

The New Alliance on Food Security and Nutrition: What are the Implications for Africa's Youth?

Key policy messages

1. Young people are a growing proportion of Africa's population and most live in poverty in rural areas. Despite urbanisation, in absolute numbers the rural youth are growing and agricultural development needs to prioritise opportunities for them to create land-based livelihoods.
2. Large-scale land-based investments that allocate land and water to private companies are often justified with the promise of job creation, but typically create fewer jobs than the land-based livelihoods that they displace.
3. Private investments in agriculture need to be designed to create opportunities for young people to create livelihoods for themselves and their families, both in primary production and also in upstream and downstream enterprises.
4. Implementation of the New Alliance on Food Security and Nutrition needs to avoid large-scale land-based investments and facilitate the process of developing

young people as independent farmers and producers capable of establishing land-based and rural non-farm livelihoods on their own, and on their own terms.

Background

The 'New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition' (hereafter the 'New Alliance') is a partnership which was established between selected African countries, G8 members, and the private sector to 'work together to accelerate investments in agriculture to improve productivity, livelihoods and food security for smallholder farmers.'¹ Announced by President Obama at the 2012 G8 Summit, the initiative aims at the fundamental transformation of Africa's agriculture through market mechanisms based on large-scale land-based investments. Its pioneers anticipated that the initiative would simultaneously increase food production/availability and food accessibility/affordability through market conduits, thereby lifting millions of rural Africans out of poverty.² To achieve this goal, its proponents put much faith in the private sector as the key driver of the initiative given the sector's endowments in terms of financial resources, human capital,

technological resources, intellectual property, market access, cutting-edge business practices, in-country networks and other expertise related to food security.³ Some critics of the New Alliance, however, challenged this initiative on grounds that the pursuit of the profit generation and developmental goals are incompatible and mutually exclusive in essence, and the combination of these two can't and will never work for the benefit of the poor, as the latter will always be adversely incorporated into the former.⁴

Africa is a youthful continent

Africa is the continent with the youngest population: nearly 70 percent of the African population is currently under the age of 30, and more than 50 percent of the world's young people live in Africa.⁵ At its current population growth rate of 2.2 percent and fertility rate of 5.2 children per woman, the demographic projection suggests that sub-Saharan Africa's young people will increase by an estimated 42.5m between 2010 and 2020, and this trend is expected to continue even beyond 2050.⁶ While Africa is also an urbanising continent, demographic estimates suggest that the absolute number of sub-Saharan Africa's rural youth will also continue to rise until at least 2040.⁷ Currently, about 70 percent of Africa's young people live in rural areas,⁸ of whom three-quarters live on less than US\$2 per day. Young women are particularly disadvantaged for various reasons: 1) gender disparities in many African societies continue to hinder young girls' acquisition of decent education and employable skills; 2) the pressures of early marriage and child rearing reduce young women's opportunity space considerably, resulting in a cycle of limited opportunities and choices; and 3) cultural norms

and obligations confine young women's options to early motherhood and unpaid domestic work.

According to a 2012 International Labour Organization report, more than half of the total youth population in Africa are employed in the agriculture and informal sectors.⁹ The report also highlights the fact that youth unemployment is high in Africa and that young women are more likely to be unemployed than young men throughout the continent. While the global unemployment rate sits at around 12 percent, the youth unemployment rates in many African countries are much higher. For instance, the youth unemployment rate stands at 70 percent for the Democratic Republic of Congo; 60 percent for Sierra Leone and Mauritania; 50 percent for Swaziland and 48 percent for South Africa.¹⁰ The situation of youth unemployment in Africa was exacerbated by the 2008 world financial crisis that led to massive job losses and pushed many of Africa's young people into unemployment. In South Africa, for instance, while the overall employment decline was about 6.4 percent between 2008 and 2010, employment dropped by more than 20 percent for young people between 18 and 24 years of age during the same period. In Zambia, youth unemployment increased to about 37.6 percent in 2008 from 21.9 in 2004.¹¹

Ironically the New Alliance, initiated to help Africa deal with the negative impacts of the global economic crisis, gives little attention to Africa's youth and much less to rural youth. Thus far, youth are explicitly mentioned only in the cooperation framework of Senegal. A few companies have specific programmes that explicitly target rural young people, such as Dominion Farms in Nigeria which provides training to about 50 Nigerian youth in rice production. However, youth as a constituency

for agricultural investment are not explicitly addressed in the New Alliance initiative. This omission is problematic, given the youthfulness of the African continent and the associated urgent need to secure decent livelihoods and employment for its rapidly growing young population.

Large-scale land-based investments are not efficient tools for rural employment creation for the youth

Large-scale land-based investments that allocate land and water to private companies are often justified with the promise of job creation, but typically create fewer jobs than the land-based livelihoods that they displace.¹² The employment potential of cereal production (maize and wheat) which forms the bulk of the crops targeted by land-based investments in Africa is extremely limited, as these are not regarded as crops with high labour intensity that could deliver great benefits in terms of employment creation.¹³ A study in Ethiopia, which has been the frontrunner in receiving agricultural investments, mainly for food crop production from the Gulf States, shows that out of 150 agricultural investments investigated, 130 were found to be creating fewer than 50 full-time equivalent jobs. There were no prospects towards higher levels of employment, either, as many of these companies were found to be continuously and steadily increasing the level of mechanisation of their operations in order to remain competitive.¹⁴ Similarly, a comparative study that investigated the employment impacts of large farms in Ghana, Kenya and Zambia also concluded that this particular agricultural model created fewer jobs, very often for an experienced adult skilled labour force rather than for young people.¹⁵

With all of these observations in view, the prospects of job creation through these agricultural investments for all categories of rural job seekers, including the rural youth, are limited. Although the data (and the literature) on youth employment in large scale agricultural investments is very scarce, the above studies suggest that these investments are unlikely to bring about a remedy to the problem of youth unemployment in Africa. On the contrary, these investments may exacerbate the problem, because land allocations to potential investors often results in loss of land for the local people.¹⁶ Most importantly, these investments involve long lease agreement that can potentially lock out the younger generation from agrarian production and precipitate a process of 'rural proletarianisation'.¹⁷ Although many African countries' land laws provide for community rights to consultation and consent, some available evidence shows that these consultations may be confined to village elders, officials and elites. Young people are seldom represented in these forums to make sure that these agricultural investments do not compromise their rural futures.¹⁸

Private investments in agriculture need to be designed to create opportunities for young people to build livelihoods for themselves and their families

Private investments in agriculture should be designed in such a way that they enable the process of developing young people as independent farmers and producers, capable of establishing land-based livelihoods on their own, and on their own terms, both in primary production and also in upstream and downstream enterprises. This may involve helping young people overcome the challenges

of, among other things, lack of access to technology and capital, which are the major hindrances to their successful participation in market-oriented smallholder production.

To conclude, any rural development effort in Africa, including the New Alliance initiative, should directly target young people as independent producers and appropriately support their visions of establishing land-based and rural non-farm livelihoods in rural areas. It is this 'accumulation from below' that should be at the core of rural development policy in Africa if policymakers wish to deal effectively with the problem of youth unemployment. The implementation of the New Alliance on Food Security and Nutrition needs to avoid large-scale land-based investments and rather facilitate land-based and rural non-farm livelihoods for rural youth.

End Notes

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