

KOSMOS INNOVATION CENTER

POLICY BRIEF

YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP DIALOGUE AND EXHIBITION FAIR

17TH SEPTEMBER 2025



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LIST OF ACRONYMNS

AFS	African Food System
AGRA	Alliance for Green Revolution for Africa
AIA	Agriculture Innovation for Africa
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CNN	Cable News Network
GEA	Ghana Enterprise Agency
KIC	Kosmos Innovation Center
MOFA	Ministry Of Food and Agriculture
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NYA	National Youth Authority
PWD	Persons With Disability
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UDS	University for Development Studies
WIAD	Women In Agriculture Development
YEFFA	Youth Entrepreneurship for the Future of Food and Agriculture



INTRODUCTION

Africa's youth are increasingly becoming a driving force in shaping the continent's agricultural sector. With a growing population and rising demand for food, the need for innovative solutions to improve food systems and create decent jobs has never been more pressing. The Youth Entrepreneurship Dialogue and Exhibition Fair responded to this need, providing a platform for African youth to showcase their innovations, share experiences, and connect with potential partners and investors with the aim of expanding and creating more jobs for young people including Persons with Disability (PWD) and women.

The event, hosted by the Kosmos Innovation Center in partnership with the Alliance for Green Revolution for Africa (AGRA), marked a significant milestone in Africa's agricultural development journey. The event brought together various stakeholders, including youth innovators, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and industry experts, to explore innovative solutions for sustainable food systems and decent jobs in the rice, soya beans, and horticulture value chains. The event featured several youth and women-led exhibitors showcasing cutting-edge innovations in the aforementioned value chain areas.

The dialogue also featured two panel discussions sessions, the first being on the topic: *Bottlenecks to youth active participation in the soya beans, rice and horticulture value chains*, and the second on the topic: *Job opportunities within the soya beans, rice and horticulture value chains*. There was also a presentation on the theme: *Leveraging tech for increased youth employability in soybeans, rice and horticulture value chains*. The resource persons emphasized the need for increased investment in youth-led innovation, highlighting the potential for technology to drive sustainable agricultural development. Participants discussed challenges and opportunities for young entrepreneurs to access finance and markets. A key takeaway from the event was the importance of creating an enabling environment that supports youth and women-led innovation in agriculture. This includes investing in digital infrastructure, promoting policy and regulatory frameworks that support youth and women-led entrepreneurship and innovation, and providing access to finance and markets for youth entrepreneurs. The Youth Entrepreneurship Dialogue and Exhibition Fair also served as a catalyst for action, inspiring stakeholders to work together to address the pressing challenges facing Africa's agricultural sector. As the continent continues to grapple with issues such as food insecurity, unemployment, and climate change, the role of youth and women-led innovation in driving sustainable agricultural development cannot be overstated.

OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY ENGAGEMENT

- To create a safe space for youth and women-led entrepreneurship dialogue on systemic, structural and policy challenges affecting youth active participation in the agriculture space.
- To facilitate a multi-stakeholder dialogue among key partners including government agencies, private sector actors, development partners, academia and youth and women-led MSMEs on critical issues such as access to finance, digitalization, and business formalization.
- To advocate for inclusive policy reforms and institutional support systems that promote a more enabling environment for MSMEs, particularly women- and youth-led enterprises.
- To identify militating issues affecting MSMEs growth and sustainability and to table these issues for national level policy reforms advocacy via the Agriculture Innovation for Africa (AIA) conference.
- To provide a platform for youth and women-led entrepreneurs to exhibit their innovative products, network and seek investor support.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Key policymakers and stakeholders increased awareness in MSME challenges and opportunities.
- Strengthened stakeholder collaboration for policy reforms and improved policy implementation.
- MSMEs growth and sustainability issues generated for National Policy dialogue (AIA conference).
- Networking and access to funding for youth-led MSME enhanced.

PARTICIPANTS

Youth and women-led MSMEs, key governmental stakeholders from the Department of Food and Agriculture (MoFA), Food and Drugs Authority (FDA), Ghana Enterprise Agency (GEA), National Youth Authority (NYA), Ghana Standard Authority, Private Sector, and Academia. Also in attendance were the Principal Agriculture Officer of Women in Agriculture Development (WIAD), Northern Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Officer of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA), management and staff of Kosmos Innovation Center (KIC), representatives of other development agencies, and entrepreneurs.

