



Project facts

Key words

Agriculture, Enable participation, Farming, Youth engagement

Behavioral themes

Present bias and Social proof/
Observational learning

Research design

Qualitative participatory design

Scope

Start date: October 2024
End date: December 2025
n=451

Location

Uganda, Ethiopia, and Burundi

Partners

Partner: One Acre Fund
Funder: Mastercard Foundation

Youth are interested in farming—how can we enable participation?

Youth engagement in agriculture is not a question of interest, but of conditions. Across Uganda, Ethiopia, and Burundi, young people do not reject agriculture itself, they reject it under current conditions. This study offers that reframing how agriculture is perceived, offering social proof of success, and tackling household hierarchies can lead to increased engagement.

Background: Youth engagement in agriculture

With 70% of African youth in rural areas and aging farming populations threatening food security, youth engagement in agriculture is critical. Yet young people view farming as a 'fall-back' option that is slow, risky, and stigmatized. This research examines conditions that shape the choices of the youth, while also identifying the behavioral and structural barriers at play here. Through qualitative inquiry across Uganda, Ethiopia, and Burundi, we understand how to unlock youth participation and offer interventions that align agricultural pursuits with the perception and requirements of youth.

Conducting the research

We began by conducting a desk review of existing studies on youth engagement in agriculture, gender dynamics, and behavioral drivers in East Africa. This helped establish the broader context and identify evidence gaps.

After which we conducted in-depth qualitative research across Ethiopia, Uganda, and Burundi, including FGDs and interviews with youth, parents, nursery managers and household heads. These conversations provided rich insights into youth aspirations, motivations, constraints, and gender-specific challenges.

Building on the qualitative findings, we facilitated co-design sessions with youth (men and women) and household heads to explore problem areas, generate ideas, and prioritize solution directions. These sessions ensured that our interventions are relevant and gender-specific.

- » Youth are not a homogeneous group. Programs should avoid binary assumptions and address a spectrum of interest and capacity, tailoring support to help youth expand into agribusinesses.
- » Income uncertainty discourages youth from agriculture, pushing them toward alternatives. Programs should offer hybrid packages combining short-term income opportunities, such as quick-yield crops or side enterprises, with longer-term agricultural investments to balance risk and returns.
- » Bridge the theory–practice gap. Programs should integrate hands-on, field-based learning that explains the rationale behind techniques and reinforces farming as a skilled, technical profession.
- » Design programs with women in mind by addressing time poverty, childcare responsibilities, and limited decision-making power through flexible, locally delivered support and household buy-in.

Implications

For agricultural development organizations:

Youth disengagement from agriculture reflects rational responses to structural barriers, not low motivation. Programs should implement interventions such as childcare, price transparency, and peer networks. Reframe agriculture within diversified livelihoods by combining farming with agribusinesses to reduce risk and stabilise incomes.

For policymakers:

Create enabling conditions by expanding youth-friendly financing without strict collateral, strengthening land tenure systems to support intergenerational transfer, and improving regulation of markets to build trust and sustain engagement.

Recommendations for future research

Long-term evidence- Tracking youth engagement over multiple seasons in Uganda, Ethiopia, and Burundi is essential to identify which interventions produce lasting participation, inform program refinement, and ensure that adoption translates into sustained agricultural involvement rather than short-term experimentation.

Targeted effectiveness- Research should examine how youth characteristics such as gender, age, education, and household responsibilities shape responses to interventions. Understanding these moderating factors will help tailor programs to the needs of different subgroups, improving relevance, adoption, and long-term impact.

Further reading

Harry, R., & Mahesh, H. (2025, July 12). Plot Twist: Young People Are Eyeing the Fields after All—and Are More Interested in Agriculture than You Think. <https://busara.global/blog/plot-twist-young-people-are-eyeing-the-fields-after-all-and-are-more-interested-in-agriculture-than-you-think/>

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One Acre Fund: Uganda, Burundi, and Ethiopia country teams

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