mothers. Targeting young women also presents equally important opportunities to connect with other mainstreaming areas, especially gender and nutrition.
- (vii) **Indigenous youth.** Indigenous youth face a number of challenges, including discrimination, lack of culturally appropriate education in their own languages, high illiteracy and dropout rates, high unemployment and a lack of legal protection. Despite these challenges, they play a key role in the context of preservation of traditional knowledge; rights to land, territories and resources; and protection of their traditional food systems. IFAD youth-sensitive projects that target Indigenous youth would benefit from the inclusion of activities that promote intergenerational knowledge transfer, including on sustainable food systems, and the use of targeted approaches to support Indigenous youth in innovating, diversifying production and improving the marketing of their products, while reflecting principles of quality, biodiversity and environmental conservation.
- (viii) **Decent jobs.** Given that youth underemployment is often more prevalent than unemployment in rural areas, interventions should aim to address the systemic issues that contribute to deficits in decent work standards.³¹ Sustainable and stable employment outcomes can be supported through programme designs that identify and tackle shortcomings in job quality and security.
- (ix) **Innovations through green jobs and digital inclusion.** Emerging green job opportunities and digital innovations have significant potential to empower rural youth, particularly through employment in sectors that support biodiversity conservation and sustainable natural resources management. The Thirteenth Replenishment of IFAD's Resources (IFAD13) recognizes that, by equipping youth with digital skills and access to green jobs, programmes can provide livelihoods that not only generate income but

³⁰ FAO. 2025. *Status of Rural Youth in Agrifood Systems*. p. 49. Rome.

³¹ Decent work, as defined by the ILO, is "productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity". This means work that provides fair income, security, social protection, opportunities for personal development, and the freedom to express concerns and participate in decision-making.

also contribute to the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity. Unlocking this potential, however, requires targeted strategies and coordinated action among government, private sector actors and community stakeholders.

- (x) **Technical and soft skills training.** The transition from upskilling to employment is gradual, requiring sustained support. While technical skills gaps often limit rural youth's access to quality jobs, programmes should focus on market-responsive upskilling and reskilling, rather than generic training, and should prioritize work-based learning opportunities such as apprenticeships and internships. As part of an integrated package, programmes should also link rural youth to employers through job-matching platforms and provide structured post-training support systems that offer continuous mentoring and access to markets and professional networks. Beyond technical (hard) skills, many rural youth face limitations in crucial cognitive abilities (soft skills) that are essential to effectively accessing and retaining jobs in the evolving labour market.
- (xi) **Fragility.** Recognizing that by 2030, two thirds of the world's extreme poor will live in fragile and conflict-affected states, IFAD13 has an enhanced focus on fragile contexts. In fragile contexts, rural youth face intersecting challenges, such as insecurity, malnutrition, displacement, weak institutions and limited access to employment, that make traditional job creation models difficult to apply. Protective and transitional approaches, such as provision of health services and cash-for-work, asset-building and public works schemes, can provide short-term income while supporting community stabilization and recovery. For greater impact, these interventions must be context-specific, conflict-sensitive and centred on promoting youth agency. Strong stakeholder engagement is essential, as are community-driven development approaches that enhance local ownership and accountability. Pathway out of poverty programmes, such as those pioneered by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC),³² can offer structured pathways from short-term support to long-term resilience and livelihoods.
- (xii) **Partnerships.** To promote sustainable rural youth employment and entrepreneurship, it is essential to foster the creation of integrated agribusiness ecosystems that align skills development with labour market demands and facilitate market access for young entrepreneurs. For these ecosystems to be successful, close collaboration needs to be fostered between public and private sector actors, notably local governments, technical and vocational education and training institutions, agribusinesses and development partners, youth networks, and youth-led enterprises. The private sector focus of IFAD13 offers an opportunity to further engagement with private sector actors for youth-focused outcomes. Beyond integrating young farmers and youth-led agribusinesses into their value chains, private sector partners can support youth-focused incubation initiatives, provide mentorship to young entrepreneurs, and facilitate market access by harnessing a public-private-producer partnerships (4Ps) model and multi-stakeholder platforms.
- (xiii) **Engaging young people in IFAD.** Many youth-focused programmes fail to incorporate the perspectives and aspirations of young people, leading to misalignment between programme objectives and their actual needs. Establishing youth advisory panels and participatory planning mechanisms with youth-led and youth-serving civil society organizations (including youth wings of farmers' organizations, producers' groups and Indigenous Peoples' networks) can help bridge this gap. This aligns with the IFAD13 commitment

³² BRAC is a leading international development organization founded in Bangladesh, renowned for its pathway out of poverty approach.

to scale up the youth grassroots approach for stakeholder feedback in operations and ensure that youth are consulted in the development of relevant strategies and operational policies.

