



ABSTRACT

This Impact Report highlights YEFI's ten-year journey of empowering young Zambians through regenerative agriculture. It showcases increased incomes, improved nutrition, restored ecosystems, and youth-led innovation, demonstrating how engaging youth in the food system fosters resilience, sustainability, and inclusive economic growth across Zambia's rural communities.

Young Emerging Farmers Initiative (YEFI)

Monitoring & Evaluation / Resource Mobilization
Department

IMPACT REPORT

31 DECEMBER, 2024

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Abbreviations

AGRA – Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa

AU – African Union

CSO – Central Statistical Office

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

GRZ – Government of the Republic of Zambia

M&E – Monitoring and Evaluation

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

SWAG – Sustainable-Livelihood for Women-Youth Agriculture Groups

UN – United Nations

YEFI – Young Emerging Farmers Initiative

ZYCALA – Zambia Youth for Conversation, Agriculture and Livelihood Action

ZamStats – Zambia Statistics Agency

Executive Summary

From 2014 to 2024, the Young Emerging Farmers Initiative (YEFI) has catalyzed a youth-led transformation of Zambia's food system. With a footprint spanning over **50 districts** and direct impact of over **50,000** people the impact assessment covered over **3,000 indigenous youth** as well as **community members** in **26 key districts**, YEFI has proven that **regenerative agriculture**, when led by young people, can transform lives, restore ecosystems, and build sustainable rural economies. This report presents consolidated findings from internal M&E systems, health center data, field surveys, and interviews, including insights drawn from youth.

Key findings show:

- Over **40% average increase in income** for beneficiaries.
- **50% improvement in household food security**.
- **Over 40% improvement in nutrition levels** among children under 6.
- **1,000+ green jobs** created through 30+ youth-led agro-enterprises.
- **Over 2,000 hectares** of degraded land regenerated and **10,000+ hectares** of forest conserved.
- YEFI's policy advocacy has shaped national conversations on youth inclusion in agriculture.

This Impact Report responds to critical comments requesting detailed data, M&E methodologies, and field-level analysis to justify YEFI's model. These elements are now fully integrated, demonstrating how YEFI's ecosystem-based, youth-centered approach offers a model for sustainable rural development.



RICHARD KACHUNGU
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

YOUNG EMERGING FARMERS INITIATIVE

1. Introduction

The Young Emerging Farmers Initiative (YEFI) was established to address the urgent need for youth inclusion and leadership in Zambia's agriculture sector. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), youth engagement in agriculture is essential to achieving sustainable food systems and rural transformation in Africa. With over 77% of Zambia's population under the age of 35 (CSO, 2022), the potential for youth-led transformation is immense but remains largely untapped due to structural barriers. These include limited access to land, financial exclusion, weak extension services, inadequate technical training, and fragmented market systems (FAO, 2014; AGRA, 2021).

YEFI emerged in response to these gaps, offering a homegrown solution that empowers young people, particularly indigenous and rural youth to become agents of change in their communities. By focusing on regenerative agriculture, climate-smart practices, and green entrepreneurship, YEFI is redefining how youth perceive and participate in the food system. The initiative also aligns with continental and global aspirations, including the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 8 (Decent Work), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). This report documents the measurable impact of YEFI's work, the stories of transformation, and our growing contribution to building resilient, youth-led food systems in Zambia.



2. Methodology

This impact report is grounded in YEFI's rigorous **Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)** framework, which combines both **quantitative and qualitative** approaches:

- **Baseline and Endline Assessments** conducted in 20+ districts.
- **District Coordinators** facilitated household surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions.
- **Health Center Data** was reviewed to assess improvements in child nutrition (children under age 6).
- **Youth Voices** were collected through structured interviews to capture lived experiences and testimonial data.

Data was collected from the following districts: Solwezi, Kasempa, Mufumbwe, Ndola, Mpongwe, Mufulira, Gwembe, Mazabuka, Monze, Namwala, Luampa, Mongu, Nalolo, Sesheke, Mkushi, Serenje, Chitambo, Lundazi, Chama, Chinsali, Chongwe, Kasama, Mbala, Mporokoso, Mansa, and Chipili. In total, over **3,000 indigenous youth and community members** were reached directly.





