



## **Grow talent, harvest a future**

**Landscapes of rural youth opportunity in East-Africa  
based on Help a Child's programs**

September 2022

# Introduction

It goes without saying that young people are the future. And today's generation of young people, at 1,8 billion, is the largest ever. Most of them live in the rural areas of low and middle-income countries. The challenges faced by today's young generation are considerable. Youth are two to three times more likely to be unemployed than adults and they are also more likely to be poor. This has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns that have disproportionately affected young people. They were not only hit in terms of their participation in the labor market but also by severe disruptions in education and training.<sup>1</sup> If these issues are not addressed, young people will be worse off for years to come.

This report aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion on how to adequately tackle these immense challenges for the youth of today. In order to do this, practical experience from Help a Child's youth projects in four East-African countries will be compared to a relevant academic framework. In this way, it will be possible to draw conclusions that are supported both by the literature and the real experiences of youth. The framework used is the 'Landscapes of rural youth opportunity' developed by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD),<sup>2</sup> which is an international financial institution and a specialized agency of the United Nations that works to address poverty and hunger in rural areas of developing countries. The practical information is derived from the experience of Help a Child, a non-profit organization that has worked with youth in a multitude of Sub-Saharan countries for many years. Most importantly, young people that have joined Help a Child projects have provided much of the information that can be found in this report. Their insights, challenges and dreams should always be part of the discussion.

## Contents

In the first part, the framework of IFAD will be explained. In part 2, this framework will be applied to four countries known to Help a Child, namely Malawi, Burundi, Rwanda, and South Sudan. In each of these countries, youth face distinct challenges resulting from their place in society and the environment in which they grow up. In part 3, we bring together lessons learned that are related to the main aspects of the IFAD framework. Lastly, in part 4, some recommendations are given that should be taken into account by both policymakers and practitioners working with (rural) youth in developing countries. This includes a short reflection on the Youth@Heart principles of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/employment/informationresources/covid-19/other/WCMS\\_813690/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/employment/informationresources/covid-19/other/WCMS_813690/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ifad.org/en/>

# 1. IFAD Framework: ‘The rural landscape of youth opportunity’

Tackling the issues that youth, and especially rural youth, face nowadays is highly complex, as every young person lives in his or her individual context made up of a multitude of factors. The IFAD developed a framework that takes into account the complex nature of opportunities for youth called: “the landscape of rural youth opportunity”.<sup>3</sup>

The central thought of the framework is that a young person’s ‘landscape of opportunity’ emerges from the interplay between a young person’s **(social/economic) structure** and his/her (perceived) **agency**.

## Structure

Four factors are identified that form the structure of local landscapes of rural youth opportunity:

- **Economic geography:** referring to the economic possibilities that are available in a certain place, depending both on the natural resources and economic viability of products or services
- **Local particularities:** local agrarian dynamics (including historical patterns of development, demography, land availability and the distribution of land holdings, inward investment in land etc.) often influence growth or employment generation
- **Social norms:** norms and expectations associated with social differences including gender, age, class, marital status, religion and ethnicity act to reproduce preconceived notions of what is acceptable or appropriate

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<sup>3</sup>[https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41187395/07\\_Sumberg+et+al.\\_2019+RDR+BACKGROUND+PAPER.pdf/740afb10-9063-3027-9175-54dlc7cca98d](https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41187395/07_Sumberg+et+al._2019+RDR+BACKGROUND+PAPER.pdf/740afb10-9063-3027-9175-54dlc7cca98d)

- **Family and access to resources:** particularly for younger people, it is often through families that productive resources including land, finance, technology, knowledge, and networks are accessed

All of these have a significant impact on the opportunities that youth have. These structural factors can be improved, but they can also prove to be quite static.

## Meaning of agency

The IFAD argues that the landscape of opportunity emerges, or becomes meaningful, only when it is read by the individual (agency). Youth will have views on the different possibilities that they see as being open to them. Information about, and familiarity with, the different possibilities affects how the landscape of opportunity is perceived, particularly for younger people whose knowledge about some possibilities is likely to be incomplete and might even be wrong.