OVERVIEW

The Youth Entrepreneurship Dialogue and Exhibition Fair employed an interactive approach, utilizing panel discussions, exhibitions, and networking sessions to facilitate interactions and knowledge sharing among participants. The panel discussions provided a platform for experts to share their insights and experiences, while the exhibitions showcased innovative solutions and products in agriculture. This interactive approach helped to foster a dynamic and engaging environment, where participants could explore new ideas, identify potential collaborations, and build relationships. The event held under the theme: “African youth leveraging innovation for sustainable food systems and decent jobs in the rice, soybeans and horticulture value chain”, explored key topics including:

- Bottlenecks to youth active participation in soya, rice and horticulture value chains.
- Job opportunities in soya, rice and horticulture value chains.
- Leveraging technology for increased youth employability in the soya, rice and horticulture value chains.

OPENING REMARKS

In his opening remarks, Mr. Benjamin Gyan Kesse, Director of the Kosmos Innovation Center (KIC), highlighted the vast opportunities for young people to leverage technology and innovation to build resilient and sustainable food systems. He noted that KIC's participation in the African Food System (AFS) Forum in Senegal had provided valuable insights into shaping policy and advocacy for youth participation in robust food systems.



According to him, the theme of the event aligns with KIC's purpose of powering innovations, transforming communities, and impacting lives. He further noted that the event was part of a broader project aimed at expanding, mentoring, and coaching disadvantaged youth in agriculture in Ghana.

Mr. Kesse emphasized that young people are not just participants in the agricultural sector but leaders and change-makers. KIC's experience in working with thousands (1000s) of young entrepreneurs across the country has shown that engaging youth in agriculture can lead to innovative solutions and viable businesses that tackle real challenges in the agriculture sector and food systems.

He noted that a team of students from the UDS, mentored by KIC represented Tamale in a business pitch competition in Senegal during the AFS forum and emerged victorious, winning the most impactful award. Their innovative business idea, which involves turning cashew waste into grease, showcased their commitment to environmental sustainability and creative problem-solving. In addition to this achievement, KIC has received international recognition including being profiled by Cable News Network (CNN). This exposure and recognition he said will undoubtedly provide the organization with the much-needed platform to share its success stories and inspire others to follow in its footsteps.

As participants listened to these remarks, Mr. Kesse asked a thought-provoking question; Are we going to take a key action point or just attend like other conferences? This rhetorical question served as a call to action, encouraging participants to actively participate in the events of the day and be inspired to take action that will drive meaningful impact.

Mr. Kesse stressed that the event was more than just a discussion but rather a session to forge connections, develop bold ideas, and set a policy agenda that would ensure youth are at the center of agricultural transformation.

He again encouraged all participants to approach the dialogue with openness and a shared commitment to action, emphasizing the importance of collaboration in driving innovation and building sustainable food systems.



KEY STAKEHOLDERS' PRESENTATIONS

Youth Innovation, Employability and Food Security in Africa

In his presentation, the Country Program Lead of AGRA, Dr. John Jagwe indicated that his outfit's partnership with the Kosmos Innovation Center is built on the premise that building the capacities of Micro, Small,

and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) is crucial for the growth and expansion of agriculture-related trades. This, in turn, will create employment opportunities for the youth. He mentioned that many young people have viewed farming as a last resort or a punishment, rather than a viable career path. And so, it was time to demonstrate that agriculture is not only a vital sector but also an attractive and lucrative field with numerous opportunities for all.

Through its partnership program dubbed “Youth Entrepreneurship for the Future of Food and Agriculture (YEFFA)”, Dr. Jagwe hinted that both organizations (KIC and AGRA) aim to attract young people into agriculture and expose them to the many opportunities that the sector has to offer.

According to him, by partnering with the Kosmos Innovation Center, AGRA is seeking to leverage its expertise and resources to create a program that is tailored to the needs of young entrepreneurs in agriculture. He concluded by stating that under the YEFFA project, KIC and AGRA will provide training, mentorship, and support to help young people develop their skills and build their businesses.

