



Session n°27

Empowering youth and women in Agrifood: bridging entrepreneurship and job creation for sustainable impact

Tuesday 7 July 2026

HIGHLIGHTS

About the PAFO-COLEAD Innovations Series

Launched in November 2020 by the Pan-African Farmers' Organization (PAFO) and COLEAD, the Innovations Series highlights successful African agrifood SMEs and promotes knowledge exchange among entrepreneurs, researchers, policymakers, financiers, and farmer organisations.

Session n°27, held on 7 July 2026, brought together entrepreneurs, farmer organisation leaders to share practical experiences on how agrifood systems can better serve youth and women as both entrepreneurs and jobseekers, and how strengthening one pathway can reinforce the other for sustainable, inclusive impact. The session attracted strong interest, with 442 registrants seeking resources, and opportunities to engage with key actors in the sector.

All information about the session is available on [Agrinnovators](#) entrepreneur's platform.

Recording of the session: [Link](#)

Key points discussed

Underemployment, not unemployment, is the real challenge: youth and women in agrifood are often already working but in low-paying, informal or precarious roles that don't match their skills. The conversation should shift from "creating jobs" to creating decent, quality jobs.

Technical skills are not enough: graduates often lack the soft skills, leadership and business acumen employers need. Training must be paired with real workplace exposure internships, coaching and mentorship not delivered as a one-off.

Barriers are structural, not individual: limited access to finance, weak entrepreneurship curricula, gender-based constraints, and fragmented market linkages hold youth and women back, not a lack of ambition or ideas, as is sometimes assumed by funders. Fixing this starts with treating youth and women as partners and co-designers of programmes and policies from the outset, not simply inviting them to participate once decisions are already made.

Job creation opportunities exist across the whole agrifood value chain: opportunities in agrifood go beyond primary production. Processing, input supply, advisory services, logistics, quality management, digital solutions, marketing and market linkages can all generate income, entrepreneurship and more attractive jobs. Strengthening these different segments of the value chain is essential to make agrifood a more viable and appealing sector for young people and women.

Support must be integrated and market-connected: entrepreneurs need a coherent bundle of services at once finance, mentorship, market access and technology rather than isolated interventions, and these tools must work in low-connectivity, rural contexts so they don't widen the gap for those they're meant to reach. Partnering with the private sector is key to scaling faster than public funding alone allows.

Farmer organisations hold untapped bargaining power: strong governance and resource mobilisation strategies help farmer organisations translate their collective size into real influence including on international funding decisions.

Key insights from businesses



Chiamaka Ndukwu
CEO, AgroHive,
Nigeria



Akejo Gordon Victor
CEO, Gordon Agricultural
Organisation,
Uganda



Fatoumatta Joof
Director of Programs, The
Woman Boss,
Gambia

Chiamaka Ndukwu, CEO, AgroHive, Nigeria

Chiamaka explained that agricultural graduates and women are more often underemployed than unemployed due to a mismatch between technical education and the practical, leadership and business skills employers seek. She presented AgroHive's experiential learning model, which combines digital training with internships, team projects, career coaching and employer engagement. Graduates who completed internships were the most likely to be hired, while employers reported higher productivity and stronger workplace readiness. She concluded by calling for greater integration of experiential learning into university curricula, entrepreneurship incubators, and regional internship programmes.

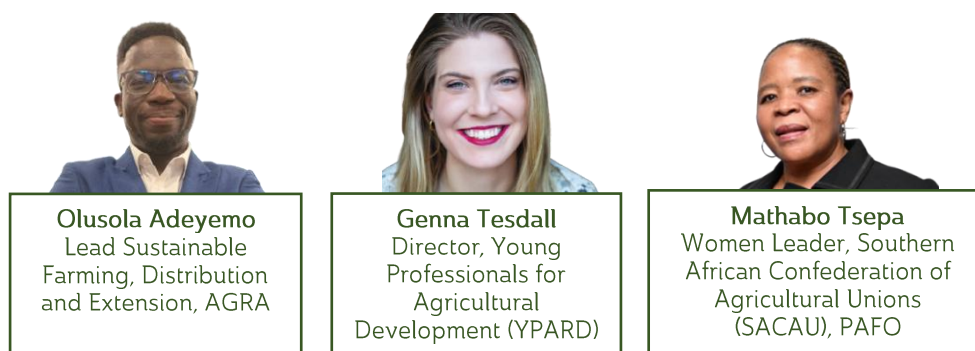
Akejo Gordon Victor, CEO, Gordon Agricultural Organisation (GAO), Uganda

Gordon described GAO-UG's bundled agrifood solution model combining input supply, market linkages, entrepreneurship training and climate-smart production support which has reached over 38,000 farmers (70% youth) and created more than 10,000 work opportunities, including support to 254 women running their own micro-enterprises in rural communities. He stressed that training alone does not build enterprises, and that women and youth must be included "by design, not by default" from a programme's very first stage.

