



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

DECENT RURAL EMPLOYMENT

Integrated Country Approach (ICA)

for boosting decent
jobs for youth in the
agrifood system

Fourth phase (2024–2027)

Project at a glance

Project title: Integrated Country Approach for boosting decent jobs for youth in the agrifood system – Phase IV (ICA-4)

- **Countries:** Ecuador, Viet Nam and Zambia
- **Duration:** 1 March 2024 – 28 February 2027
- **Beneficiaries:** Rural young women and men that are unemployed, underemployed, inactive or in situations of working poverty and vulnerable employment but with potential to be engaged in the prioritized agrifood value chains (VCs)
- **Budget:** 49 000 000 SEK (approx. 4 700 000 USD)
- **Donor:** Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)
- **Leading FAO technical division:** Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division (ESP), in partnership with Agrifood Systems and Food Safety Division (ESF)



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The issue

The high share of youth in the global population – 1.2 billion young people aged 15 to 24 years ([UNDESA, 2022](#)) – represents an enormous opportunity for the rejuvenation of agrifood systems.

Yet, the employment potential of agrifood VCs is not fully harnessed. Youth are often overrepresented among the most vulnerable categories of workers, and poor access to productive resources, infrastructure, knowledge and support services turn them away from investing in the sector. Rural youth are particularly disadvantaged: when compared with urban youth, they are four times more likely to work as unpaid family workers and 40 percent more likely to engage in casual work without a contract ([ILO, 2019](#)).

More sustainable, inclusive, and scalable solutions are needed for generating decent employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for rural young women and men in agrifood VCs.

The response of the ICA project

Since 2011, FAO has been implementing the Integrated Country Approach (ICA) programme to assist countries in developing inclusive agrifood policies, strategies and programmes for the promotion of youth engagement and employment in agrifood systems. Strong emphasis is placed on job creation, but also on the quality of jobs in the agrifood sector. The programme has primarily been funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

The fourth phase of the ICA programme will be implemented in **Ecuador, Viet Nam, and Zambia** through a three-year project.

In order to create or enhance productive employment opportunities for youth, the project identifies as main entry point specific VCs, selected based on their employment potential and relevance to the target group – for instance, **fine cocoa** and related **agroforestry products** in Ecuador, **rice** in Viet Nam, and **soybean** in Zambia.

The project adopts a **market-systems development approach**. By partnering with market players in addressing the main barriers faced by youth, ICA-4 aims at improving market functions or rules to generate more and better jobs for the rural youth. The project will engage both the **private and public sectors**. In particular, it will explore partnerships with businesses at key nodes of the VC and its supporting functions. At the same time, the partnership with the public sector will ensure an enabling environment, establishing appropriate incentives for businesses to be more youth-inclusive, along with targeted interventions to support the most vulnerable youth.

Across interventions, critical attention will be placed on climate **change adaptation and mitigation**, thus ensuring that youth opportunities are increased in the frame of environmentally sustainable agrifood VCs, **gender equality** and **youth agency**, by supporting youth networks and collective action.

Expected results

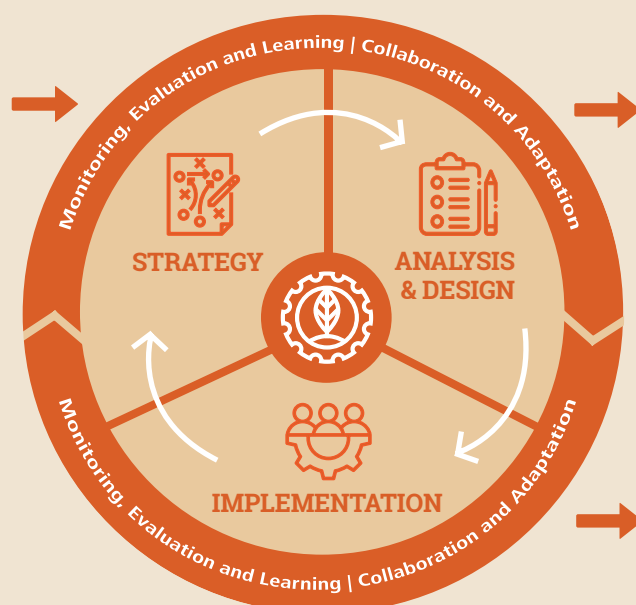
- **Outcome 1:** Market players in prioritized agrifood VCs adopt new or improved youth-inclusive business practices, products or services that contribute to generating sustainable agribusiness and job opportunities for rural young women and men.
- **Outcome 2:** Enhanced youth-inclusive norms and regulations are in place and effectively harnessed by the youth.
- **Outcome 3:** Enhanced youth-inclusive VC governance mechanisms are in place and effectively harnessed by the youth.

With a robust **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)** approach and focusing on a **Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA)** process, the design and implementation of ICA-4 will entail: (i) learning about the context and developing solutions by collaborating with market actors from the public, private and civil society sectors, including youth organizations, and (ii) implementing solutions with market actors to test them, scale up those that have best results and buy-in, and adapt the solutions as the situation evolves.

ICA-4 will take on a facilitation and catalytic role, supporting market actors to adopt and adapt solutions that resonate with their incentives and capacities.

Project logic

Specific countries and VCs prioritized in 2023 based on desk review and design missions.



Year 1:

- **Labour market scans and youth-sensitive analysis of prioritized VCs** and related market systems (e.g. finance, skills, land).
- Development of vision, **youth-sensitive upgrading strategy** and list of possible ICA-4 interventions identified in each target country and VC to address the root causes of key constraints.

Years 2 & 3:

- **Piloting of ICA-4 interventions** addressing strategic upgrades in the VCs that are relevant for youth employment (i.e. upgraded business models, enabling environment or governance).
- Facilitate exchanges and linkages with potential technical and financial partners to foster the **scaling-up of tested solutions**.