## Figure

The figure below illustrates the conceptualization of landscapes of rural youth opportunity. This figure indicates that a young person; 'reads and engages with the landscape of opportunity as an actor situated in a certain economic geography, and embedded in a set of specific local historical, environmental, social, economic, political, and family relations. Some of these relations will enable and others will constrain.'<sup>4</sup>

Looking at youth development through the lens of the rural landscape enables us to take into account the different factors that influence young people's lives. It shows that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for improving the situation of rural youth. Additionally, it is crucial to get a clear picture of how individuals themselves perceive their landscape of opportunity. In some situations, much progress can be made if youth are given appropriate access to information.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41187395/07\\_Sumberg+et+al.\\_2019+RDR+BACKGROUND+PAPER.pdf/740afb10-9063-3027-9175-54dlc7cca98d](https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41187395/07_Sumberg+et+al._2019+RDR+BACKGROUND+PAPER.pdf/740afb10-9063-3027-9175-54dlc7cca98d)

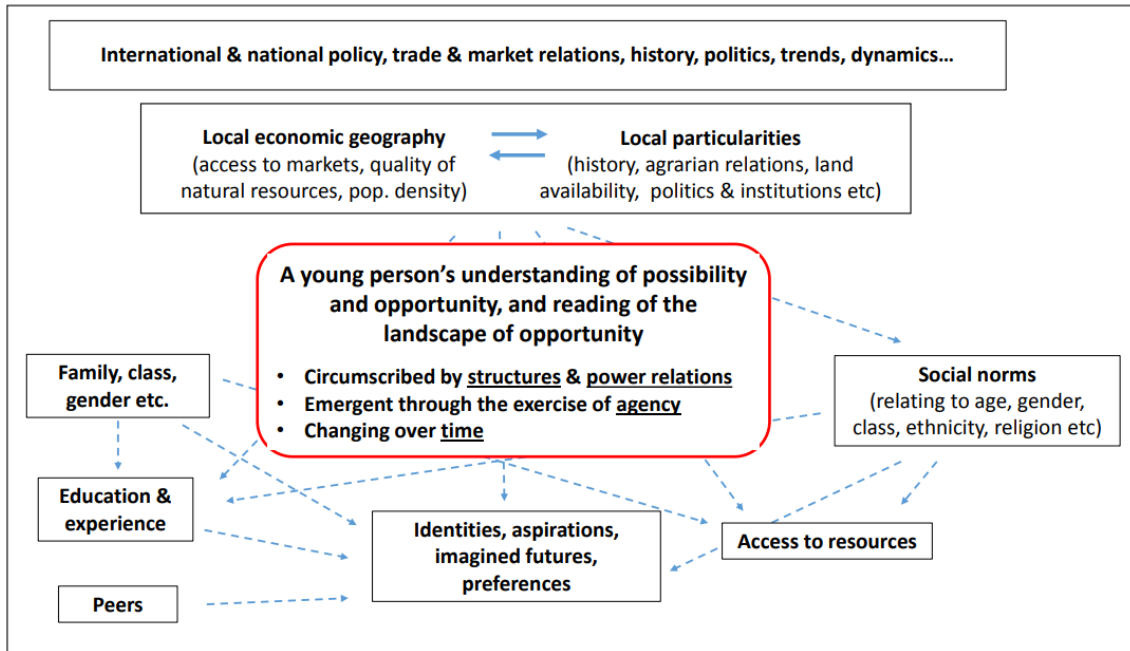


Figure 1: Landscapes of rural youth opportunity (IFAD)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41187395/07\\_Sumberg+et+al.\\_2019+RDR+BACKGROUND+PAPER.pdf/740afb10-9063-3027-9175-54dlc7cca98d](https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41187395/07_Sumberg+et+al._2019+RDR+BACKGROUND+PAPER.pdf/740afb10-9063-3027-9175-54dlc7cca98d)