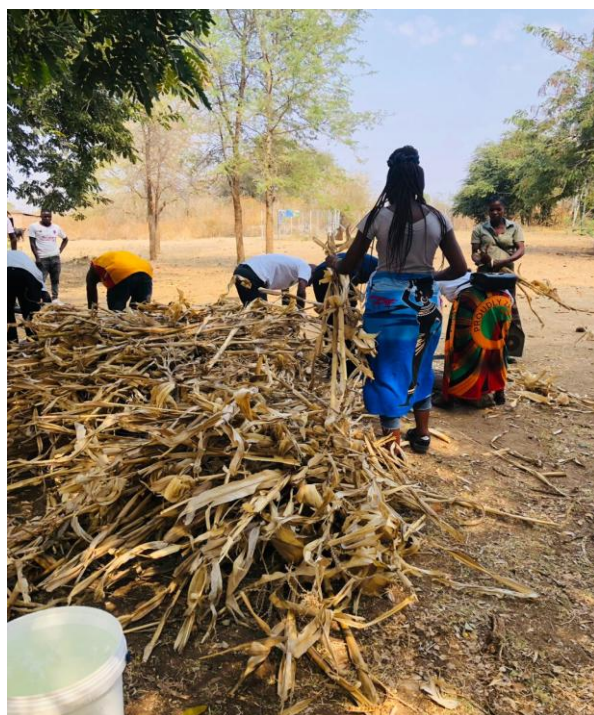
3. Key Impact Areas

3.1. Youth Training and Agroecological Capacity Building

YEFI has trained **over 50,000 young people** through community-based, hands-on sessions in:

- Agroecology and Permaculture
- Conservation Agriculture
- Agroforestry
- Integrated Pest Management
- Business Planning and Market Access (Entrepreneurship)
- Leadership and Community building

The ZYCALA project, in partnership with Gaia Education and WWF Zambia, and the SWAG Initiative, exemplified this through **12 demonstration sites** and **over 1297 trained youth** in Central Province alone.



3.2. Income Growth and Livelihood Transformation

All 3, 000 youth and community members assessed indicated a **40% or more increase in household income**. Key drivers included:

- Diversified farm enterprises (poultry, honey, horticulture)
- Better post-harvest handling
- Improved market access (e.g., honey value chains)
- Group savings initiatives and cooperative formation

“Before YEFI, farming was just for survival. Now, I make enough to send my wife back to school.” — **Speancer, Serenje**



3.3. Nutrition and Food Security

YEFI improved dietary diversity and food security through:

- Promotion of indigenous and organic vegetables
- Use of compost and liquid manure
- Kitchen gardens and food sovereignty education

Impact assessment shows:

- **50% improvement in household food security**
- **Over 40% improvement in child nutrition (under 6)**

Health data from 15 rural health centers and 27 health personnel interviews corroborated these outcomes.

“I used to bring my daughter to the clinic monthly for malnutrition checks. Now he’s growing strong, thanks to what we grow at home.” — **Judith, Serenje**

3.4. Green Jobs and Agro-Enterprises

YEFI facilitated the creation of **over 1,000 green jobs**, catalyzed by:

- Formation of 30+ youth cooperatives/clubs
- Value addition (beekeeping, poultry, vegetable processing)
- Social enterprise training in all demo sites (e.g., 577 youth trained)

Youth-led enterprises range from organic seed multiplication to mushroom, vegetable and mango drying.

“I was jobless for years. Through YEFI, I now run a profitable organic poultry business.” — **Maxiwell, Chitambo**





3.5. Ecosystem Restoration

YEFI has restored over **2,000 hectares of degraded land** through agroecological methods:

- Agroforestry (native tree planting)
- Cover cropping, composting, mulching
- Community-led conservation

In Serenje, Mkushi and Chitambo, over **600 trees** grown by youth were distributed and planted.

