



Equator Initiative Case Studies

Local sustainable development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities

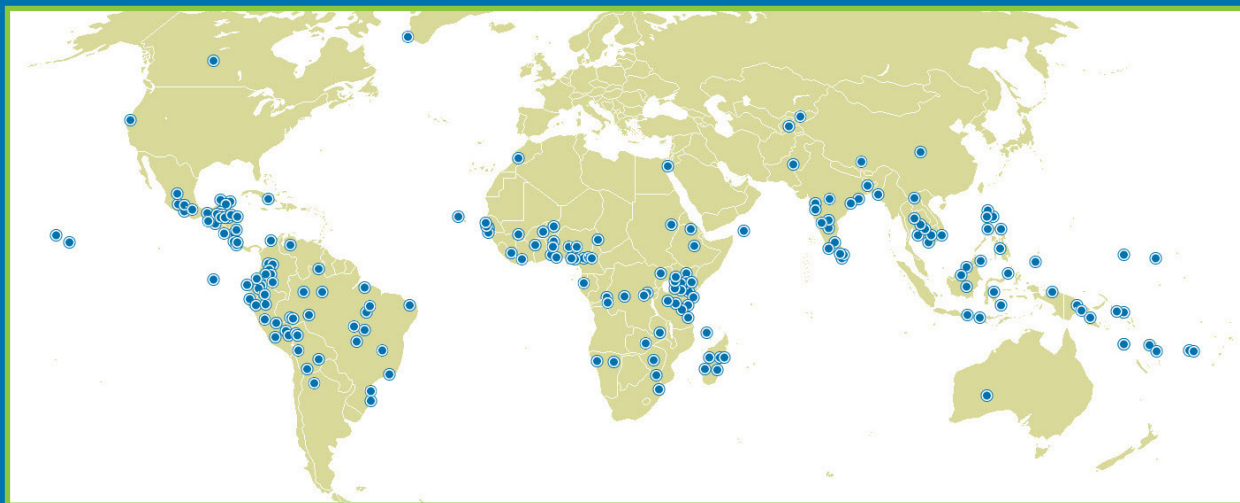
UNDP EQUATOR INITIATIVE CASE STUDY SERIES

Local and Indigenous communities across the world are advancing innovative sustainable development solutions that work for people and for nature. Few publications or case studies tell the full story of how such initiatives evolve, the breadth of their impacts, or how they change over time. Fewer still have undertaken to tell these stories with community practitioners themselves guiding the narrative. The Equator Initiative aims to fill that gap.

The **UNDP Equator Initiative**, supported by generous funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), awarded the Equator Prize in 2023 to 10 outstanding Indigenous and local communities from 10 countries. The winning organizations showcase innovative, nature-based solutions for tackling biodiversity loss and climate change. Selected

from a pool of over 500 nominations from 108 countries, the winners were celebrated at a high-profile event, held virtually, on November 7th, in the lead up to the biodiversity and climate change negotiations at COP28. The event was part of the **Nature for Life Hub**, a three-day series of virtual events designed to raise ambition for nature-based solutions in global biodiversity and climate policy. The winners are sustainably protecting, restoring, and managing forests, farms, wetlands, marine ecosystems, and biodiversity to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, help communities adapt to climate change, and create a green new economy.

The following case study is one in a growing series that describes vetted and peer-reviewed best practices intended to inspire the policy dialogue needed to scale nature-based solutions essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



PROJECT SUMMARY

The Young Emerging Farmers Initiative (YEFI) is a youth-oriented organization in Zambia that empowers young people in rural and urban areas through sustainable agriculture. YEFI has a network of over 500,000 youth and has successfully addressed high unemployment rates, particularly in rural Zambia, by establishing over 50 youth-led enterprises and creating 1,000 jobs. To protect biodiversity and critical natural resources, the organization has planted over 6,000 trees and conserved 5,000 hectares of forest. Implementing organic and agroecological practices has supported the regeneration of 10,000 hectares of degraded land and led to a significant reduction of at least 30 percent in nitrous oxide emissions per hectare. Such practices improve soil structure, minimize erosion, and enhance plant health, ensuring the land's resilience to changing weather conditions. YEFI's efforts contribute to resilient ecosystems, a growing economy, and a just and prosperous food system while empowering youth through new opportunities in agriculture.