African Youth Leveraging Innovation for Sustainable Food Systems and Decent Jobs in Rice, Soybeans and Horticulture Value Chains

In a statement read on behalf of the northern Regional Director of Food and Agriculture, Mr. Issah Abubakari commended Kosmos innovation center (KIC) for their good work and for taking up such an initiative with AGRA. The purpose of convening is not only to discuss agriculture but to address how Africa’s greatest asset can transform the challenge of food insecurity. Over the past two decades, Africa has made bold contribution to target agriculture as the engine of growth. In 2003, Africa leaders adopted a comprehensive African development program which aimed at investing at least 10% of the public expenditure and achieving 6% annual growth in the sector. The African youth charter clearly stated that, the youth have the right to involvement and to participate in successful development process. At the global level, the sustainable development goals, especially SDG 2- Zero hunger and SDG 8 – Decent work and economic growth, reminds us that the transformation of food systems must go hand in hand to create dignified jobs for young people. At the national, regional and global level, Africa continues to face critical challenges in its food systems as well as in the creation of decent jobs for the youth. Africa imports over 35 billion USA dollar of foods annually with much of this being rice, soyabeans and other produce. In 2024, Ghana’s import bill reached a high of approximately 3.3 billion dollars, signaling the growing precedence of imported foods. Food systems are vulnerable to becoming short with post-harvest losses, market disruptions and up to 30-40% perishable crops loss this year. The existing opportunities must be leveraged to empower the African youth and enable them to lead the transformation of the value chain to drive development across the continent. By focusing on the

value chain, particularly in agriculture, youth can increase productivity, increase jobs creation opportunities and enhance food security. These three (3) value chains (rice, soybeans and horticulture) offer enormous potential with rice still heavily imported despite the demand; soybeans remain a high demand food for human and animal industry. Given the above, empowering young people, women and marginalized groups through access to land and technology, will ensure decent jobs are created with the right investment, infrastructure and access to market. Youth are the direct force needed to drive agriculture transformation, through innovation.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Two (2) topics explored in two (2) separate panel discussion sessions:

- Bottlenecks to youth active participation in soya, rice and horticulture value chains.
- Job opportunities in soya, rice and horticulture value chains.

PANEL DISCUSSION 1

Bottlenecks to youth active participation in soya, rice and horticulture value chains

The first session of the panel discussion was moderated by the co-founder of Milky Way. The panel consisted of two esteemed guests: CEO of MarvMay Enterprise, and Mr. Northern Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Officer at the Department of Food and Agriculture. The discussions were centered around the following key topics:

Why Don't Youth Venture into Agri-Business?

Key militating factors against youth participation in agri-business were highlighted include inadequate skills training, poor innovations, inconsistent ideation, and poor access to finance and resources.

Is Agriculture Attractive to Youth?

Agriculture remains attractive to youth; however, numerous challenges—such as limited access to land, high input costs, and expensive processing—continue to hinder their full participation in the sector. Panelists emphasized the need for youth to adopt a learning mindset, demonstrate a willingness to acquire new skills, and remain persistent to succeed in agriculture. They further noted that agricultural investments yield returns over time and therefore require patience.

Key Qualities for Success in Agriculture

The panelists identified key qualities necessary for success in agriculture, including:

- Attitude of learning
- Zeal to acquire skills
- Learning from people already in the space
- Perseverance
- Interest in seeing opportunities

Key Outcomes from the Question-and-Answer Session

- Stakeholders raised concerns about land availability. In response, the panel acknowledged that access to land and irrigation remains a major challenge. However, they noted that under the FEED Ghana program, the government plans to secure 160,000 hectares of land for agricultural development, which will be made accessible to youth aged 15–40. They admonished the youth to take advantage of this initiative.
- Access to finance was identified as another key challenge. The panel advised startups to begin small and gradually expand their agribusinesses. Young agripreneurs were encouraged to save and reinvest their savings, seek low-interest credit facilities, and strengthen their pitching skills to attract potential investors and development partners. They were further encouraged to leverage online platforms, such as LinkedIn, to explore additional opportunities.

PANEL DISCUSSION 2

Job opportunities within the soybeans, rice and horticulture value chains

Unlocking Opportunities in Agriculture

The second session of the event was expertly moderated by Programs Officer at the Kosmos Innovation Center (KIC). The session featured two esteemed panelists: Principal Agricultural Officer at WIAD, and a seasoned Business Consultant and founder of Grow for Africa Consult.