## 2. The framework in practice – four ‘portraits’ of rural landscapes

The ultimate aim of Help a Child’s holistic Youth & Work approach is to make youth self-reliant and ready to work. Throughout all of its programs, Help a Child focuses on youth empowerment and participation. In its programs Help a Child has a distinct agricultural approach to youth empowerment. It is important to note that agriculture is a proven engine for poverty reduction. GDP growth generated by agriculture is more effective in reducing poverty than growth in any other sector. In Sub-Saharan Africa, growth in agriculture reduces poverty up to eleven times faster than growth in other sectors.<sup>6</sup>

To see how policy and practice can take up the challenges for youth, it is important to know the particularities. Therefore, this chapter zooms in on four different local contexts in four countries where Help a Child is present. Per context, we describe the four structural elements of the IFAD framework and how Help a Child encounters these elements in its programs. The details and data of these portraits are derived from the observations of field staff, evaluation reports, and the youth themselves.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ifad.org/nl/investing-in-rural-people>

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## Portrait 1: Malawi

### Equipping youth in the role of (future) parents

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**Economic geography:** Malawi remains one of the world's least developed countries, ranking 170 out of 188 on the Human Development Index. Rural villages, like the ones in which we work in Upper Zilakoma are sparsely distributed across a very difficult, hilly terrain with long steep slopes, which makes it difficult for people to easily move from one section to another. Due to the difficult terrains of the Upper Zilakoma area, finding sufficient usable land for agricultural production is quite a challenge, and renting additional land involves even higher costs. This limits the land-based expansion of agricultural production leading to limited production levels. Due to the difficult terrains of Upper Zilakoma, a rational choice for young farmers is to allocate much land to crops that have better price/guaranteed market or are significant for household food security.

**Local particularities:** In general, most young people in Upper Zilakoma have limited knowledge on modern farming technologies as well as limited knowledge about sexual and reproductive health issues. Consequently, they often start their families very young and already have to care for a household with young children, while being (very) young themselves. Most youth are unemployed, and in terms of self-employment, the number of youth owning land is very limited. This is coupled by a limited adoption rate of high value commercial crops.

**Social norms:** Most of the youth are settled in marriage and more responsible for their families, which affects the personal and family decisions they make. In rural areas gender roles are still quite strictly defined. Girls and women are responsible for all the household chores and caring for children, whereas boys and men are expected to take care of the farm and provide an income for the family. Because of the fact that youth often have families themselves, chances of them migrating to other areas are not very high, thereby providing some assurance for sustainability of agricultural project initiatives as individuals but also collectively as youth clubs or groups. There is a firm social belief in most rural areas that it is beneficial to have larger families as it means more family/free labor available for agricultural production. This reduces reliance on hired labor which can be costly especially during peak farming periods.

**Families and access to resources:** Youth, especially those far from the larger cities, continue to have limited access to credible microfinancing hence making it difficult to start new businesses or expand their existing agribusinesses. Other sources of financing are often limited or unreliable or too expensive to service. This results in risk-averse and 'traditional' livelihood plans: youth planting recycled or traditional seeds that realize limited productivity thus leading to a poverty trap. Furthermore, there are no SRH services within a 15 km range in Upper Zilakoma area making it difficult for the youth in upper Zilakoma to regularly and timely access sexual and reproductive health services from the center coupled by limited access to HIV testing kits in the area. This affects their health and family options, which results again in livelihood plans based on subsistence farming.



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## Portrait 2: Burundi

### Building a future in a post-conflict society

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**Economic geography:** The economy of Burundi is heavily dependent on agriculture, with around 90% of the population meeting their livelihood needs through agriculture. Almost every hill in Burundi has a local market, where there is space for small-scale trading activities on a weekly basis. The main export products of Burundi in recent years are coffee, tea, minerals, and gold. There are promising income-generating activities for young people (such as sewing, welding, carpentry, and beekeeping) but these require modest startup investments. Youth often face challenges in getting access to such investments, for example, because there are entry barriers for loans for farming and livestock breeding startups. There are also opportunities for youth in agribusiness, but this necessitates more productive use of the land and increased orientation towards the market. Currently, most Burundians engage in subsistence farming, leaving little produce for trading or selling.

