This study examines the potential of the agriculture sector for youth in Ethiopia, in particular the opportunities related to agroecological business practice. Based on a desk review and consultations with stakeholders, a series of cases have been identified which show a growing market for food products produced in an agroecological way, an upcoming sector with companies which have diversified and strengthened their production systems and generated more employment, and several enabling factors in the market and policy environment. Generally agrifood SMEs face a number of constraints, such as access to finance, to land, to knowledge, training and mentoring, which are even more felt by youth.

In addition to identifying issues, the report shows a range of stakeholders is interested in collaboration for youth and agroecology. This study is designed as an input for entrepreneurial youth and coalitions looking to create a conducive environment for agroecology to flourish. It is also intended to catalyze the Youth in Agroecology and Business Learning Track Africa (YALTA) Initiative, that the IKEA Foundation is supporting.

The YALTA programme aims to support young agripreneurs to apply agroecological principles and to co-create networks around them, in view of contributing to the increased sustainability of food systems and youth employment in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda. To inform future programming and decision making, a mapping was done in these four countries to identify best practices, main challenges, existing financial mechanisms, relevant stakeholders and existing programmes and initiatives on the nexus of agroecology, youth and business. This summary provides the key findings of the mapping in Ethiopia.

A consultative assessment methodology was employed, which built upon the perspectives of the different stakeholders in youth development in Ethiopia. It included a general desk review and a search for relevant cases and stakeholders, working from a longlist to a shortlist of those. Network members provided information, views and opinions during pre-launch orientation and kick-off meetings.

**Ethiopian context**

**Food security - millions of smallholder farming households at risk**
Ethiopia is characterized by a diversity in bio-physical conditions and agroecological zones, as well as by a vast ethnographic and social diversity. Its agriculture sector consists predominantly of rain-fed subsistence production, and is highly vulnerable to drought and environmental degradation (e.g. acid soils affect 43% of agricultural land). This affects the food security of millions of smallholder farming households, while they also face arrays of other challenges including weak integration into markets, and limited access to finance and technology.

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1Agroecology is an integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of food and agricultural systems. It seeks to optimize the interactions between plants, animals, humans and the environment while taking into consideration the social aspects that need to be addressed for a sustainable and fair food system. [http://www.fao.org/agroecology](http://www.fao.org/agroecology)
Lack of job opportunities
The average age of the population is low, more than 40% is under 15 years old. This means Ethiopia will need sufficient employment for its ever-expanding labour force within the coming decades; approximately three million young people enter the labor market each year. Even if female unemployment fell faster than that of males in recent years, far more young women are unemployed (30%) than young men (22%), and women generally do unskilled production work while their participation in management is very low. In 2013, 45% of the youth were engaged in the agriculture sector.

Youth face many challenges
Both urban and rural youth face a series of challenges besides this lack of job opportunities, including high levels of illiteracy, narrow skills sets, restricted access to land and other productive assets, substance abuse, restrictive gender norms, lack of financial capital, lack of support from their families/communities and limited decision making power (particularly for female youth), and political instability.

Existing agroecological practice

Different agroecological practices are applied in different parts of Ethiopia. These include: conservation agriculture; eco-agriculture; resource conserving agriculture; permaculture; integrated pest management; ecological intensification; and organic agriculture.

Two interesting examples of agroecological business are described in the study: one is of an integrated organic farm led by Mrs. Haregu Gobezay in Mereb Leke District of the Tigray Region in northern Ethiopia. The farm diversified the products and crops, used IPM and developed a strong and innovative business model. The other is Menagesha Integrated Organic Farm PLC, a successful mushroom producing farm delivering to urban restaurants, which innovated its design with use of external expertise³.

At the moment, several key agroecological knowledge bases and science centers exist, serving as a source of traditional and scientific knowledge on agroecology, including the family farms and communities. The most notable science centers involved in the creation, collection, storing, and dissemination of agricultural knowledge and information including agroecology based farming systems, with a direct linkage with the farmers, are institutes of agricultural research and the Ministry of Agriculture.