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KEY FACTS

Equator Prize winner

2023

Founded

2014

Location

Lusaka, Zambia

Beneficiaries

60,000 direct beneficiaries; 440,000 indirect beneficiaries

Thematic areas

Sustainable agriculture and food security; Forest conservation/sustainable development; Sustainable livelihoods

Fields of work

Climate-smart agriculture; Regenerative agriculture; Agroforestry

Sustainable Development Goals addressed



EQUATOR PRIZE 2023 WINNER FILM





BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

“Our initiatives are deeply rooted in the wisdom and practices passed down through generations of Indigenous communities in Zambia. These Traditional Knowledge systems guide our agricultural practices, placing an emphasis on sustainable, nature-centric approaches. We incorporate age-old techniques like crop rotation, seed saving, and organic farming, which have been proven over centuries to maintain soil health and biodiversity.

Moreover, Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge informs our understanding of the interconnectedness of nature and agriculture. We recognize the delicate balance between land, water, and ecosystems, and our work strives to protect and enhance these relationships. Additionally, Indigenous Knowledge plays a pivotal role in our community engagement. It fosters respect for local customs and traditions, promoting a sense of ownership and empowerment among community members. It’s not just about imparting knowledge; it’s about preserving a cultural heritage and passing it on to future generations.

Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge is the bedrock of YEFI’s work, influencing our agricultural practices, environmental conservation, community engagement, and respect for our cultural heritage. It’s the thread that connects our past, present, and future, shaping our approach to building sustainable food systems while honoring our Indigenous roots.

— Richard Kachungu, Executive Director, Young Emerging Farmers Initiative

The Republic of Zambia lies in the heart of southern Africa, with remote landscapes, diverse wildlife, and ancient cultures embodying its beauty and vibrant energy. Zambia’s landlocked geography rests mainly on high plateaus. The country is known for its notable Zambezi River, vast Lake Tanganyika, sprawling dry tropical forests, and the famous Victoria Falls along its Zimbabwean border.

Though sparsely populated, the nation is massively diverse, with over 70 Indigenous groups or ethnicities. Its largest Indigenous groups include the Lozi, Bemba, Ngoni, Tonga, Luvale, and Kaonde. Among the population, young people are the majority, with 77 percent below the age of 35 as of 2022. Most of Zambia’s rural communities remain isolated from major cities like Lusaka. In these communities, agriculture is a cornerstone. Many families engage in subsistence farming and cultivate staple crops such as maize and groundnuts, relying on the region’s

fertile soils and seasonal rains to uphold these agricultural activities.

The Miombo woodlands stretch across central and southern Africa and have evolved to thrive in low-rainfall areas. These dry tropical forests surround Zambia’s rural communities with low-lying trees and shrubs, interspersed grasslands, and highly adapted flora and fauna. Many endemic and threatened bird species find habitat in the Miombo woodlands; however, over-harvesting and clearing of trees for agriculture and settlements are posing risks to the woodlands and the wildlife that thrive there. For example, the Wattled Crane (*Bugeranus carunculatus*) has seen its numbers decline over the years and has been labelled vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) due to habitat destruction and disturbance.

Some Miombo woodlands are protected as national parks and gamelands; however, these areas are still relatively minimal. Kasanka National Park, for example, is a protected area known for its seasonal congregation of fruit bats, which makes it a magnificent wonder during bat migration. The park, though relatively small, teems with wildlife such as marshdeer, known as *sitatunga*, antelope, known as *puku*, and various species of waterbirds. Several game management areas act as buffer zones to national parks and offer additional protection to wildlife. Such management areas balance conservation with sustain-

able resource use, helping Zambia's unique ecosystems provide livelihood opportunities for local communities in a sustainable, regenerative manner.

