



## ICSIAPL project Learning brief

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# Investing in youth: The opportunity to grow the livestock sector through youth entrepreneurship

**The YEE model focuses on four pathways to create employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for young people: access to inclusive markets, skills development, access to inclusive finance, and an enabling ecosystem.**

The ICSIAPL project focused on feed security for agro-pastoral communities in Narok, Kajiado and Taita Taveta through the commercialisation of forage production and implementation of Integrated Landscape Management practices. The project was intentional in the inclusion of youth in the project as an opportunity to establish young agripreneurs leading the improvements in the livestock value chain. This article will describe the intervention logic, the lessons learnt and conclusion on the opportunities to successfully integrate young people in agripreneurship in general and specifically within the livestock value chain.

### **SNV's Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Strategy**

Approximately 76% of the Kenya population is under the age of 35 years. Broken down, this demographic also faces the highest level of unemployment. The ICSIAPL GESI analysis concluded that youth in the targeted counties have limited access to productive resources, financial instruments and assets, limiting the opportunities to invest in livestock entrepreneurship.

Youth are often not involved in community decision making and have to consult with the parents or parents-in-law when investing in entrepreneurial opportunities. Young women face additional barriers as they move to their parents-in-law land and have no decision-making power within the household and community at large.

To address these challenges and ensure the active participation of young people in the livestock value chain, the ICSIAPL project has implemented SNV's Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship (YEE) model. The YEE model focuses on four pathways to create employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for young people: access to inclusive markets, skills development, access to inclusive finance, and an enabling ecosystem. This model has been adapted and implemented in various African countries, resulting in increased employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for young people. With the right skill set, access to inclusive markets and financing, and a supportive environment, we believe young people can thrive in agri-business and lead the way in agricultural transformation.





### Growth

The ICSIAPL project introduced innovative practices in the livestock value chain, focusing on forage production and storage to ensure feed security for cattle, even during droughts. The quality of feeds improved through the planting of enhanced forage varieties and the use of storage techniques like silage production. Operating machinery and working the land can be labor-intensive, so many women's groups engage youth to perform these tasks at a fee. Consequently, the project provided training on forage production and machine use to all groups, including youth, women, and men.

Participants from all three counties visited Itiri Farm in Meru County, a former participant of the SNV-led Kenya Marketled Dairy Programme (KMDP) project, to learn about silage production and quality feeds for dairy animals. During a fourday training and exchange visit, participants learned practical skills in silage making and understanding the nutritional needs of cows. Youth were the first to adopt these innovations, with some starting to produce silage for other farmers within the same week. Although most youth do not own land or cattle, offering labor and advisory services to other farmers can be a profitable business venture.

The project used the Service Providers Entrepreneurship model (SPE model) to support young entrepreneurs in establishing entrepreneurial businesses opportunities within the forage value chain. Youth participated in the Leadership Enhancement Action Program (LEAP) to learn about personal leadership skills, business management including budgeting and business canvas model, and societal leadership. This curriculum is designed for the leaders of social businesses in community settings like Community Based Organisations (CBOs), Self Help Groups (SHGs) and cooperatives. Besides the training, youth groups and youth leaders with potential received mentorships to strengthen their business model and leadership positions. The youth who were keen on setting up a service providers model for silage and hay production received an intense one-week training to establish their business model.

### Match

Access to markets and business opportunities can be challenging for youth who are just starting their business in livestock. Understanding the market dynamics and where the opportunities are is therefore equally important to establish a sustainable business. When ICSIAPL identified the interest of many youths in meat production, the team organised a visit to Choice Meat, a meat processor in Nairobi. The group of young people was able to interact with the company and understand what kind of quality and relationships the meat processor was looking for, while understanding the process of slaughtering and processing. This was an eye-opener for young people interested in engaging further in meat production, where some groups decided to focus on quality breeds for fattening instead of purchasing emaciated animals to gain weight and sell back to the local market. Some youth decided to fulfill orders with Choice Meat, providing direct and stable market opportunities. Youth also identified opportunities in terms of inputs supplies for livestock production in underserved areas. This led to establishment of agrovets, and project provided technical support in ensuring compliance to government regulations and enterprise development.

Exhibitions like the Meat Expo in Nairobi and the Agricultural fair in Mombasa have provided market linkages for young agri-preneurs dealing in meat production and forage production. Youth from meat producing groups from three project counties attended the Meat Expo in Nairobi to better understand the needs of meat processors and the opportunities available in the meat value chain. After the expo youth started engaging in cattle trading for other community members, being able to identify which animal would bring a good profit for meat production. Youths engaged in the Mombasa agricultural fair identified clients from all over Kenya interested in buying splits and seeds of improved forage varieties and made linkages for their service providers model for silage production. Once given the opportunity to attend such fairs, they developed capacities to do business, engage and establish relationships with potential clients and off-takers.

### Match...cont

The project also collaborated with various dairy cooperatives to improve the feed quality, quantities for dairy animals including conservation with the goal of increasing milk production and income of farmers. Farmers often struggled with producing and conserving large quantities of feed and required external labour and often machinery to produce the tons of silage required for year-round feed security. Young people were trained on silage production and safe machine operation and maintenance in addition to linkages with cooperatives to establish contracts with individual farmers. One youth enterprise from Taita Taveta county secured all contracts from dairy farmers within a large cooperative. While the youth were in business, individual farmers received advice on feeding practices to enhance milk production, resulting in increased income. The cooperative also benefited from a higher milk collection, boosting its overall business. Additionally, women dairy cooperatives gained access to machinery through the Small Investment Fund, with youth required to operate the equipment.

