

THE STATUS OF YOUTH IN AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS

NEWS: The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations released a report titled *“The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems”*, highlighting the role of agrifood systems in addressing youth unemployment and transforming food security.

WHAT’S IN THE NEWS?

Key Demographic and Employment Highlights

- **Youth Distribution:** Nearly **85% of the world’s 1.3 billion youth (aged 15–24)** live in *low- and lower-middle-income countries*, where **agrifood systems are central to employment and livelihoods**.
- **Definition – Agrifood System:** Encompasses the **entire value chain** of food production—from agriculture, processing, transportation, and marketing, to consumption—while factoring in social, economic, and environmental dimensions.
- **NEET Population:** Over **20% of global youth** are classified as NEET—*Not in Employment, Education, or Training*—with unemployment highest among the **20–24 age group**.

Youth Participation in Agrifood Systems

- **Youth Involvement:** Around **44% of working youth** globally are involved in agrifood systems, compared to **38% of working adults**.
- **Declining Trend:** Participation has decreased from **54% in 2005** to current levels (44%), signaling a disengagement trend.
- **Crisis-Driven Engagement:** In **protracted crisis regions** (conflict, climate, or food insecurity), **82% of youth** work in agrifood systems, in contrast to just **23%** in *industrialized* agrifood systems.

Emerging Challenges and Warnings

- **Urban Shift:** About **54% of youth now live in urban areas**, with concentrations especially high in **East Asia**, reducing rural workforce availability.
- **Labour Shortage Risk:** In *industrial agrifood systems*, **rural youth make up just 5%** of the population, raising alarm about *future labour shortages in food systems*.
- **Food Insecurity Among Youth:** Globally, youth food insecurity **rose from 16.7% (2014–16) to 24.4% (2021–23)**, with the most severe impact seen in *Africa*.

Climate Threats to Rural Youth

- **Climate Risk:** An estimated **395 million rural youth** live in regions projected to face **declining agricultural productivity due to climate shocks**, especially in *sub-Saharan Africa* and *traditional agrifood systems*.

- **Implication:** Without climate-resilient agriculture and adaptive capacity, youth in these areas face increasing vulnerability.

Three-Pronged Strategy for Youth Empowerment

The report outlines a strategy focusing on **data, inclusion, and investment**:

1. Inquire More:

- Bridge **knowledge and data gaps** on youth employment in agrifood systems.
- Promote **research and evidence-based policies** that are inclusive of youth perspectives.

2. Include More:

- Ensure **active youth participation** in policy-making and governance related to agriculture and food systems.
- Support **youth organizations** and leadership training programs.

3. Invest More:

- Targeted **financial and capacity-building investments** to enhance youth participation in both **on-farm and off-farm roles**.
- Improve access to **credit, training, land, and market infrastructure**.

Recommended Interventions

- **Expand Economic Opportunities:** Equip youth with **skills, technology, and entrepreneurship support** in agricultural and allied sectors.
- **Modernize Infrastructure:** Improve **rural infrastructure**, irrigation, and logistics to make farming more **profitable and aspirational**.
- **Facilitate Access to Land & Credit:** Design *youth-targeted land ownership and financial support schemes*, including micro-credit.
- **Promote Orderly Youth Migration:** Encourage *safe and skill-enhancing migration* pathways that address *labour mismatches* in rural-urban and international contexts.
- **Enhance Digital Connectivity:** Strengthen access to **internet and digital tools**, helping youth tap into *e-commerce, precision farming, and market intelligence*.

FAO's Call to Action

- The report is seen as a “**timely, evidence-based assessment**” of how agrifood systems can serve as a tool for **youth empowerment, food security, and sustainable development**.
- **FAO Director-General QU Dongyu** emphasized that **empowered youth** can become *key drivers* in transforming global agrifood systems for the better.

India's Government Initiatives for Sustainable Agrifood Systems

- **PM Kisan Sampada Yojana:**

- Promotes **food processing near farms**.
- Offers **35–50% grant** for setting up **cold storage, packaging units, warehouses**, etc.
- **Mega Food Park Scheme:**
 - Supports **integrated food processing zones** with common infrastructure.
 - Provides **up to ₹50 crore** in financial aid.
- **Operation Greens:**
 - Targets **value chain development** for **tomato, onion, and potato (TOP)** crops.
 - Grants up to **50% support for post-harvest infrastructure**.
- **PM-FME Scheme:**
 - Aims to **formalize micro food enterprises**, especially in *rural and semi-urban areas*.
 - Provides a **35% subsidy** (up to ₹10 lakh) for small units like **pickle, spice, or flour processing**.
- **Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme:**
 - Designed to boost **food exports**, generate **2.5 lakh jobs**, and support **Indian food brands** globally.
 - Offers **financial incentives** for increasing capacity and scaling up operations.

Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO): An Overview

- **Established:** 1945 as a specialized UN agency.
- **Headquarters:** Rome, Italy.
- **Membership:** 195 members (194 countries + EU), including India.
- **Mandate:**
 - Coordinates international efforts on **agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and land and water use**.
 - Aligns with *Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger)*.
- **Funding:** Entirely through **contributions from member countries**.
- **Role in Relief:** FAO **does not directly manage food relief** in crisis zones—this responsibility lies with the **World Food Programme (WFP)**.

Key Reports Published by FAO

- **SOFI:** *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*
- **SOFO:** *State of the World's Forests*

- **SOFIA:** *State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture*
- **SOCO:** *State of Agricultural Commodity Markets*

Source: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/agriculture/agriculture-can-provide-employment-to-millions-of-youth-boost-global-gdp-by-14-fao>