Some notable examples of Ethiopian Indigenous Agroecological Practice include:

- Derashe Traditional Conservation Agriculture
- Konso Cultural Landscape
- Hararghe Highland Traditional Soil and Water Conservation
- Hararghe Cattle Fattening
- Hararghe Small-Scale Traditional Irrigation
- Anokober Manure Management
- Traditional Agroforestry: Gedeo Zone, East Shewa Zone, East Wollega Zone, West Gojam Zone.

³ See page 20 of ‘Agricultural Innovators in Ethiopia. Lessons from the Food Security and Rural Entrepreneurship Fund (FSRE)’. 

+3,000,000 young people on labor market each year
Opportunities for involving youth in agroecology

The study identified several opportunities for youth to engage in agroecology:

- Income generation activities in the context of the intensification and diversification of agricultural production. These could include natural resource management based income generation activities, which buffer for scarcity of land: e.g. beekeeping, oil seed processing or also fruit, vegetable or fodder production.
- Services in the area of integrated soil fertility management (ISFM); e.g. the establishment of lime supply chains with youth business groups and/or private sector stakeholders can strengthen the local economy and create jobs.
- Eco-friendly youth business development (e.g. ecotourism).

Available services and funds:

- Innovative financial packages and services are available. E.g. The Dashen Bank initiative provides training and financial assistance for over 1000 youth entrepreneurs in 6 cities.
- The Federal Government of Ethiopia facilitates youth and women empowerment in the agriculture sector. Of particular interest is a Youth Revolving Fund, which creates employment opportunities through self-employment using organized youth business groups (SMEs). In parallel, a national adolescent and youth health strategy was put in place to address key health issues, which is important for young agripreneurs who often lack access to affordable health care including to sexual and reproductive health services.
- Development partners’ youth support programs in the agriculture and non-agriculture sectors, including capacity building and training in view of employment and entrepreneurship. E.g. the Save the Children and SNV/Mastercard Foundation youth enterprises programme.

Private sector opportunities for youth employment

In addition, the private sector provides opportunities too for youth employment. Currently, several agri-food companies are actively engaged in producing and exporting organic products from Ethiopia as well as supplying for the local market: e.g. Oromia Coffee Union, Genesis Farm, Mandura Ethiopia, Apinec Plc, and ECOPIA. Several successful small companies developed an integrated organic production system with a diverse set of crops and animals, using integrated pest management and developing innovations based on market demand.

Enabling environment for youth to engage in agroecology

The Ethiopian government supports organic agriculture

It’s Climate Resilient Green Economy strategy enables the development of a climate smart, competitive agribusiness sector. The ATA-agribusiness & markets initiative mainstreams climate change while also promoting women and youth inclusion, which was particularly effective in the Input Voucher System, 8028 Farmer Hotline (IVR/SMS), Ethiopian Agribusiness Acceleration Platform, and the National Market Information System. Recently, talks have started on the establishment of an environmental court, which could be an opportunity for agroecology.

The market environment seems favourable too

There is an increasing domestic, regional and global organic market and a considerable potential to expand the Ethiopian agro-processing industry. Gradually, more women-led businesses are active in the market. There is potential for service provision along the agricultural value chain by trained youth and their business spin-offs. Contract farming has a legal and regulatory framework. Potential exists for youth to engage in the use of ICT in agriculture, in agro-ecotourism businesses, and in the processing of agricultural commodities sourced in the vicinity of integrated agro-industrial parks.
Additional enabling factors

1. The GoE Agricultural Growth Program emphasizes agricultural intensification, growth, and the transformation from subsistence to commercial agriculture; its agriculture sector development interventions are primarily based on agro-ecological (geographically) conditions and access to markets.

