

POLICY BRIEF - ADVOCACY PAPER



Hub

IYBA
SEED

Investing in **Young
Businesses in Africa**
Supporting Entrepreneurial
Ecosystems Development

EMPOWERING YOUTH AND ECOSYSTEM SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS (ESOs) FOR AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION IN AFRICA

Introduction

As part of the IYBA-SEED programme in collaboration with SNV-YEE and ENABEL-Bilateral, a travel study tour including a knowledge exchange session was organised on the sidelines of the Africa Food Systems Forum 2025 in Dakar, Senegal. The delegation brought together youth-led Ecosystem Support Organisations (ESOs) and their entrepreneur champions from Benin, Kenya, and Senegal, to dialogue, advocate, and learn from multiple entrepreneurship development actors present at the AFS Forum 2025 and within the Senegalese Ecosystem.

The aim of this initiative was to:

- Amplify youth voices in the transformation of agri-food systems.
- Provide a platform for knowledge sharing and peer learning among ESOs and young entrepreneurs.
- Strengthen advocacy for youth-friendly business environments by identifying common challenges and developing joint policy recommendations.

The discussions and exchanges during this tour informed the insights and recommendations captured in this Policy Position Paper.

The Challenges

Youth entrepreneurs are central to Africa's food systems transformation. They bring innovation, energy, and resilience. Yet, their efforts are constrained by structural and systemic challenges that limit their potential and the impact of the Ecosystem Support Organisations (ESOs) that assist them.

The challenges identified through the knowledge exchange in Dakar can be grouped as follows:

- **Limited Access to Finance:** Young entrepreneurs face barriers in accessing credit, investment, and youth-friendly financial products. Traditional lenders view them as high risk, while few blended finance solutions exist that combine capital with technical support.
- **Weak Skills and Education Systems:** Current education curricula often neglect practical business and agribusiness skills. Many young entrepreneurs lack structured support in enterprise management, innovation, and digital tools.
- **Governance and Data Gaps:** Weak systems for accountability, transparency, and data-driven decision-making constrain effective programme design and monitoring. Record-keeping by farmers and Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) remains poor, reducing trust and investment potential.
- **Limited Market Access:** Young entrepreneurs struggle to integrate into established value chains. They face difficulties in meeting quality standards, connecting with buyers, and accessing regional and international markets.
- **Policy and Institutional Barriers:** Youth voices remain underrepresented in policymaking. Regulations are often rigid, fragmented, or outdated, creating administrative and fiscal hurdles/confusion that disproportionately affect young and small businesses.



SNAP Insight from Ecosystem Support Organisations

Story:

“When we shared our experiences on accompanying our youth and women-led incubators especially in agri-food value chains, rice (Senegal), Soya (Benin) and Aquaculture (Kenya), we quickly came to agree that training alone was not enough. Entrepreneurs also dearly need access to finance, market connections, and a supportive policy environment to grow.”

Mr Imali Djetta

President, National Chamber of Agriculture, Benin

Need: This experience reflects a broader reality: ESOs face increasing demand to provide **comprehensive support**, yet they lack the resources, partnerships, and recognition to address these systemic gaps.

Answer: By positioning ESOs as **integrated partners** in policy implementation and programme delivery, governments and development actors can ensure that youth entrepreneurs receive both the technical and financial support they need, along with pathways into value chains.

Proof: Evidence from Kenya, Benin, and Senegal shows that **where ESOs are empowered - through funding, training, and partnerships combined - they unlock opportunities for hundreds of youth enterprises, creating jobs and strengthening local food systems.**



RECOMMENDATIONS

To address these challenges, ecosystem actors from **Kenya, Benin, and Senegal** put forward the following actionable recommendations. These are grouped into five priority areas to guide policymakers, development partners, and private sector actors.

a) Finance & Investment

- Establish **youth-dedicated funds** and **guarantee schemes** tailored to the realities of agri-food entrepreneurs.
- Promote **blended finance models** that **combine capital with technical** and business development support.
- Strengthen **ESOs to act as trusted intermediaries** linking youth with investors and financial institutions.

b) Education & Capacity Development

- Integrate **entrepreneurship and agribusiness skills** into **national curricula** at secondary and tertiary levels.
- Expand **practical training opportunities**, including incubation, mentorship, and digital learning tools.
- Recognise **ESOs as partners in delivering capacity development** and scaling innovative training models.

c) Governance & Data

- Improve **transparency and accountability** in youth and agriculture programmes.
- Strengthen **data collection, analysis, and sharing** to guide policy and investment decisions.
- Support SMEs and farmers in **record-keeping systems** to **build credibility** and investor confidence.

d) Markets & Value Chains

- Facilitate **youth access to domestic, regional, and international markets** through platforms, fairs, and trade agreements.
- Strengthen **youth integration into value chains with tailored support** for meeting standards and certifications.
- Incentivise private sector actors to **source from youth-led enterprises**.

e) Policy & Institutional Environment

- Create **formal platforms for youth participation in policy dialogues** at national and regional levels.
- Establish **national and regional coordination mechanisms bringing together, public institutions, ESOs and development partners** to strengthen alignment, reduce duplication, and ensure complementarity in ecosystem support.
- Create **lasting multi-stakeholder platforms (public-private-ESO-youth)** to foster collaboration, coherence, and **joint action in designing and implementing policies** and programmes.
- Simplify and adapt **regulations, taxation, and licensing** to **reduce barriers for young entrepreneurs**.
- Promote **institutional and policy harmonisation** at **sub-national, national and regional levels** to ease youth participation in agribusiness even across borders.

The Way Forward

The collective voice of notable ecosystem actors – such as ADEPME Senegal, Chamber of Commerce Kaolack Senegal, Ashoka Senegal, Enabel, The State Department for SME Kenya, The Chamber of Agriculture in Benin, the EUD in Senegal and National Union of Traders and Industrialists of Senegal; ESOs and youth entrepreneurs from Benin, Kenya, and Senegal – is clear: **strengthening ESOs and creating youth-friendly business environments is essential to unlock Africa's agri-food potential.**

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