**Local particularities:** Investments in the growth of the Burundian labor market are heavily hindered by poor local infrastructures, with electricity, water, and roads being the potential game changers. This also negatively affects the development of public transport services, with increased costs and time of travel across provinces as a consequence. Besides that, Burundi is in a (post-)conflict situation, where there are many land-related and ethnicity-related tensions between people in densely populated rural areas. People who fled from the war often come back to find their land occupied by other people. As Burundi is one of the most densely populated countries in the region, leaving the land will create problems for the new owner because they will most likely have nowhere else to go. As a consequence, many new interpersonal conflicts arise. A 2017 study conducted by the Conflict Alert and Prevention Centre found that Burundi's young people consider peace their main priority.<sup>7</sup>

**Social norms:** Family responsibilities and expectations weigh heavily on adolescent boys and girls in Burundi. While adolescent boys may be pressured to provide food for their families in the context of limited employment opportunities, adolescent girls often carry the burden of housekeeping. Within rural communities, there generally is unequal access to education and economic opportunities between boys and girls. Most children and youth in rural communities do not have sufficient time to study at home due to family labor demands. Additionally, for young people, access to land is sometimes hindered by cultural values that

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<sup>7</sup> [http://cenap.bi/documents/Publications/Synthse\\_Aspirations\\_Jeunes\\_Burundi\\_demain.pdf](http://cenap.bi/documents/Publications/Synthse_Aspirations_Jeunes_Burundi_demain.pdf)

determine that youth are taken less seriously by their elders. In Burundian culture, a young man is always considered a child or irresponsible until he is married. As for young women, they are double penalized by this cultural weight, as women on the one hand and as young people on the other.<sup>8</sup>

**Families and access to resources:** Many youths have their own families, with almost 1 in 10 girls between 15-19 years old having a family of their own. These figures are much higher in youth up to 25 years old. Youth have limited access to farming land and this results in frustrations because of interrupted education and a lack of meaningful job opportunities. There is a national youth bank but entry barriers limit youth's access to available loans. Only a handful of young people have access to smartphones, and digital literacy levels are low across Burundi. This hinders the growth of the digital/mobile economy which could offer diverse and youth-friendly streams of revenue. On the community level, insufficient vocational education and professional skills development courses are being offered. Youth plead for these to be more accessible and affordable. Many youths are coming together in cooperatives, in order to try to tackle the issues related to access to land, finance, and markets.

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<sup>8</sup> Also see [Gender-and-Socio-Economic-Resilience-Final.pdf](#)

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## Portrait 3: Rwanda

### Reinventing agribusiness as a compelling opportunity for boys *and* girls

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**Economic geography:** In Rwanda, particularly in rural areas, agriculture is the major source of employment. Almost every household income is directly or indirectly connected to agriculture. Agriculture made up around 26% of total GDP in Rwanda in 2020 and employs about 62% of the working population. One big challenge is the scarcity of land, Rwanda being one of the most densely populated countries in the region, which leads to small plots of 0.1-0.5ha per household being available. Additionally, limited access to finance and market linkages still jeopardizes value chain development initiatives. Lack of technology in agriculture, limited knowledge and skills in agricultural techniques (such as climate smart agriculture, organic farming and high performing seed varieties) also remain concerning.

**Local particularities:** Many areas in Rwanda suffer from irregular rainfall and are lacking irrigation systems to respond to prolonged droughts. Many households are involved in subsistence farming, focused on crops such as bananas, beans, maize, and vegetables. In most cases, parents or adults are the ones to be involved in agriculture. The youth nowadays are not very eager to be active in agriculture which is a large challenge, especially because many young people in the community cannot find other types of employment. Off-farm activities are very limited. Combined with the fact that revenue from farming is usually quite low, this has caused much youth in the community to be involved in delinquency, drugs, or abuse.

**Social norms:** Young men are often more likely to assume leadership positions, not necessarily because young women do not possess the right capabilities, but because they are not confident enough to take a leadership role, as this falls outside of cultural expectations. Interestingly, the number of girls in primary schools is higher than the number of boys, but when going into secondary school this changes, as more girls drop out. The decision to stay at home for many girls is influenced by their families and the expectations placed upon them to take responsibility for household activities.