YEFI also supported the conservation of **over 10,000 hectares of forests** by building youth-led awareness and alternative livelihoods.





3.6. Policy Advocacy and Systems Change

YEFI has shaped national and district-level agricultural discourse by:

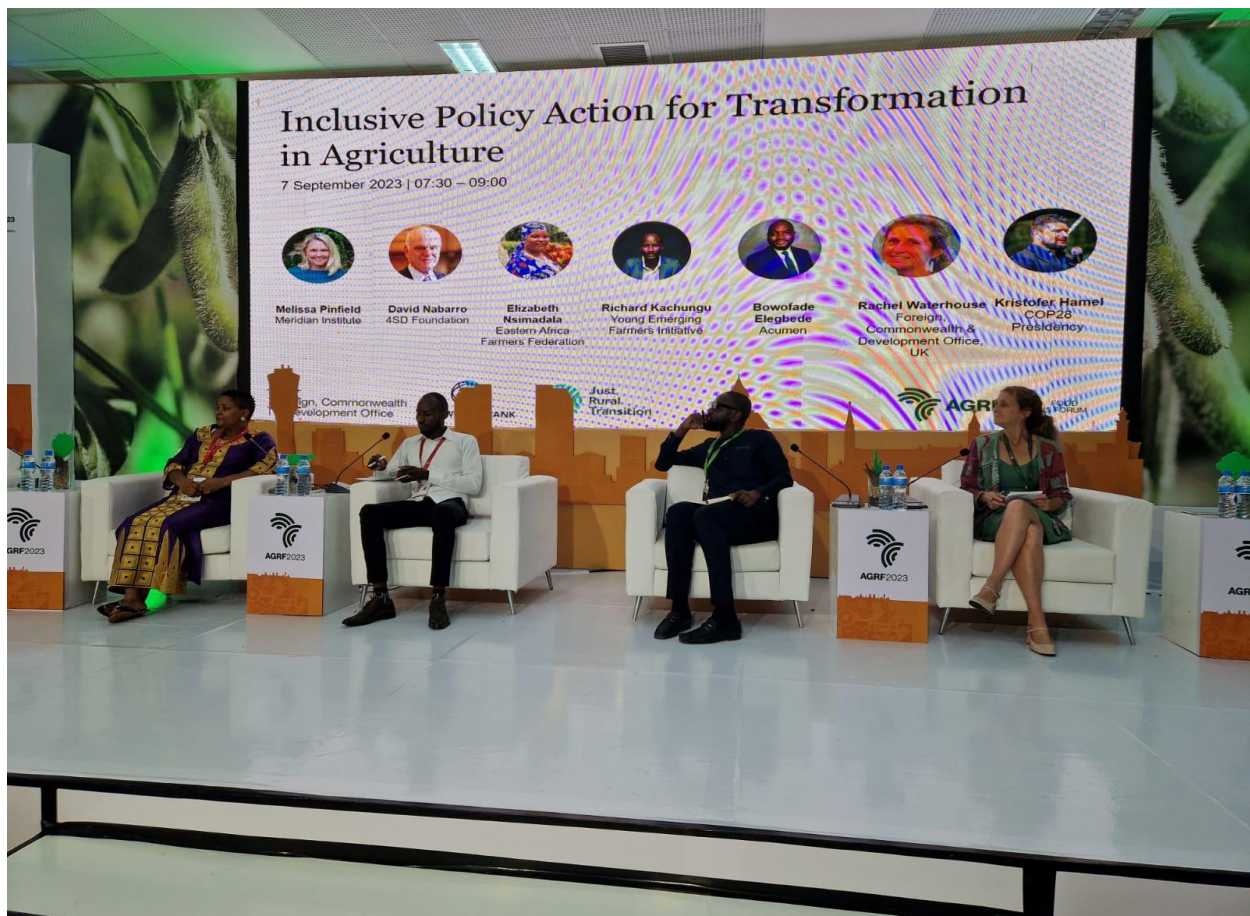
- Participating in policy consultations
- Leading campaigns on youth land rights and access to finance

- Partnering with CSOs to push for youth inclusion in Zambia's agriculture policies

This work contributed to new youth-focused provisions in Zambia's 8th National Development Plan.