### Access

Financial literacy, especially with regards to savings, lending, budgeting, investments and forecasting, are important skills for young people to possess in order to continuously grow their business. The LEAP training program, mentorship, and financial training supported young people in gaining and implementing the skills within their business models. Women are often engaged in savings groups like table banking and Village Savings and Loaning Associations with some young men engaged but was not widely used among the youth groups engaged with ICSIAPL. Thanks to awareness raising and training, more youth groups started saving and lending as a group activity. To support youth groups in jumpstarting their business model, ICSIAPL provided the opportunity of accessing the Small Investment Fund. The youth groups were supported in writing the business proposal development. The grant was co-funding with the project providing 75% of the budget while the youth groups contributed 25%.

For all youth groups it was the first time to receive financial support to start their business, which picked up well. Due to extension of the project ICSIAPL was able to support some youth groups with more than one grant agreement to scale up their model and invest more. This has led to a more sustainable business model and provided a healthy growth investment. With new development projects and new youth funds from the Kenyan Government the groups are now ready to apply for a wide range of funding opportunities due to a solid business case, a track record of previous investments and experience in writing grant applications.

### Enable

ICSIAPL worked closely with the county governments to implement the project. Lessons learned about youth entrepreneurship opportunities in the forage value chain have been shared and discussed. Officers and directors have visited youth groups, providing them with greater exposure during county events such as the Mombasa Agricultural Fair. County projects are now actively engaging with youth groups to enhance their visibility and support their business growth.

During youth meetings held in each county, a frequently mentioned challenge was the limited space youth receive from their parents and community to innovate in farming and establish agri-businesses. In some communities, a lack of trust has developed between parents and their children. For example, some fathers previously gave their sons land title deeds early, but the sons sold the land, bought motorcycles, and moved to the city. Parents also invested in their children's further education; however, jobs are scarce and competitive, leading youth to return to rural areas in search of opportunities. ICSIAPL has invested in raising awareness among the wider community about the opportunity for men, women, and youth to collaborate for a thriving livestock value chain. By focusing on training and providing exposure to youth, the project has enabled them to demonstrate the impact of new innovations to their parents and community members. We see youth leading agro-pastoralists in implementing Integrated Landscape Management practices and advising farmers on optimal feed production and storage for improved meat and milk production.



### Lessons learnt

Throughout implementation, the project learned and adapted to the needs of the youth. It requires staying flexible, involving and attentive to their voices to identify opportunities. Initially, the project focused heavily on supporting youth in silage and hay production businesses, achieving great successes. However, in some areas, improved forage production remained challenging as a full business model due to limited rainfall. Youth groups began engaging in meat production through cows or goats. The challenge of limited access to land was addressed by splitting the herd into several herds. Group purchasing enabled them to buy more cattle and inputs collectively than individually. As a result, the project began conducting exchange visits and training on meat production to meet the requests of youth groups. Youth groups also found opportunities to establish agro-vets for livestock producers, ensuring closer access to inputs for their parents while generating income and providing job opportunities for marginalised community members. By listening to the ideas of the youth and adapting the project to their needs, ICSIAPL has successfully engaged more youth in the forage value chain.

Youth groups are often less active initially, as they are typically formed in response to a project. In contrast, women's groups remain very active and have strong solidarity bonds among members. Youth groups tend to be slower to establish but more dynamic in their operations. Women's groups and mixed groups are better organised and often have savings to invest. However, once youth groups adopt the right mindset and identify opportunities, they grow much faster and develop larger long-term plans for their ventures. Investing in youth entrepreneurship requires more time but results in better sustainability and faster growth once it takes off. Therefore, it is worthwhile to invest in youth agri-preneurship with the right support and agency that empowers the youth. Community awareness on the importance and positive impact of engaging youth in agri-business is necessary, especially in communities where a lack of trust between youth and parents is visible. Showcasing good examples of youth entrepreneurship and how youth can be part of solving the development or market challenges in a community helps other youth to start their business journey.

Raising awareness about gender roles and the role of young women in agri-business is crucial in all communities, as young women face significant challenges in entering the livestock value chain. They often lack decision-making power both within the household, where they may live with their parents-in-law, and within the community, limiting their ability to invest in agri-preneurship. Youth have demonstrated their ability to change social norms and values within communities, with both elders and youth acknowledging that young couples engage in more joint decision-making and resource-sharing than older generations. However, young women's voices are often unheard in the community, and the time constraints of starting a family make it difficult for them to participate in training and other activities. Projects should intentionally create interventions to ensure the active and valuable participation of young women in the livestock value chain. This can include focusing on value chains that are more accessible to young women (such as dairy goats and poultry) and providing childcare services during all training sessions and meetings.

### Conclusion

Supporting youth in agri-preneurship not only benefits them by providing increased employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, but it also helps the wider community meet its development needs. The positive impact of youth entrepreneurship on other livestock producers is evident when young people introduce innovations and help address challenges in the livestock sector. For example, youth have assisted farmers in professionalising their silage and feed production, not only by producing silage but also by advising farmers on planning for sufficient feeds and optimising feeding practices for better meat or milk production. As a result, farmers have seen increased milk production from the same animals. Additionally, youth have opened agro-vets in their communities to address gaps inconsistent, quality and affordable input supply for their parents' animals. Both women and men have noted that they no longer need to travel far to obtain necessary inputs and livestock management advice. Youth have demonstrated an understanding of continuous business investment for growth and are quickly scaling their business models compared to other groups. Once a trust relationship is established, and youth feel their voices are heard and their needs addressed, there is a real opportunity for young agri-preneurs to thrive in any value chain. They can be trusted with financial resources to further their ventures.