Fatoumatta Joof, Director of Programs, The Woman Boss, Gambia

Fatoumatta argued that agriculture is too often introduced in early education as an afterthought rather than a viable career and entrepreneurship path, and that this narrative needs to shift. She highlighted those persistent social norms lead funders to underestimate youth- and women-led ventures and shared a key lesson from The Woman Boss's 90-day accelerator programme: training without long-term institutional capacity and mentorship fails to produce lasting impact.

Key insights from organisations supporting businesses



AGRA, represented by Olusola Adeyemo, Lead, Sustainable Farming, Distribution & Extension

AGRA (Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa) is an African-led institution working with governments and the private sector to sustainably grow Africa's food systems, focusing on smallholder productivity and the inclusion of youth and women.

Olusola framed the discussion around the urgent need to connect Africa's demographic potential with economic opportunities in agrifood. He stressed that youth and women face barriers related to finance, land, skills and market access, but also represent a major opportunity for enterprise development, job creation and food systems transformation. He presented the importance of connected opportunities, linking skills training, access to finance and market connectivity. He also called for a shift from short-term projects to stronger ecosystems, supported by policy alignment, investment coordination, institutional anchoring and better measurement of long-term impact.

YPARD, represented by Genna Tesdall, Director

YPARD (Young Professionals for Agricultural Development) is a youth-led global network that champions the meaningful engagement, leadership and voice of young people in agricultural research, innovation and policy, reaching over 33,000 young professionals in 65 countries.

Genna challenged two common myths: firstly, that youth's main challenge is unemployment rather than underemployment and secondly, that that young people should not be treated only as future leaders or passive beneficiaries. They are already actors of change and should be involved in decision-making, policy discussions, programme design and implementation. She presented YPARD's work through capacity building, peer-to-peer forums, advocacy, youth-led networks and country chapters, and encouraged organisations to work with young people to build youth-led solutions and amplify youth voices.

SACAU, represented by Dr Mathabo Tsepa, Women Leader and member of the GAFSP Steering Committee

SACAU (Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions) is a regional farmers' organisation representing national agricultural unions across Southern Africa, and a founding member of PAFO. It works to strengthen farmers' organisations and amplify farmers' collective voice on regional, continental and global matters.

Dr. Mathabo Tsepa highlighted the role farmer organisations play in advancing youth and women's entrepreneurship, employment and leadership built on sound governance, resource mobilisation, and the effective use of their collective bargaining power. She urged farmer organisations to proactively engage their Ministries of Agriculture to be included in the 9th Call for Proposals, since governments are scored on demonstrating real engagement with farmers. She also stressed the value of private-sector partnerships in helping youth- and women-led enterprises access finance and prepare for future producer-organisation-led funding.

Resources

1. Reports and Studies

AGRA / CAFEYA Youth Programme, 2024, [Africa Youth Common Position on Agriculture, Policy and Climate](#)

AGRA, 2024, [Africa Agriculture Status Report 2024: Accelerating the Private Sector for Food Systems Transformation in Africa](#)

FAO, 2023, [The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems](#)

FAO, 2025, [The Status of Youth in Agrifood Systems](#)

HLPE (CFS), 2021, [Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems](#)

IFAD, 2019, [How Old Is the Average Farmer in Today's Developing World?](#)

ILO, 2024, [Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024: Decent Work, Brighter Futures](#)

2. Trainings and other opportunities

AGRA, [VALUE4HERConnect TalkCorner sessions](#)

AGRA, [YEFA \(Youth Employment in Agrifood and Forestry in Africa\)](#)

AgroHive, [agricultural upskilling programme](#)

AWARD, [e-Learning Portal and Fellowships](#)

COLEAD, [e-learning platform](#)

GAFSP, [9th Call for Proposals Information Sessions](#)

YPARD, [Events and Opportunities](#)

Coordination team for these series:

[PAFO](#): Babafemi Oyewole - Chief Executive Officer, Aimable Twagirayezu

[COLEAD](#): Inês Bastos – Head of Department, Ahoefa Soklou – Project Officer, Nina Desanlis-Perrin – Project Officer, Networks and Alliances



This event was organised by the Fit For Market Plus programme, implemented by COLEAD within the framework of Development cooperation between the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), and the European Union (EU).

This publication has been produced with the financial support of the EU and the OACPS. Its contents are the sole responsibility of COLEAD and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the EU or the OACPS.