2. The diversity of farm production, enabled by the tremendous diversity of agro-ecological zones in Ethiopia.

3. There are promising and untapped cross-cutting market opportunities notably in the areas of packaging facilities, testing and certification facilities, recycling, cold chain innovation, dryer innovation, traceability, and logistics.

4. GoE is improving the private sector enabling environment, e.g. with changes in the financial sector, investment climate, trade, public financial management and standards and privatization of both assets and responsibilities.

5. There is potential for increasing production, which would lead to changes in the sector and thus create potential opportunities for youth e.g. improved irrigation systems, veterinary and livestock services.

In addition, a range of business development services are commonly provided, which fall into seven categories: technology and product development, training and technical assistance, input supply, finance, market access, infrastructure, and policy and advocacy. The report notes a potential to strengthen tailored BDS for youth and women.

Challenges to be addressed in this context

The challenges that agriculture sector entrepreneurs of all sizes face are still multiple: access to land, market knowledge, access to finance, access to facilities and advice, infrastructure limitations, and administrative and regulatory matters. While these are obstacles for farmers and other entrepreneurs of different age groups and sizes, some of those are particularly challenging for youth, women, and/or start-up businesses. The latter include for example insufficient training and education, and lack of knowledge and skills in business management.

A challenge related to ecological sustainability of agricultural business sector is an ongoing policy change to allow genetic modification; this offers the possibility of higher yields while it brings risks for indigenous agrobiodiversity and the economic independence of farmers.

Existing platforms and networks

For the development of further action, it is important to take into consideration the current strengths in the way different actors and food communities share information and collaborate.
For example the Agricultural Development Partners’ Linkage Advisory Council (ADPLAC) could be a relevant player; it enhances linkages and coordination among potential partners engaged in agricultural extension, research and development at different levels, from the Federal to the Woreda levels. In addition, the Ethiopian agroecology network platform, established by AgriProFocus and Tufts University Agriculture Knowledge Documentation and Policy Program (AKLDP) and now steered by a diverse group of NGOs and entrepreneurs active in Ethiopia; this network has addressed issues of climate resilience and circular economy, particularly in its work to promote conservation agriculture. There is also the apex organisation Christian Relief & Development Association (CRDA) and the Ethiopia chapter of Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM Ethiopia). Finally, ad hoc and irregular interactions also take place as a result of invitation-based participation in seminars, workshops and other related group-events, which could be interesting to tap into.

**Stakeholders identified**

Based on their degree of influence and importance in relation to YALTA project’s objectives and goals, over 190 potential key stakeholders are identified as suitable for partnership in the implementation of YALTA project. This group can be used as a starting point for any follow-up stakeholders’ consultation workshops. The stakeholders are categorized in nine groups:

- Private sector & industry (55)
- Financial service providers (7)
- Government (18)
- Civil society (NGO), non state actors (55)
- International aid agencies and multilateral organisations (24)
- R&D institutes and universities (17)
- ICT solution providers in agriculture (5)
- Media (6)
- End market stakeholders, (organic) market (3).

**Conclusions**

1. Although there are opportunities for youth to engage in agriculture and food systems in Ethiopia they encounter numerous challenges too. Most of these challenges are interwoven, as are the solutions.
2. Capacity building programs that combine multiple interventions including training, finance, and access to market are more effective in helping youth to benefit from agroecology business opportunities. So youth-specific projects and programmes, like YALTA can provide the extra push to strengthen youth in the agroecology business sector.
3. It is underscored that a coherent and integrated response is required to address the core challenges faced by youth when engaging agroecology related business. It is important to work in partnership, with a transparent multi-stakeholder mechanisms ensuring coherence, coordination and cooperation across different national government institutions and agencies, at central and local level, private sector organizations, youth organizations and development partners.

This is the executive summary of a mapping study about Youth in Agroecology in Ethiopia. Comissioned by AgriProFocus with financial support from the IKEA Foundation. Please email sassefa@agriprofocus.com to request a copy of the full report from Sarah Assefa, Country Project Coordinator Ethiopia.