4. Youth Voices: Impact Testimonials

1. **Brian (Serenje):** “YEFI helped me understand the business side of farming. I created a savings group and we’ve now expanded by onion production business.”
2. **Chimwemwe (District Coordinator, Chama):** “Youth in Chama now see farming as an opportunity, not a burden. The confidence and pride they carry into the fields is inspiring.”
3. **Judith (Serenje):** “My garden feeds my family and gives me income. I feel more respected as a young woman because I bring something home.”

5. Lessons Learned

5.1. Community Ownership Drives Sustainability

Programs are most successful when designed **with** youth, not **for** them. District Coordinators play a pivotal role in mobilizing communities, ensuring inclusivity, and adapting to local contexts.

5.2. Income Visibility Encourages Engagement

When youth see tangible results like income or better nutrition, they become self-motivated. Economic success stories inspire uptake and ownership. Our engagement also indicates that **68%** of the youths trained lacked follow-up support to scale their agribusinesses.

5.3. Peer-to-Peer Learning Works

Youth Change Agents (425 in ZYCALA) taught **2,200 households**, demonstrating high-impact peer learning models.

5.4. Digital Tools Extend Reach

Digital platforms (e.g., SMS systems for reporting and weather alerts) are bridging the information divide, especially in rural areas.

5.5. Youth: A Moving Target

One key lesson is that youth are a dynamic and diverse group, requiring flexible and adaptive engagement. Their attention spans can be short, and many prefer immediate results over long-term gains. Additionally, youth between the ages of 15 and 35 differ in their motivations and responsiveness, what works for a 17-year-old may not resonate with someone aged 30. Tailored approaches based on age, life stage, and context are essential. This includes designing differentiated mobilization strategies, engagement platforms, and support systems that cater to their evolving interests, while maintaining consistent mentorship and follow-up to sustain long-term involvement.

6. Forward Path: 2025 and Beyond

YEFI plans to build on this momentum through:

- **Operationalizing the Youth Agriculture Hub:** A social enterprise model for incubation, learning, and innovation.
- **Operationalizing the YEFI Fund:** Financing youth-led, nature-based solutions.
- **Scaling the ZYCALA Model:** Replicating across new districts.
- **Investing in Digital Platforms:** For market access, training, and peer exchange.

Conclusion

From Solwezi to Chinsali, Mansa to Gwembe, YEFI has helped young people see themselves not as victims of poverty or climate change, but as agents of regeneration. Over the past nine years, this youth-led movement has increased incomes, improved household nutrition, restored degraded land, and redefined what agriculture means to a generation. In landscapes once forgotten or depleted, young farmers are now growing food with dignity, purpose, and environmental awareness.

This journey has not been without its challenges. Droughts, market disruptions, limited policy support, and financing gaps continue to impact youth participation in agriculture. Yet, YEFI's experience demonstrates that when youth are empowered when they have access to the right skills, resources, networks, and platforms they can build systems that are both economically viable and ecologically sound. Through locally rooted innovations and peer-to-peer learning, the initiative has grown from a small idea to a nationwide force recognized by communities, institutions, and global actors alike.

As Zambia and the wider region grapple with the twin crises of climate change and youth unemployment, YEFI's regenerative agriculture model offers not only a path forward but a movement worth scaling. The solution is not only in the soil, but also in the minds, hands, and hearts of young people willing to lead change from the ground up.

Moving forward, YEFI will deepen its work in communities, expand digital and financial inclusion, and strengthen partnerships that support youth leadership in the food system. This impact report is not just a reflection of what has been achieved, but a call to action for governments, funders, and partners to invest in youth not as beneficiaries, but as co-creators of resilient food futures.

Because when young people grow food, they don't just feed nations, they reshape them.

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