Facing challenges like diminishing livelihood opportunities, climate change, food insecurity, and biodiversity loss, bringing sustainable development solutions together with nature conservation has become vital. Making up the vast majority of the population, young people in Zambia have begun to explore how to revitalize industries like agriculture to ensure a new path forward.

Origin and structure

Originating from the collective vision of innovative students at the University of Zambia, the Young Emerging Farmers Initiative (YEFI) emerged in 2014, inspiring new horizons for Zambia's agricultural landscape. These young leaders developed a collective sense of responsibility for Zambia's future, leading them on a remarkable journey to reshape and transform the nation by providing their peers with sustainable and innovative employment opportunities. Recognizing the pivotal role of agriculture in transforming Zambia's economic trajectory, particularly amidst a growing youth population, YEFI leaders formally registered as a non-governmental organization in 2015, ready to empower and mobilize young individuals to engage with and innovate in the sustainable food landscape.

YEFI's mission would mobilize and empower youth within the sustainable food industry through comprehensive training, seed capital provision, and heightened awareness campaigns centred around climate change and healthy living practices. Across rural and urban spheres, this wave of agricultural innovation would foster wealth creation and employment opportunities in Zambia and beyond, stepping the organization closer to its goal of creating over one million jobs for young people in the food system by 2030.

Structured to maximize its impact, YEFI operates through a board of directors responsible for strategic oversight and a dynamic Secretariat spearheading day-to-day operations. A robust network of provincial and district coordinators supports this governance architecture, ensuring the seamless execution of YEFI's multifaceted initiatives at both the local and regional levels. Crucially, decision-making within YEFI is underpinned by a commitment to inclusivity, with community members, particularly women, youth, Elders, and Indigenous Peoples, actively engaged in shaping the organization's agenda and programmes. Community needs assessments, community meetings, and general assemblies that are open to community members help facilitate a participatory approach that fosters community ownership and enhances the relevance and sustainability of YEFI's interventions.

YEFI is committed to diverse funding streams and partnerships to help realize its vision of empowering young farmers and driving agricultural transformation in Zambia and beyond. Through government grants, private foundations, corporate partnerships, individual donors, strong grant-writing skills, effective fundraising campaigns, and revenue-generating social enterprises like agribusiness ventures, YEFI hopes to continue growing its reach.





LOCAL CHALLENGES

Lack of livelihood opportunities

The lack of livelihood opportunities for young people is a significant challenge in Zambia, particularly within the agricultural sector. Despite Zambia's sizable youth population, young individuals are increasingly marginalized from job opportunities. Young people often lack sufficient resources for education and job skills, and the few opportunities available are often inadequate to meet the needs of this burgeoning demographic.

Within the agricultural industry, limited resources, including access to land, capital, and technology, hinder youth engagement, exacerbated by insufficient financial

support and access to credit. Access to land, in particular, is a significant barrier as many young individuals need financing to acquire or lease land for agricultural activities. Additionally, perceptions of farming as labour-intensive and unprofitable drive young people away from rural areas and fertile lands. Inadequate training and capacity-building opportunities further impede youth from adopting sustainable farming practices and inhibit youth from engaging with the exciting future of organic agriculture and sustainable food systems.

Negative impacts of a changing climate

Climate change has disrupted Zambia's traditional agricultural rhythms with unpredictable rainfall patterns, frequent and severe droughts, and floods. These climatic shifts make it difficult for farmers to plan and adapt their farming strategies effectively. Rising temperatures and changing weather patterns also exacerbate pest and disease outbreaks, posing additional threats to crops and livestock. Scarcer water resources, intensified by climate change, affect farmers reliant on irrigation-dependent agriculture, forcing them to innovate water management techniques to sustain their crops amidst shifting hydrological conditions.