- (xiv) **Data and knowledge-sharing.** Poor data- and knowledge-sharing hinders the effective design and implementation of youth employment and entrepreneurship programmes that address real challenges. Some projects lack and/or underreport data on rural youth, particularly those with multiple vulnerabilities (for example, Indigenous youth and youth with disabilities). Unreliable self-reported or inconsistent outcome data also make it difficult to effectively measure job creation and determine whether decent employment has been created.
- (xv) **Mainstreaming themes.** IFAD's commitment to integrating youth and other mainstreaming themes (environment and climate, gender and nutrition) in the investment projects it supports strengthens the inclusivity and sustainability of its interventions. However, pursuing some or all mainstreaming themes together within a single project can add complexity to project implementation. It is therefore important to integrate mainstreaming themes in operationally feasible ways, responding to real needs and leveraging synergies between themes to deliver intended results without over-stretching the project management unit (PMU) implementation capacities.
- (xvi) **Technical capacity in design and implementation.** Project teams would benefit from greater access to data and shared knowledge on best practices for integrating youth employment and empowerment pathways into project design reports and for developing youth-sensitive implementation strategies. Similarly, clearer guidance and enhanced capacity for engaging rural youth through stakeholder feedback mechanisms would further strengthen the design and implementation of youth-sensitive projects. Measures should be adopted to ensure that staff, consultants and PMUs have timely, accessible and reliable guidance, knowledge management products and best practices.
- (xvii) **Measuring the performance of youth-focused project interventions.** Unlike other mainstreaming themes (gender, climate and nutrition), there is currently no dedicated supervision and implementation support indicator to assess the performance of projects in implementing youth-related interventions. This makes it challenging to manage and report results of youth-sensitive projects at project and aggregate levels in a consistent manner. Work is under way to develop markers for youth performance measurement using artificial intelligence and machine learning.
- (xviii) **Measuring job-related outcomes.** Enhancing the clarity and simplicity of methods for measuring job creation could support greater government ownership and adoption of core outcome indicator 2.2.1 (jobs created). Some countries have expressed reluctance about committing to achieve targets measured through this indicator owing to concerns about its definition, in particular that it does not adequately reflect the fact that rural employment is characterized by high levels of underemployment rather than unemployment. Moreover, measuring job creation is inherently complex and multidimensional, as it may include direct employment generated through project activities, indirect jobs created along value chains, and induced employment resulting from increased economic activity. Job creation also encompasses informal sector jobs, which are particularly relevant in rural and agrifood economies.
- (xix) **Targeting.** Effective youth-sensitive programming requires targeting approaches that are both aligned with overall project strategies and responsive to the diverse realities and needs of rural young people. Youth

are not a homogeneous group, and differences in age, sex, education, mobility and socioeconomic status mean that a one-size-fits-all approach often leads to suboptimal outcomes. While there have been recent efforts to set thresholds for outreach targets, projects should also identify and develop clear targeting strategies based on youth subgroups (e.g. younger versus older youth, young men versus young women, Indigenous versus non-Indigenous youth, youth with disabilities), ensuring that interventions are inclusive and context-specific, including in fragile contexts.

- (xx) **Wage/self-employment intervention pathways.** Youth employment strategies in rural development projects should envisage differentiated pathways for wage and self-employment, recognizing that numerous youth may prefer to pursue wage employment opportunities, while others will favour self-employment, and that these options require distinct forms of support. Wage employment pathways often depend on the availability of private sector opportunities, public works programmes or apprenticeships, and they typically require investment in skills training aligned with market demand. In contrast, self-employment and entrepreneurship pathways call for access to finance, mentoring, business development services and support for market access. Projects should clearly define the pathway(s) they aim to support and ensure that interventions are coherent, feasible and responsive to youth's challenges and priorities and to local economic contexts. Greater strategic clarity on employment pathways can improve both the design and effectiveness of youth-focused interventions.