

INSIGHTS INTO YOUTH NETWORKS AROUND AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Speaker

James Kyewalabye holds a M.A. in Agriculture and Rural Development from the University of East Anglia and is currently interning at the Secretariat Global Donor Platform for Rural Development, particularly supporting the Thematic Working Group on Rural Youth. Prior to this James founded and worked for Real Agricultural Solutions for Africa (RASA), the first alternative coffee value addition hub in East Africa that focuses on generating local alternative markets. He has in addition been engaged in international youth policy dialogues, e.g., the Growing the Future Fellowship organized by the United States based Center for Strategic and International Studies, and was a participant and panelist at the Global Donor Platform's 2018 Annual General Assembly in Berlin which was under the title ["Young and ready to move – empowering the new generation in the rural space"](#).



Presentation Highlight

The presentation kicked-off with an introduction to the topic followed by the classification of these networks in case-studies format. It then scoped into key challenges faced by these youth network before presenting the formulated key recommendations.

According to the study's findings, there are various reasons for youth to join networks. First, they want to create synergies to take advantage of economies of scale-marketing, production, and bulking. Second, they want to share information about call for grants or opportunities for funding through social media platforms i.e., facebook, twitter, and linkedin. They also see these networks as a mean to access *niché* services e.g. trainings and peer mentoring platforms. In addition, they use the convening power of these networks to push agendas with the government or local policymakers.

A 2017 study conducted by AgriPorFocus and University of Netherlands revealed that although other non-youth collaborative networks are already established and operating, some youth find it very difficult to join them. Some of the contributing factors include rigid entry requirements for traditional cooperatives and exclusion of young people in the decision-making processes. The study also revealed that youth consider the establishment of National Youth Councils, which are under supervision of local government, is only to "check-box" as they do not engage youth and represent their voice in practice. These challenging realities triggered the formation of independent youth networks.



Despite the challenging task to find more information on the youth networks due to scanty literature around the topic, the study suggests that the networks can be clustered into three different areas:

1. Scope of work

This cluster consists of a set of networks with distinguished characteristics such as self-help and collective, academic oriented, lobby and advocacy enthusiast and youth empowerment. While some of these networks directly involve in agricultural production (i.e., self-help and collective group) others specialize more in agriculture research and development (i.e., academia), creating the National Youth in Agriculture Manifesto (i.e., lobby and advocacy group) and information sharing for young people (i.e., youth empowerment group).

In providing more detail about this cluster, respectively, James featured University of Nairobi's **Kibwezi Hortipreneurs Youth Group (KHYG)**, University of Cape Town's **Young African Researchers In Agriculture (YARA)**, Uganda's **Young Farmers Champions Network (YOFCHAN)** and the **Youth Café in Kenya**.

2. Geographical scope of operations

The second cluster focuses on organizations at regional, national and international level that promote learning and collaboration, among many other things. One prominent characteristic of this cluster is the increasing number of membership – thanks to social media platform – that usually reaches over a few hundreds and even thousands within the African continent and even worldwide. Apart from having secretariat functions and dedicated staff built into their structures, these networks have country chapters that are recognized by donors and policymakers. In addition, many of the in-country (national) networks are associated with government and require membership subscription fees.

James described specific features of each level of cluster, respectively, using the examples of **Africa Youth in Agribusiness Association (AYA)**, **Botswana Young Farmers Association**, and **Climate Smart Agriculture Youth Network**.

3. Affiliations

The third cluster are mainly composed of networks that are affiliated with other institution such as **Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Youth Network** and **African Union – European Union Youth Envoys**. The main characteristics of this cluster lie in their large membership and the promotion of collaborative learning and information sharing through the affiliated country chapters as explained above.



Some of the challenges identified by youth networks in this study are as follows:

❖ **The lack of operational resources**

Unsurprisingly the biggest challenge identified is the lack of operational resources to maintain secretariat functions and to finance activities such as training. This is due to the fact that many of these networks do not take in membership subscription, making it difficult for them to raise revenue and creating more dependencies on external grants and funds. This challenge is also stemmed from an inconsistency with the funds as donors' priority changes.

❖ **The lack of political support**

Many networks expressed that they are not recognized by practitioners or governments in their home countries. In extreme cases, these networks are seen to antagonize the governments and are victimized for trying to push for youth inclusion. This, unfortunately, limits the expansion of the networks' membership. There is also no efforts from the political government to establish a structure to formalize these networks. As a result, many networks do not have the option to register as formal institutions.

❖ **Limited access to information & cross networking**

Located in rural areas with limited infrastructure, some of the networks have to operate under no exposure to their target groups, limited access to information and poor connection to networks in other locations.

❖ **Lack of technical guidance**

Many organisations that started as small network reported that as their network's membership expands, they find it more difficult to manage the work under limited technical guidance in critical areas such as financial and strategic planning.

❖ **Avenues for participation**

Some networks lamented that they still have limited avenues to voice challenges, participate in policy dialogues or showcase their work.

❖ **Youth mind-sets**

Apart from associating network with traditional cooperative with rigid entry requirements, many youth still have autonomous mind-sets that makes them reluctant to join networks. Also, youth are not in favour of membership subscriptions either because of their mind-sets or they simple cannot afford it.

