

## Youth

Youth in Africa face significant constraints to finding meaningful employment opportunities in agriculture. Many young people don't own land and have limited access to capital. They are more likely to migrate to cities. Yet when given the chance to find employment in agriculture, many thrive. Youth farmers are typically more educated and more open to adopting and demonstrating new technologies than older people, and many have a talent for connecting, motivating and training their peers. They sometimes even prove to be better communicators.

**Recent evaluations of AGRA's Village Based Advisors (VBA) program looked at how the program addresses the needs of young farmers and VBAs.** This brief highlights key findings.

### **VBA Evaluation Sources: 2022–2023**

180 key stakeholder interviews, 35 focus groups with farmers and 1,032 VBA phone survey respondents in Burkina Faso, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and Mozambique

### **Farmer Evaluation Sources: 2023**

6,777 farmers across 484 VBA and 369 non-VBA villages in Kenya, Mozambique and Nigeria

## Background

AGRA is an African-led institution that promotes agricultural transformation across Sub-Saharan Africa. With the ratio of agricultural extension agents to farmers in this region often exceeding 1 to 1,000, few opportunities exist for smallholder farmers to learn better agricultural techniques.

To address this, AGRA's VBA program recruits and trains tens of thousands of respected farmers in best farming practices. These VBAs pass knowledge to other farmers and serve as trusted problem solvers. VBAs are also encouraged to become agri-preneurs, connecting farmers with inputs and markets. AGRA and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation hired Mathematica to evaluate the program. This series of learning briefs explores key findings.

## Findings

***While the VBA program provides entrepreneurial opportunities, it can be difficult to attract young farmers (under the age of 35).*** Many are lured to urban areas by the possibility of an education or the draw of steadier, more lucrative work. Without access to land, they can't demonstrate successful techniques to other farmers.

***But there is no denying the value that youth participants bring to the program.*** Youth farmers are more likely to embrace innovation and are often better than their elders at grasping and disseminating new agricultural knowledge, according to respondents. Youth VBAs are demonstrably more comfortable using smartphone apps, such as Plantix and Farmex, than older farmers. They generally use mobile apps more than other groups.

This confidence with technology, youth farmers believe, elevates their credibility with more senior farmers. In fact, there is some evidence that the success of farm phone applications generally is connected, at least in part, to recruitment of younger, digitally savvy farmers in Nigeria and Mozambique.

**Much as is the case for women in the program, young people tend to be the best at helping people like themselves—other young farmers.** Youth VBAs who go into business are also more likely than other groups to employ more youth farmers.

**But there can be country-specific differences in how youth farmers respond after being reached by VBAs.** Youth in Nigeria tend to use more hybrid seeds than older farmers, for example. However, the VBA program overall seems slightly less effective for young people in Nigeria. There, youth farmers, on average, see smaller yields than their older counterparts, which leads to smaller profits.

**Younger VBAs are more motivated by the opportunity to earn income compared to their older peers.** More than one in four youth VBAs are driven mostly by a desire to improve their income. That’s true for less than one in five older VBAs.

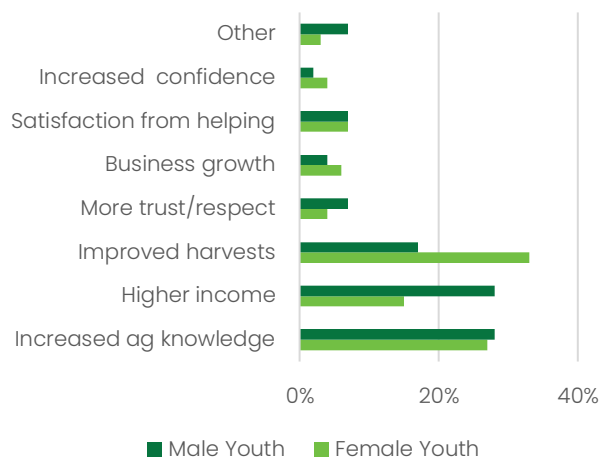
### Opportunities

More can be done to draw youth farmers to the VBA program. Most steps, though, require a greater focus on ensuring better access to reliable incomes.

One way to do that would be to acknowledge youth farmers’ relative inexperience and limited budgets. Establishing special programs that offer mentorships and access to credit as well as targeted loans and grants could help the more entrepreneurial youth farmers start and maintain businesses.

Such programs could also include monitoring and rapid assessments to help fine-tune specific interventions. These incentives could draw more youth to join and remain part of the VBA program.

### What is the most important impact of being a VBA?

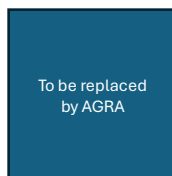


Source: Mathematica VBA phone survey, 2022.

Doubling down on a digital strategy may also increase AGRA’s ability to recruit youth VBAs. Branding, even with products such as T- shirts and field hats, can be important for attracting youth farmers. Many want to increase their skills, but they also care deeply about what others think. Making their participation and success visible to others could be a helpful draw.

### Conclusion

Youth farmers can be particularly gifted at teaching others like them—the next generation of youth farmers—how to adopt new agricultural techniques. But recruiting them and keeping them involved in VBA programs will require significant additional steps.



**Scan this QR code with your phone’s camera app to view the evaluation report and suite of learning briefs.**