The Youth Entrepreneurship in Agriculture in Rwanda (YEA-R)

The Youth Entrepreneurship in Agriculture in Rwanda (YEA-R) program's goal is to enable 40,000 young women (70%) and men into dignified and equitable work opportunities in the Agrifood sector in Rwanda, thereby contributing to the Mastercard Foundation's 2030 goal of creating 300,000 work opportunities for youth by 20230. This is being achieved by enabling inclusive market led economic growth through enabled agricultural SMEs due to better-skilled youth, a well-coordinated sector, and innovative value chains.

To achieve its goal, the program is being implemented over five years with a focus on empowering young women and men under the age of 35 with the technical skills relevant to the horticulture and poultry value chains, in addition to the need for life skills and entrepreneurship coaching and mentorship for young people to succeed in these competitive value chains. To sustain this impact over the long term, the program focuses on building resilient market systems, fostering entrepreneurship, collaborating with existing access to finance programs and promoting Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) practices.

The project's central approach to youth entrepreneurship and empowerment targets and overcomes identified barriers, such as poor access to financial resources, lack of market-ready skills, and limited appropriate support services. This forms the basis for proposing three interlinked pathways that set conditions for short-term, long-term, and system-level changes.

Pathway 1: Strengthened Resilience: The Program aims to equip young people with industry-relevant skills that enable them to successfully run and grow businesses in increasingly competitive poultry and horticulture subsectors. Skilled young people are also well positioned to be hired as skilled workforce in the agrifood systems, or they can start their agribusiness venture if it is well supported, as envisaged under pathway 2.

Key interventions:

Promote Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) and technical training to enhance resilience in the Poultry and Horticulture Value chains.

Enhance linkages with Financial Institutions & promoting internal savings mobilization to build

financial resilience.

Build capacity of young women and men in agripreneurship, access to knowledge, inputs, equipment, & services.

Establish demonstration model farms with demo plots with successful youth agripreneurs opening their farms.

The Theory of Change

The Theory of Change (ToC) presents the partners' analysis of systemic barriers and how the Program works to overcome identified barriers through causal change processes. The design is structured around three interlinked pathways presented below:

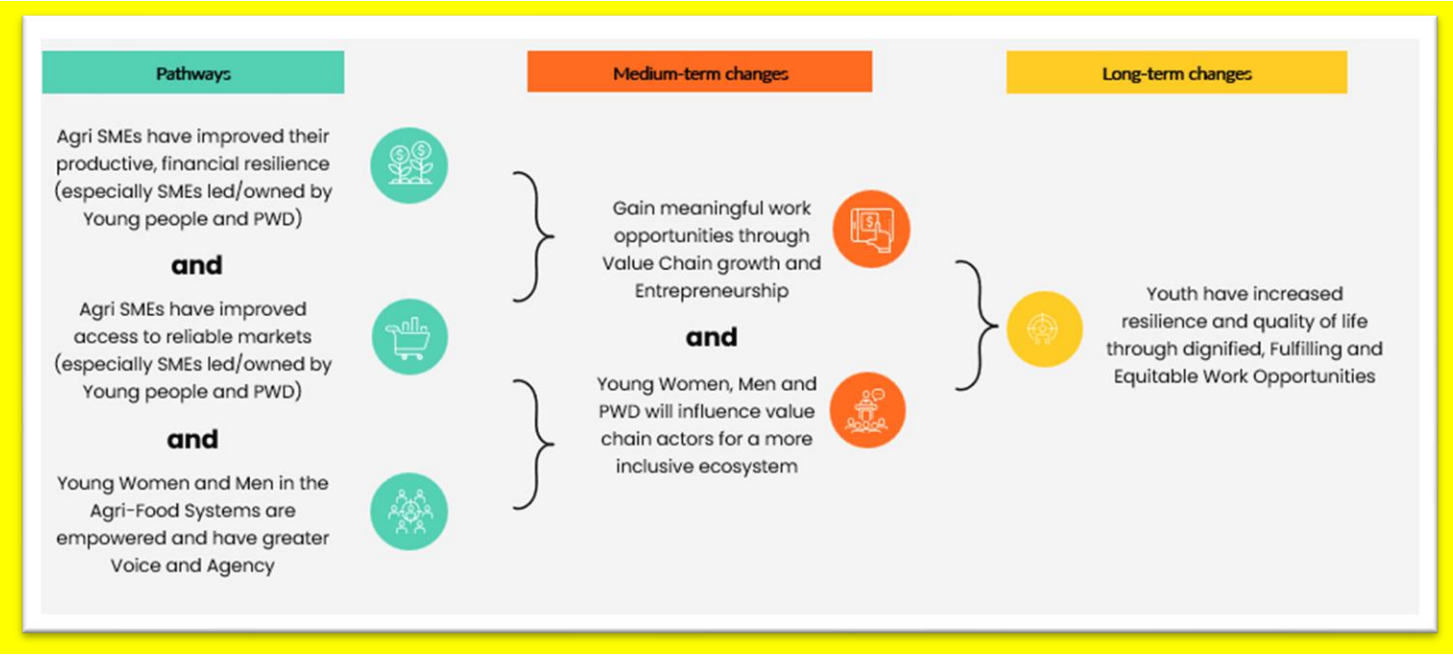
Strengthened Resilience: The Program aims to equip young people with industry-relevant skills that enable them to become successful in starting, managing, and growing businesses in increasingly more competitive poultry and horticulture sub-sectors.