❖ **Others**

There are other miscellaneous challenges that are related to agricultural activities such as lack of access to land, production technologies, climate change, and social constraints e.g., gender

Having outlined the key challenges, James then went on to outline a set of recommendations:

1. Understanding the diversity of networks

Many youth networks keep changing their structure from informal networks to NGOs and other forms mainly to chase opportunities and find grants. Such changes can be the type of pressure that detaches them from what they are intending to do. Therefore, practitioners need to understand the diversity of networks specifically in regards to their evolving structures and member composition, including their legal registration and funds. This will allow them to match development programme needs with the structures to prevent unwarranted changes in the structures of the networks.

2. In-depth studies

Practitioners need to conduct more in-depth studies of the networks to understand power structures, representativeness and risks of “elite capture” within the networks.

3. Increasing the visibility

Clearly one challenge presented in this study is identifying these youth networks. Online search method adopted in this study generated a good result; however, on the other hand, it failed to include other youth networks and associations that do not establish their presence online. Practitioners can contribute to the efforts to enhance the visibility of these youth networks through the creation of database.

4. Facilitation of creation of youth network led advisory committees

Since youth networks have diverse and unique voices, practitioners can facilitate their (networks’) engagement through the creation of advisory councils within their (practitioners’) activities. One of the best example is the establishment of the Rural Youth Thematic Working Group within the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development which has been facilitating engagement with the youth.

5. Promoting youth networks

Practitioners play a crucial role for youth networks through promotion and endorsement of these networks as recognised and relevant institution to governments.

6. Enhancing interconnectivity

The study identified about 10 youth associations in Ghana that are doing similar work but are not aware of each other’s existence. Practitioners can enhance these networks’ interconnectivity at country and regional level by creating programmes to bring them together and harmonize their efforts.



7. Provision of resources	Donors can offer various resources to these networks to conduct their activities including hosting secretariat functions and providing operational funds.
8. Building the technical capacity	Having identified the challenge of managing a large network size due to lack of technical capacity in terms of strategic planning and management, it is highly recommended that development partners invest in relevant training and development for network heads.
9. Creating arenas for networks to showcase their work	Not only do high-level forums increase the networks' chance to showcase their works but they also increase their visibility as relevant development partners.

Q&A Highlights

Question from the audience: It sounds like many youth networks already exist and trying to promote them is far more important than setting a new ones. Do you have a good example to showcase donors working with youth networks to help promote them to the government and acquire their national recognitions?

James Kyewalabye: A good example will be YOFCHAN in Uganda which has launched the National Youth in Agriculture Manifesto. They evolved out of an intervention with FAO that recognized youth champions. As a result of that, they are currently recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture, the key reference point in youth programming. Another good example is Botswana Young Farmers Association which has worked with GIZ to map out youth in agriculture in Botswana. These examples showcase how local government's recognition validates the network's professionalism in their area of operation.

Question from the audience: You mentioned that youth networks very often lack information about other existing networks, as exemplified in the case of networks in Ghana. You also provided an example of country-level networks strongly tied with other networks in showcasing Botswana Young Farmers Association, which has over 5000 young farmers in the country along different value chains, and Namibia Young Farmers Association. How well organized and well connected are these two networks in their respective countries?

James Kyewalabye: Botswana Young Farmers Association has other networks tied into it. Most of these networks are small-producers networks. As I mentioned in the last part, we need more in-depth studies about how the structures operate. In an interview with the head of the Association, she mentioned that they organize consultative meeting with different young farmers in different regions in the network to generate ideas for their Strategic Plan. The Plan is then approved by the Botswana annual farmers' forum.



There is a need to sort of validate how much of ideas are echoed and from which regions exactly in Botswana. There is data gap relating to such structures. Based on the interview, I could tell you that the association is well structured, has an office and is very recognized within the government but I cannot provide concrete answer regarding other networks that are tied into this association.

The Namibia Young Farmers Association is mainly an online platform. Their goal is not so much to push agenda but more on information sharing via online platforms. For instance, when you join their Facebook page, you can share your ideas, post your questions, and learn about new opportunities.

Question from the audience: Has there been real impact that you have seen on helping more rural, lower educated youth? My experience is that it is a real challenge to reach them rather than more urbanised, higher educated ones.

James Kyewalabye: I cannot really see if there has been real impact but I do know that there are challenges in reaching them. In this study, I learned that it is difficult to reach some representatives remotely because they do not have e-mail addresses and are not fluent in English.

Question from the audience: Do you have any contact with CAADP network and any update on what they are currently doing, how well are they set up now with their country chapters and how well are they connected with the other networks?

James Kyewalabye: I did not have direct contact with CAADP but there was a webinar recently organized on how to keep youth involved in CAADP processes. In that webinar, they shared some details. We will also have more contacts with them and will include the detail and more updates of their progress in the full report.

Question from the audience: Will the study's full report be shared?

James Kyewalabye: Yes, the study's full report will be shared at the end of November and it will have a full list of all other networks included in this study.

Please feel free to send questions or feedback to oliver.hanschke@donorplatform.org

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