Droughts and flooding have been particularly damaging in regions like the Gwembe and Nalolo districts. Droughts

have led to water scarcity, crop failures, food shortages, and financial distress, impacting agricultural productivity and livelihoods. Conversely, intense rainfall and flooding have destroyed crops, washed away topsoil, and damaged infrastructure.

Financial loss due to flooding compounds the financial burden on young farmers already struggling with limited resources. It hinders their ability to recover and perpetuates a cycle of vulnerability in the face of climate change. Addressing these challenges requires investments in adaptive technologies, climate-smart practices, and access to information and resources tailored to the specific needs of young farmers in Zambia.

Food insecurity

Despite agriculture being the cornerstone of the country's economy, food insecurity remains a pressing challenge among young people in Zambia's agricultural sector. Many young farmers encounter obstacles in accessing vital resources such as land, credit, and inputs, which restrict

their ability to adopt productive farming practices. This reality ultimately leads to lower yields and food insecurity. Insufficient knowledge of climate-smart techniques and post-harvest management also undermine agricultural productivity and resilience to climate change impacts.

Similarly, fragmented value chains and limited market access contribute to challenges in selling produce at fair and consistent prices, threatening income stability.

Climate change exacerbates these challenges, with unpredictable weather patterns leading to crop failures and lower yields. Rural-to-urban migration further strains

agricultural systems, reducing the number of farmers engaged in food production. Young farmers' limited access to credit and finance options impedes agricultural investment, asset acquisition, and risk management, further constraining food production.

Biodiversity loss

Zambia is grappling with alarming deforestation rates driven by charcoal production, timber, and the advancement of unsustainable agricultural practices. According to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Zambia, 250,000 to 300,000 hectares of forest are lost annually. Deforestation has had a noticeable effect on the *Caesalpinioideae* tree species, including the *Brachystegia* Genus, known as Zebrawood, *Julbernardia* Genus, known locally as *Mnondo*, and the native hardwood *Isobertlinia doka*. The significant loss of trees annually erodes the biodiversity of forests

and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. Overuse of agrochemicals and increased monoculture farming also contribute to the loss of soil health and biodiversity. Such practices have contributed to soil degradation, erosion, and desertification—rampant issues in Zambia affecting agricultural productivity. This challenge in biodiversity loss, particularly in forested and subsoil ecosystems, poses a significant obstacle for the nation as it considers its future development.





“At YEFI, we view our relationship with the natural world as one of deep interdependence and stewardship. Our work aligns with this perspective by focusing on sustainable agriculture, conservation of biodiversity, and empowering young farmers. We believe that by nurturing the land and harmonizing our practices with nature, we can create a more resilient and equitable food system. Our initiatives strive to honor and preserve this sacred connection to the environment.”

— Nawa Joe Silishebo, Programmes Director, Young Emerging Farmers Initiative

Developing green business opportunities for the next generation

The Young Emerging Farmers Initiative (YEFI) supports the development of livelihood opportunities for young people in sustainable food and agriculture. Engaging the vast population of young people in this sector contributes to economic growth, environmental conservation, and social wellness, making it a critical solution for sustainable development in Zambia.

One critical strategy YEFI employs is establishing market linkages for eco-friendly products. For instance, YEFI links young beekeepers in Serenje, Mkushi, and Chitambo to businesses in the UK, like LUSH, that buy honey at premium prices. YEFI also links Young farmers In Chama and Gwembe to the company Shais Food, a market that promotes drought resistance crops like millet and sorghum. By bridging the gap between young entrepreneurs and markets prioritizing sustainability, YEFI addresses a significant hurdle young farmers face—accessing markets for their produce. Through

these market linkages, young entrepreneurs can generate income and expand sustainable businesses, catalysing further economic growth within communities.

Moreover, YEFI strongly emphasizes mentorship and networking, recognizing the invaluable role experienced green business owners play in guiding the next generation of entrepreneurs. By fostering a culture of knowledge-sharing and collaboration, YEFI empowers young farmers to learn from the successes and challenges of their peers. This emphasis on mentorship accelerates the growth of eco-enterprises and cultivates a sense of community among young entrepreneurs, fostering a supportive eco-system for sustainable business development.