Opportunities for Young People in Agriculture

Opportunities identified within the agricultural sector for young agripreneurs included crop production, food processing, value addition, agri-tech innovations, and mechanization services, among others. Female agripreneurs were further encouraged to engage with the WIAD office at the District Department of Agriculture to explore the wide range of opportunities available to them.

Access to Startup Capital and Finance

Government and private sector actors were recognized as key stakeholders in providing funding opportunities for young agripreneurs. Panelists emphasized the need for youth to actively build skills and develop viable business ideas to position themselves for funding opportunities. Agripreneurs were further encouraged to take advantage of mentorship and coaching programs to enhance their capacity and expand their networks.

Inclusion and Support for Persons with Disabilities

The discussion emphasized the need to create inclusive opportunities within the agricultural sector. Panelists highlighted the importance of extending services and resources to persons with disabilities, ensuring that they are not left behind in agricultural development. They also stressed the provision of both soft and hard skills training to enhance their capacity for active participation in agribusiness.

Vision for the Future of Agriculture

Panelists shared a forward-looking perspective on the agricultural sector, projecting significant transformation over the next three to five years. They envisioned a vibrant youth presence in agriculture, driven by agro-industrialization and export growth. Young people were encouraged to cultivate curiosity, continuously seek knowledge, and take advantage of mentorship and coaching opportunities from experienced professionals to strengthen their contributions to the sector.

Key Outcomes from the Question-and-Answer Session

During the Q&A segment, stakeholders raised questions on how young people could access information on opportunities in the agricultural sector. Panelists advised that relevant information and support can be obtained from agricultural departments and agricultural extension officers.

Questions were also raised regarding access to bank loans and consultancy services. Panelist highlighted that some banks offer facilities that do not require extensive documentation. They emphasized the importance of making inquiries, seeking the right information, and leveraging technology. Young people were further encouraged to adopt innovative and strategic approaches in pursuing such opportunities.

Leveraging Technology for Increased Employability in Soyabeans, Rice and Horticulture Value Chains

The session on Leveraging Technology for Increased Employability in Soya Beans, Rice, and Horticulture Value Chains highlighted the role of innovation and digital solutions in creating new opportunities for youth in agriculture. The presentation emphasized bridging skill gaps, addressing the digital divide, expanding financing options, and promoting inclusive participation.

Key solutions showcased included mobile apps for mechanization services, crowdfunding platforms for farmer financing, and technology-driven systems to reduce crop losses. Several entry points for youth were identified across rice, soybean, and horticulture value chains, particularly in mechanization, processing, value addition, and digital marketplaces.

Networking and Exhibition

The networking and exhibition segment created a vibrant platform for stakeholders, agripreneurs, and industry professionals to connect, exchange knowledge, and explore collaborative opportunities. A diverse group of exhibitors showcased innovative products and services ranging from soybean and cereal processing to organic compost, vegetable processing, and value-added agribusiness products.

The exhibition provided four key benefits:

1. Networking Opportunities – fostering connections that may lead to strategic partnerships and collaborations.
2. Innovation Showcase – highlighting creative agribusiness solutions and technological advancements.
3. Market Exposure – offering visibility and potential market expansion for participating enterprises.
4. Knowledge Sharing – enabling the exchange of best practices and industry insights among

CONCLUSION

The Youth Entrepreneurship Dialogue and Exhibition Fair demonstrated the potential of African youth to drive transformative change in the agricultural sector. The event showcased innovative solutions, fostered partnerships, and provided a platform for knowledge sharing and networking. To build on this momentum, stakeholders must work together to address the challenges and opportunities highlighted during the event, ensuring that African youth can leverage innovation to create sustainable food systems and decent jobs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussions and exhibitions, several recommendations emerged.

- Governments, private sector, and development partners should increase investment in youth-led innovations, focusing on incubators, accelerators, and funding opportunities.
- Financial institutions and market actors should develop innovative financing models and market-based solutions to support youth entrepreneurs in agriculture.
- Policymakers should create an enabling environment for youth-led innovation, including policies and regulations that support youth entrepreneurship, innovation, and job creation.

Picture Gallery