Strengthened business operations and linkages to markets and financial services: To complement the skills development, the program continues to facilitate the creation of inclusive reliable market and financial linkages for youth-led businesses to sustain youth-led enterprise growth over time.

Empowerment, Voice & Agency: The program embeds GESI (Gender, Equity, Social Inclusion) transformation and youth empowerment for young women and men to influence value chain actors, resulting in a more inclusive ecosystem at household, community and national level focusing on young women and young PWD.

Together with our partners, we believe that:

If; Youth-led businesses in agriculture are more resilient and, if they have reliable markets and if young people are empowered to have increased voice and agency, then; they will gain access to dignified and fulfilling work opportunities in the agrifood sector and, they will be able to influence for an inclusive agriculture ecosystem. Ultimately, young people will have increased resilience and quality of life because of access to dignified, fulfilling, and equitable agricultural work opportunities.



Program's interventions

Pathway 1: Strengthened productive and financial resilience

To grow and improve decent jobs on farms, young women and men, including young PWDs, must enhance their productive and financial resilience, engage in an 'agripreneurship' mindset, and access the skills and services to manage production. Establishing an agribusiness at any node in the agricultural value chains requires the right entrepreneurial skills, including digital and marketing skills, financial literacy and business skills, and specific technical skills related to each node in the horticulture and poultry value chains.

Intervention 1.1. Young women, young men and Young PWD producers are better organized and have improved capacity to access markets (equitably)

Youth-led enterprises often initially succeed because they can understand and capitalize on a local market opportunity but usually need help meeting market requirements and competition when they try to expand their markets. The Program promotes stronger market linkages between agro-processing, entities facilitating trade between farmers and off-takers, and direct B2B with e-commerce companies and institutions such as schools, hospitals, and hotels through new and strengthened cooperatives and organized youth groups, associations and cooperatives. Specifically, the program maps out VC opportunities in the area, identifies interested individual charitable beneficiaries who are financially disadvantaged (target group), and mobilizes them to form, register

and operationalize cooperatives which are linked to off-takers. These off-takers may include agro-processers, commodity traders, schools etc. This market incentive can increase volume, reduce transaction costs, reduce post-harvest losses, and effectively share market information, which can change the power dynamics within value chains.

Meeting market requirements is critical, including facilitating linkages with companies and service providers for new and existing MSMEs active in the horticulture and poultry sector. Additionally, the program enables new networks of financially disadvantaged female entrepreneurs for young female farmers to start off-farm businesses through the young women's business mentors, building skills and confidence and creating new business opportunities between them. The program aims to develop women's cooperatives as a strategy to work with 70% of young women, focusing on organizing up to 1000 new youth groups and supporting them to access markets.

Intervention 1.2. Young women, young men & young PWD have increased access to CSA/agripreneurship knowledge, inputs, equipment, & services

YEA-R works with cooperatives and youth groups to maximize the potential of horticulture and poultry to generate decent work for rural young women and men who often have less education, less digital access, and subsistence livelihood strategies.

SNV designs a series of VC-specific inclusive CSA training to build capacities for these young women and men to enter profitable (semi) commercial production – which can be quickly scaled up through linkages with BDS services available in districts. Program Partners' district-based teams of skilled Youth Entrepreneurship Officers (YAOs) (2 YAOs per district)– combine agronomy, marketing, entrepreneurship, and social mobilization skills – to train, coach, and mentor youth groups in each district through a specific trajectory, adjusted to the chosen value chain as well as the local context and market opportunities.

Training and extension services (climate smart technology transfer, advisory services and facilitating access and use of agro-inputs and services etc.) are specifically tailored and responsive to young women farmers, who are often underrepresented in providing and using these services, even though they represent at least 50% of the workforce. Working with up to 1,500 (100 youth farmer

groups per district per year), the design looks at both the practical needs, such as timings and childcare arrangements and strategic needs, such as allowing double household members (not just heads of households) and promoting social norms which recognize the role (young) women play in agricultural production. Options for digitalization and roll-out of these training programs through ToT for youth leaders support sustainability.

Intervention 1.3. Agripreneurs have improved skills, capacity & resources to meet the requirements of financial institutions & platforms

YEA-R works on on-farm entrepreneurism and financial capacities to enable young people to access finance in their local area. The project links agripreneurs with existing and emerging financial products and services (including digital). YAOs promote financial literacy, work with Village Saving and Lending Associations (VSLAs), build capacities of the target participants and access to informal financial services, and function as a steppingstone to formal financial opportunities. The program links the target groups to existing and innovative financial services, especially those promoted by other Mastercard Foundation-funded programs.

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