In addition to its on-the-ground interventions, YEFI actively advocates for policies conducive to the growth of eco-enterprises and green businesses. By collaborating with stakeholders and advocating for favourable regulations,

YEFI has created an environment that enables sustainable enterprises to flourish. For example, YEFI was consulted by the Ministry of Agriculture during the development of the Comprehensive Agriculture Transformation Support Programme, which is currently under development as a policy document to respond to challenges presented by the Farmers Input Support Programme. YEFI was consulted by the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment on the development of its National Adaptation Plan (NAP) for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and in collaboration with other organizations, on the development of Zambia's agroecology policy. YEFI has also been consulted by the government for the past decade regarding statutory instruments for imports of agriculture commodities and equipment.

The impacts of YEFI's efforts are profound and far-reaching. In less than ten years, YEFI has facilitated the establishment of 20 eco-enterprises and equipped countless young individuals with the essential tools for success in this

burgeoning sector. These enterprises are organized and registered entities that are owned and led by young Indigenous individuals in the communities of YEFI's work. Young farmers who embrace eco-enterprises experience a remarkable 30 percent increase in their incomes within the first two years, underscoring the tangible benefits of sustainable entrepreneurship. YEFI has been providing business development services such as assistance with financial and market linkages, training in business development, support with financial management, and training on leadership skills to enhance these enterprise's operations. Beyond individual success stories, the growth of eco-enterprises has catalysed broader community development, creating over 1,000 jobs, supporting incomes for 2,000 women and 1,000 men, and fostering a positive impact on local economies. The adoption of sustainable growing practices by farmers involved with YEFI has reduced environmental impact, including the conservation of biodiversity and improved soil and water management.

KEY IMPACTS

Developing green business opportunities for the next generation

- YEFI established 20 eco-enterprises.
- Young farmers saw a 30 percent increase in income in the first two years.
- YEFI's programmes have led to the creation of over 1,000 jobs.
- More than 2,000 women and 1,000 men members earn incomes.
- The adoption of sustainable practices has led to reduced environmental impact, the conservation of biodiversity, reduced pesticide use, and improved soil and water management.



Embracing climate-smart agriculture and ecosystem restoration

Climate change is exacerbating Zambia's social, environmental, and economic challenges. Extreme weather events, in particular, threaten safety and livelihoods, including crop harvests. YEFI has taken a leadership role in addressing these problematic events by supporting sustainable, climate-smart agricultural practices and establishing a sustainable food industry resilient to climate impacts.

Central to the group's efforts is a comprehensive training programme to educate young farmers on climate-smart agriculture practices and the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem restoration, including workshops, seminars, and field visits to real-life restoration efforts. Through

teaching practices like crop rotation, intercropping, organic farming, integrated pest management, responsible water management, and soil conservation, YEFI equips young farmers with the tools to enhance resilience to climate-related challenges while promoting farming methods that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and conserve natural resources. Farmers learn to make informed decisions regarding planting, irrigation, and pest control using weather forecasts and data. YEFI has successfully trained over 50,000 young farmers, empowering them with the knowledge and skills necessary to increase productivity and resilience in their agricultural pursuits.

YEFI's emphasis on biodiversity conservation and restoration through agroforestry, conservation farming, and ecosystem restoration helps mitigate climate change's impacts and maintains essential ecosystem services. YEFI organizes tree-planting campaigns to increase green cover, improve air quality, and enhance wildlife habitat in local communities. These campaigns have helped put more than 5,000 trees into the ground. Additionally, by supporting innovative technologies like efficient irrigation systems, YEFI helps young farmers to adapt to changing climate conditions while reducing water usage.

In parallel, YEFI spearheads community-level initiatives focused on disaster preparedness and community-based adaptation projects. For example, in collaboration with local governments, they have developed the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), supporting youth-led agriculture projects aimed at climate resilience. By assisting with disaster response and readiness, such as water storage and flood protection measures, the CDF helps to strengthen the ability of communities to withstand disasters. This collaboration has improved disaster response, empowered young farmers economically, and reduced poverty in communities.