**Families and access to resources:** Like in other areas of Rwanda, youth are facing a challenge with regard to accessing loans or financial services due to a lack of collateral assets. This is a problem that affects both men and women. Rural youth also struggle with the lack of access to education and training. They need this to develop more skills, but there are not enough facilities available. Many rural youths are starting families at a young age,

and this has been even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teen pregnancies have increased, which has a larger effect on girls than on boys. Moreover, girls cannot easily venture into income-generating activities or businesses, as they are encouraged to care for their young children or support their female family members in and around the house.

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## Portrait 4: South Sudan – Seeking alternatives to suspicion and competition

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**Economic geography:** In South Sudan, up until 2012, the private sector was growing rapidly and there were increased job opportunities, but this was disrupted as a consequence of the war in 2013. Since 2013, over 90% of young people have been driven into serious poverty caused by a lack of jobs, which until now has not been adequately addressed by the government. For the very few youths that follow either secondary (11%) or tertiary education (1%), the only ‘educated’ jobs with a realistic salary perspective are those in the humanitarian sector, which is highly competitive. Without a job, youth become dependent on their working relatives, placing pressure on the little earnings of the family. This makes many young people join the army, the police, and non-uniformed security personnel. Others even join criminal groups to get an income. Young people in rural areas are often farmers and cattle keepers. They are regularly hampered by insecurity, lack of access to the market, lack of capital, and inter-communal conflicts which result in displacements. Young people are involved in rearing cattle but because of poverty, they often get involved in riskier activities like cattle raiding where they are risking their lives. Those with cattle also drive their cattle into farms of the farming youths leading to conflicts and displacements. Many of these displaced young people end up in urban areas without jobs.

**Local particularities:** Young people in South Sudan are heavily divided and affiliated with their tribal leaders and representations, so there is limited free interaction among young people. The only unifying factors are schools, the market, and sports, but all other things are hardly shared and as a consequence, there is much suspicion among people from different tribes. The issue of inclusive programming by considering the most vulnerable young people and those with disabilities from all areas are only being practiced by humanitarian workers but these efforts are often hampered by the personalities in charge of offering opportunities.

**Social norms:** There is much cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity within South Sudan, going back to the time of colonization by the British, who brought Christianity and the English language, and the Arabs who brought Islam and the Arabic language. This situation was exacerbated by the effects of the civil war in which nearly 2 million South Sudanese were displaced to Uganda, Congo, Kenya, Ethiopia, and other countries in the region. When returning, people brought along different cultural practices that have contributed either positively or negatively to the original culture of South Sudanese. As a consequence, there

are many young people that graduate from education taught in languages other than the official South Sudanese language (English). Those who graduate from Arabic or French education face a lot of discrimination and face significant integration challenges.

**Families and access to resources:** All South Sudanese are strongly attached to their clans, and tribes, and divided by their states and regions. Families are the smallest unit within a clan and many clans make up a tribe. It is not allowed to marry within the same clan, but it is possible to marry within the same tribe. Because of the volatile social situation, most of the youth in South Sudan do not have access to many resources. In addition, South Sudan's economy is also performing poorly, making it one of the poorest countries in the region. As was also described, there is only a very small group of young people that has access to higher education or further training.

# 3. Practice – Lessons learned in relation to the IFAD framework

Help a Child has been working with rural youth for years in multiple countries, gaining a first-hand perspective on effective support to youth in their specific and changing contexts. In this chapter, we will share a few general findings in relation to the IFAD framework. Thanks to these and other insights, the bottom line of Help a Child's interventions for youth is and will be to embrace a holistic vision of youth development, acknowledge multiple identities, and take the agency of youth along in the (further) design of the program.

## **Different identities call for a holistic group approach**

Help a Child acknowledges that youths in rural west-African countries can have very different realities. After all, they are often students, children, entrepreneurs, and parents at the same time. Therefore, youths have many different needs that should all be addressed in the program. Bringing youth together in groups, which is our standard of practice, helps them to gain skills in leadership, time management, and trust. Through savings and loans, they gain experience in enterprising together. In some of our programs, this can lead to monthly income increases of 300%. Mobile phone possession is significantly growing among youth in our programs. But most importantly, over 99% of the youth establish a social security net by being part of a group of youth and a community, expanding their opportunities, knowledge, and agency.

## **The two-sided impact of family farm envisioning**

Help a Child wants youth voices to be heard, for starters within their own families. Often there is a lot of pressure from parents, the heads of households, who own the family livelihood business. Ensuring youth can participate, and more importantly, are valued for it has led to remarkable effects on the family farms that we support. These ‘family farms’ are the cornerstone of PIP (Plan Intégré du Paysan), a concept of Wageningen University.<sup>9</sup> PIP is adopted by Help a Child in an early stage and is now in the process of becoming an integral part of Help a Child’s community programs. Through PIP, young people do not only become part of the ‘family business’, but they are also the ones who easily pick up new technology and new ideas and bring innovation to their families. This is especially the case when it comes to climate-smart agriculture. Since youth increasingly will have to deal with the consequences of climate change, they are effective advocates for sustainable agriculture within their families. Furthermore, being involved as a family in agribusiness is a huge motivator for youth.



A great example of a young person who found more agency in his life, and consequently sees a brighter future, is Nelson. He got paralyzed on his left arm as a child when he was playing football, and an accident happened. He dropped out of secondary school because there was not enough money for his school fees. When he was offered agricultural training through the community program of Help a Child, he was determined to seize the opportunity. When asked about his disability and whether he feels that it holds him back Nelson said: ‘Physically I feel weak sometimes, but mentally it made me strong and determined.’ Nelson increased his harvest from 15kg to 200kg and has already bought livestock with his profits. His dream is to expand his business so one day he can hire youth who are struggling as he did. ‘When we rise together, we and our country Rwanda will rise economically’.

**Rwanda** | In Rwanda, before being involved in household farm planning, only 10% of the youth was enthusiastic about farming, over the course of the project, this grew to 78% of respondents. These results were found in a midterm evaluation of the PIP pilot project, carried out in Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda. It also showed that the number of youths who see a bright future for themselves in agribusiness has been doubled compared to the start of the two-year pilot (from 20% to 42%). In the same evaluation, 95% of the participating farmers mention that they see clear changes in the quality of land, soil, and vegetation in the community (compared to 68% at the start of the pilot program).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The PIP approach: building a foundation for sustainable change – WUR

<sup>10</sup> See the PIP Pilot Midterm Report (December 2021): [Integrated Farm Planning \(PIP\) - Help a child.](#)



## Youth empowerment as a vehicle for peacebuilding (and vice versa)

In fragile contexts like Burundi and South Sudan, youth employment cannot be addressed without addressing peace and conflict issues. Most youths know peers that have been involved in conflict or have active experience in conflict themselves. Because of a lack of job perspective, they regularly join the armed forces or the police or alternatively engage in criminal activities. This is why Help a Child in both Burundi and South Sudan focuses on enhancing life skills such as leadership, tolerance, team building, public speaking, and much more.

**Burundi** | Youth in Burundi noticed that there is more security in their community in the sense that there is less idleness, and also the issues that used to result in violence such as alcohol abuse, marital issues, and stealing due to poverty have reduced in the youth thanks to the Building Bridges in Burundi (BBB) program.<sup>11</sup> Also, the BBB structure has helped youth to resolve conflicts at the basic level of the group, in most cases. As one of the participants said: “One of the things I learned, is that the solution to our problems is found in our hard work, we can still create our income and find solutions to our problems. The lack of resources was one of the main root causes of the vices amongst the youth in our community. This is where the idleness was starting and led to other useless activities.”