To understand the impact of their work, YEFI is in the early stages of developing a carbon accounting system in partnership with environmental experts from Open Forest Protocol. This system will estimate the quantity of carbon sequestered annually. Preliminary estimates indicate that YEFI's reforestation and agroforestry efforts have the potential to sequester several hundred metric tons of carbon dioxide per year. This will also allow the organization to explore the carbon credit market in the future.

The impacts of YEFI's climate action initiatives are substantial and far-reaching. Young farmers trained in climate-smart agriculture experience fewer crop failures and increased agricultural productivity, improving food security within their communities. Replanting efforts have led to noticeable increases in green cover in many communities. YEFI's focus on waste reduction and recycling has also minimized pollution and contributed to greater environmental responsibility. Furthermore, adopting sustainable farming practices has decreased greenhouse gas emissions, thus contributing to climate change mitigation efforts. Through knowledge transfer initiatives, YEFI empowers young farmers to become advocates and trainers in climate change adaptation and mitigation, further amplifying the impact of their work.

KEY IMPACTS

Embracing climate-smart agriculture and ecosystem restoration



- YEFI has successfully trained over 50,000 young farmers on adoption of more resilient farming methods.
- Agroforestry and tree planting on farms have decreased greenhouse gas emissions.
- YEFI has helped planted more than 5,000 trees.



Increasing food security

YEFI is committed to combatting food insecurity among young people by employing a multi-faceted strategy grounded in sustainability. The organization facilitates access to critical resources such as land, seeds, capital, and market access, addressing key barriers young farmers face in achieving food security. The organization has assisted over 500 young farmers in land access and startup funding.

Currently, YEFI members own over 50,000 hectares of land, and together, they are campaigning for future rights of 100,000 hectares to benefit the community members especially youth. YEFI will support the ownership mechanism of land and help local young people acquire titles. Community members have engaged with local authorities, legal experts, and non-governmental organizations specializing in land rights and organized awareness campaigns through the 'My Farm My Swag' campaign under YEFI. Securing legal ownership of land provides communities with a stable foundation for agricultural development, reduces poverty, and helps ensure food security. Increased land access also provides opportunities for more alternative and large-scale farming activities.

YEFI also assists young farmers in connecting to local and regional markets, which has led to over 80 percent of YEFI's farmers experiencing increased income and food security, with many now producing surplus crops and diversified income streams. YEFI has also promoted the formation of youth-led agricultural cooperatives. Cooperatives facilitate collective farming and resource-sharing and provide avenues for accessing markets. With 20 cooperatives boasting over 3,000 members, YEFI's cooperative model has proven instrumental in fostering collaboration and growth in food production.

YEFI's comprehensive training programme also strengthens food security, equipping young farmers with agricultural practices that improve soil conservation, crop diversification, and resource management. These practices help improve crop quality, increase yields, maintain soil regeneration, and increase sustainability. YEFI's farmer training programme also includes nutrition education initiatives that contribute to a decline in malnutrition rates among children in the areas of operation, promoting diverse diets and improved food choices.

KEY IMPACTS

Increasing food security



- YEFI members own over 50,000 hectares of land, and together, they are campaigning for future rights of 100,000 hectares to benefit the community members especially youth.
- YEFI assisted over 500 young farmers in securing land for cultivation and establish small-scale agribusinesses.
- YEFI farmers established 20 agricultural cooperatives with over 3,000 members.
- Over 80 percent of YEFI farmers experienced increased income and food security.
- There has been a decline in malnutrition rates among children in areas of operation.





National policy impacts

The Young Emerging Farmers Initiative (YEFI) work is influencing policy at local and national levels. For example, locally, YEFI advocates for the welfare and interests of farmers and communities, participating in district dialogues on agricultural and environmental policies and shaping the policies that directly influence the livelihoods and well-being of local communities. Through these dialogues, YEFI becomes a voice for the concerns and needs of local farmers, many of whom are young and emerging agricultural entrepreneurs, on various issues, including land tenure, water resource management, farming practices, and environmental sustainability. The organization's involvement in district dialogues contributes to developing more inclusive, responsive, and context-specific policies.

At the national level, YEFI's work aims to influence and shape pivotal policy developments that directly impact agriculture, green business, youth empowerment, and climate resilience. For example, YEFI actively participates in discussions on formulating and revising the National Agriculture Policy and Plan. The organization was consulted by the Ministry of Agriculture during the development of the Comprehensive Agriculture Transformation Support Programme and, in collaboration with other organizations, on the development of a national agroecology policy. It was also consulted by the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment on the developing its National Adaptation

Plan (NAP) for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Through these consultations, YEFI helps the unique voices of young farmers reach policymakers, advocating for provisions that support and promote the interests of young farmers and contribute to strategies for climate adaptation and mitigation within the agricultural sector. YEFI advocates for sustainable farming techniques, resource-efficient practices, and the integration of climate-smart technologies, promoting long-term agricultural sustainability and food security.

At the regional level across southern Africa, YEFI also influences agricultural and food system policies. One of the key platforms for its policy engagement is the Africa Food System Forum, where YEFI leaders actively participate and collaborate with regional stakeholders, fostering the exchange of ideas, experiences, and best practices in youth involvement in agriculture and food systems. Similarly, in partnership with regional and global organizations and governments across southern Africa, YEFI shares valuable insights and recommendations that stem from the unique challenges and opportunities faced by young farmers and entrepreneurs, emphasizing the critical role they play in the region's food security and agricultural sustainability, and promoting youth-centric policies. YEFI aims to ensure that regional policies align with the broader goal of fostering a dynamic, sustainable, and inclusive food system across the southern region of Africa.

Contributions to the global agenda

At the global level, YEFI supports the implementation of several critical multilateral agreements, including the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) (CBD), the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC), and the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) (2030 Agenda).

For example, by participating in significant global gatherings such as the World Food Forum and the UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP), YEFI supports global policies and strategies that leverage sustainable food production and youth engagement. At the World Food Forum, YEFI leaders share insights and best practices to empower young farmers in sustainable agriculture while shedding light on the specific challenges that young people face in

agriculture. At UNFCCC meetings, YEFI leaders advocate for policies encouraging climate-resilient agriculture and youth engagement. The organization's presence at these meetings ensures that the youth perspective is included in global climate policies--crucial for achieving climate goals and building a resilient planet for future generations.

YEFI's work contributes to achieving numerous Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. For

example, by implementing climate-smart and sustainable agricultural practices and by supporting UNFCCC meetings, YEFI advances the goals of responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), climate action (SDG 13), and life on land (SDG 15). Engaging young people in these objectives through value creation and jobs creation, supports the goal of decent work and economic growth (SDG 8).





REPLICATION, SCALABILITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY

“We are passionate about what we do in the communities we work in, and we would love to create more impact beyond our reach and make a significant change in the lives of Indigenous youths towards a sustainable food system. We call upon all relevant stakeholders from Government, private sector to donors, to partner with YEFI towards transformation in the food system.”

— Matthew Ntabo, Board Chair, Young Emerging Farmers Initiative

Replication

The success and impact of the Young Emerging Farmers Initiative (YEFI) have encouraged other communities and organizations to adopt similar models across Zambia. Its sustainable agribusiness programmes, focusing on organic farming and value addition, have been replicated in neighbouring areas, and local farming cooperatives and organizations have embraced many of YEFI's methods to improve agricultural productivity and income generation. Youth empowerment and capacity-building projects have also become more popular thanks to YEFI's model. Youth groups and local government agencies are replicating these youth-focused projects.