In many ways, the BBB program proved the point of the IFAD framework to take into account not ‘just’ the economic factors, but the whole set of factors in boosting the opportunities of rural youths. BBB, a peacebuilding program by origin, was successful in combining social, economic, and personal factors (e.g. psychosocial support, intergenerational dialogues, and conflict resolution that was often related to access to land and/or family issues). Against the background of post-conflict, this set of interventions turned out to be a strong combination. According to 95% of the project participants, the level of violent conflict had been reduced, while youth members of Cluster Level Associations have been called to decision-making meetings on community levels with local authorities and other civic leaders. At the same time, the average monthly income of youth group members increased from 11.08 before to 88.34 euros after the program.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.helpachild.org/explore-help-a-child/where-we-work/burundi/building-bridges-in-burundi/>

**South Sudan** | In South Sudan, the combination of youth empowerment and peacebuilding is also effective. In the rural area of Wau (Western Bar El Ghazal), heads of households and ethnic leaders are generally not very receptive to the voices of youth, especially those of girls. By combining sports competitions with youth empowerment, community dialogue, and life skills for girls, as we do in ‘Boruboru’, youths, especially girls, get a stage to advocate for peace and girls’ rights.<sup>12</sup> In 2020, Boruboru was used to promote the End Child Marriage Campaign during a large Boruboru tournament held in Wau. Teams were not only competing to become the number one Boruboru playing team but at the same time, they prepared personal messages to stand up for their rights against forced early marriages and unwanted pregnancies. Above Boruboru being a powerful youth empowerment tool, it also brings people from various backgrounds together. People, who normally live side by side in suspicion, are brought together around Boruboru, sharing the joy and pride of this revived traditional sports tournament. This is how Boruboru puts young people at the center of peace and peaceful coexistence.



Kelada James Saadalla, the girl who was invited to give a speech during the Boruboru tournament in 2020, reflected on this event by saying: “I was not confident that I would make it through as a girl. But after getting public speaking training, I was able to deliver the speech to the best of my ability and attracted the attention of the whole audience. I am now a different person who can represent my fellow girls effectively.”

## Redefined interventions by considering youth as parents

In focusing on youth, we often imagine youth as children in their parents’ households, with an older generation limiting or enabling them. However, the reality in west-African rural areas is that many youths have children of their own. If we want to develop impactful youth programs, this reality needs to be taken into account.

**Malawi** | In Malawi, we established a youth group where income-generating activities and job creation are combined with parenting training. Before, it was hard to encourage youth to join the default parenting groups. The experience of young parents in these groups was that they actually could not share their life and family struggles with older parents. They felt ignored by the community. The special parenting group for young parents turns out to be a good solution. In a short time, the group has grown to 45 participants. Being recognized and acknowledged as parents has given them a legitimate position in the community. As participants recall: “We as young parents can now take part in the community, and this wasn’t the case before”. Through this group and other interventions, youth gained more

<sup>12</sup> [www.helpachild.org/boruboru](http://www.helpachild.org/boruboru)

access to family planning services (from 42.9% to 74.6%) and various young parents have resumed primary or secondary education as they now feel empowered as parents *and* youth. It taught us how important this identity is for youth and how limiting it can be if this is ignored in job creation programs.

# 4. Recommendations for policymaking

Let us close with some general recommendations for those aiming to put youth at the heart of development policies. These recommendations have been derived from experts working with youth in Malawi, Burundi, Rwanda, and South Sudan, but are also based on what youth in those countries have indicated themselves. Although this report is limited in scope, we believe that these suggestions can also be applied to other (African) countries with large young rural populations.

## Recommendations

1. **Focus on new technologies, digital skills, and innovative agricultural training**
  - In general, young people are quick to learn new and innovative techniques
  - Youth can drive innovation in terms of agriculture, as they are more interested in this than most adults are
  - Emphasizing innovative agricultural opportunities will improve the negative image youth often have of working in agriculture
2. **Strengthen the connectors between youth, especially in fragile/post-conflict situations**
  - Promote sports, joint businesses, and joint activities of schools and religious institutes
  - Invest in youth-led community advocacy and sensitization activities to help young people to build confidence and develop leadership skills
  - Encourage cultural exchange among people from different communities with a central role for youth as agents of change
  - Ensure that job creation and income generating activities go hand in hand with social development activities
3. **Apply a holistic approach and engage with youth in all their complexities and overlapping identities**
  - Policies should take into account young people's identities as both youth and parents
  - Be aware of cultural norms that might discourage youth from participating in decision-making
  - Pay attention to gender differences and the ways in which different expectations towards young men and women influence their actions and choices

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