In addition, YEFI's climate-resilience projects, including water management and disaster preparedness initiatives,

have inspired other areas facing similar climate challenges to implement these strategies. Local governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been instrumental in encouraging the replication of these efforts, often with YEFI's guidance and technical support. YEFI shares its experiences through in-person and electronic channels, such as industry conferences and forums, to engage with peers and stakeholders and present its initiatives and best practices. YEFI leverages social media platforms to disseminate its experiences and achievements, reaching a broad online audience. The organization also produces printed materials like reports, ensuring its work is accessible to those without online access.

Scalability

YEFI has scaled up some of its projects at a national level, primarily through policy change, collaborations with international NGOs, and government support. YEFI partnered with established international NGOs in the agricultural sector, providing technical expertise, financial

resources, and access to broader networks. Together, this network of partners conducted pilot projects demonstrating the viability and impact of YEFI's youth-led agriculture initiatives on a broad national scale.

Through active engagement and advocacy with government agencies responsible for agriculture and youth development, YEFI highlights the success and potential of its sustainable agriculture programme. YEFI secured government support in funding and in-kind assistance, which was instrumental in scaling up its projects and reaching a

wider audience of young farmers and communities. It aims to create national policy changes that would support and enable the expansion of youth-led agricultural initiatives in Zambia. This large-scale vision also aligns its projects with national development goals and priorities.

Sustainability

YEFI has implemented a multifaceted approach to the long-term sustainability of its work, encompassing financial, social, and environmental values and utilizing partnership-driven strategies. Its diverse range of funding sources, including government grants, private foundations, corporate partnerships, and individual donors, reduces the organization's financial vulnerability and provides a stable foundation for long-term sustainability and growth. Strategic partnerships with government agencies and other organizations that share its vision ensure the support necessary for long-term growth. Collaborations with local and national government bodies have resulted in comprehensive sustainability plans that outline long-term goals, resource allocation, and risk assessment.

These plans guide its actions and decisions, ensuring its programme can adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining effectiveness.

Even more, YEFI has fostered a strong sense of community ownership and dedication to its mission, ensuring its objectives will be carried forward. The organization is building a sustainable movement of young people interested in securing a just transition to sustainable agriculture and environmental conservation in the long term. The organization provides training and capacity-building programmes that equip local farmers with the knowledge and skills necessary for this continued transition.

FUTURE PLANS

The Young Emerging Farmers Initiative (YEFI) has an exciting five-year vision, filled with initiatives that promise to empower young people, transform the food system, and promote a sustainable future. In 2024, YEFI finalized a project document for a state-of-the-art Youth Agricultural Business Hub and has begun the initial stages of fundraising for the project. The hub will serve as a dynamic centre for training, innovation, and entrepreneurship, equipping young farmers with the skills and resources to succeed in the agricultural sector. It will provide a space for knowledge exchange, technology adoption, and sustainable practices, fostering agribusiness development.

By 2028, YEFI plans to establish an agriculture bank tailored to the needs of young people in the food system. This bank will provide accessible financial services, loans, and investment opportunities to support young farmers and agro-entrepreneurs. Addressing the critical issue of finance will catalyze the growth of youth-led agricultural ventures.

More broadly, YEFI is committed to expanding its outreach to a million young people in Zambia and the surrounding region by 2030. By scaling its programmes and initiatives, YEFI strives to promote sustainable agriculture, environmental conservation, and economic empowerment among an ever-growing number of young people, transforming the nation and the planet's future.

PARTNERS

- **ActionAid International Zambia:** Provides capacity building, technical assistance and financial support.
- **Agent of Change Foundation (ACF):** Implementing partner providing technical support.
- **Gaia Education:** Implementing partner providing technical and financial support.
- **Global Platform Zambia:** Provides capacity building, technical assistance and financial support.
- **Unthu Finance Company Limited:** Supports the organizations finance and administration.
- **World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Zambia:** Implementing partner providing financial support.
- **Youth Life Project:** Implementing partner providing support for programs and field activities.

SOURCES AND FURTHER RESOURCES

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