



TECHNICAL TRAINING ON EXPORTING AGRIFOOD PRODUCTS

from Honduras, Colombia, and Mexico



Rural Women and Youth Program and International Trade
and Regional Integration Program

January 2026



AgroJoven: Technical training on exporting
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EDITORIAL COORDINATION: Priscila Zúñiga

TRANSLATION: Máximo Araya

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This technical report was prepared with the invaluable support of the following persons:

INPUTS:

Young people participating in the “*AgroJoven: Technical Training on Exporting Agrifood Products from Colombia, Honduras, and Mexico*” initiative, as well as the Honduras, Colombia, and Mexico delegations, which we would like to thank for their support in conducting the workshops and developing the proposals that were presented.

PREPARATION OF THE TECHNICAL REPORT:

Silvia Castellano (Technical Specialist in the Rural Women and Youth Program, IICA)
Carlos Ruiz (Technical Specialist in the Rural Women and Youth Program, IICA)
Priscila Zúñiga (Manager of the Rural Women and Youth Program, IICA)

TECHNICAL REVIEW:

Milagros Conislla (Technical Specialist in the International Trade and Regional Integration Program, IICA)
Diana Arroyo (Technical Specialist in the International Trade and Regional Integration Program, IICA)

EDITORIAL COORDINATION: Priscila Zúñiga (Manager of the Rural Women and Youth Program, IICA)

COPY EDITING: Máximo Araya, Language Unit, IICA

DESIGN: Ingenio, Arte y Comunicación S.A.

Castellano, Silvia

AgroJoven: Technical training on exporting agrifood products from Honduras, Colombia, and Mexico/ Carlos Ruiz y Priscila Zúñiga - San José, Costa Rica: IICA, 2026, 42 p.; 21 x 16 cm.

ISBN: 978-92-9273-237-0

Published also in Spanish

1. Rural youth 2. agrifood sector 3. capacity development
4. participatory approaches I. IICA II. Título

AGRIS
E70

DEWEY
380.141

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	04
2. Justification and context	07
3. Methodology	11
4. Characterization of youth participants	14
4.1. Honduras	15
4.2. Colombia	17
4.3. Mexico	19
5. Results and principal findings, by country	20
5.1. Principal findings of the workshop	21
5.1.1. Honduras	21
5.1.2. Colombia	26
5.1.3. Mexico	28
5.2. Priority areas	31
5.2.1. Honduras	31
5.2.2. Colombia	36
5.2.3. Mexico	39
6. Results of the evaluation surveys completed by participants	44
6.1. Honduras	45
6.2. Colombia	47
6.3. Mexico	48
7. General conclusions	49
8. Recommendations	54
9. Bibliography	58

INTRODUCTION

1



Rural youth are a fundamental part of the agrifood sector of the Americas. Their participation in the international trade of agrifood products is not only a worthwhile goal, but a necessary objective that calls for coordinated efforts, strategic resources, and public policies that recognize their role as key players in transforming the sector and achieving global food security.

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), through its International Trade and Regional Integration Program and its Rural Women and Youth Program, recognizes the strategic role that young people play in energizing and developing the agrifood sector throughout the region.

The International Trade and Regional Integration Program assists countries to improve their standing in international markets for agrifood products. This program has two spheres of action focusing on improving market access and the implementation of trade policies, as well as identifying and seizing trade opportunities arising through international trade agreements and regional integration processes.

On the other hand, the Rural Women and Youth Program promotes the empowerment of rural youth in the Americas, recognizing them as key stakeholders in agriculture. As such, its strategic courses of action include providing mentorship for business ventures in the early stages of operation, strengthening soft skills, and promoting the leadership and participation of these groups in high-level forums, in a bid to strengthen their capacities, highlight their contributions, and expand their opportunities in places of power at the regional and international levels.

This intersection between international trade and youth empowerment is particularly strategic in the current climate. Although a significant number of young people in rural areas are involved in agricultural activities, they face important limitations with respect to access to land, financing, and production resources, and are excluded from decision-making forums in agrifood production and trade. Moreover, the population in rural areas is aging; yet land ownership and the control of production resources remain primarily in the hands of older generations. Thus, an intergenerational approach is being promoted, to capitalize on the capacities of both population groups, encouraging collaboration to strengthen the sustainability of the sector (ECLAC, FAO and IICA 2019).



Training and technical capacity building in areas linked to international trade, export processes, and negotiation skills are essential for the development and empowerment of young people in the agrifood sectors of the region. This initiative seeks to strengthen the technical skills of youth, with a view to enhancing their capacity for advocacy in the agrifood sector, and transforming them into knowledge multipliers, while also promoting their leadership in their countries and on the international scene.

It is important to note that this initiative has been possible thanks to joint, coordinated actions and a commitment by various institutional stakeholders, which have been pivotal to its success. Collaboration between IICA's technical programs and its delegations in Honduras, Colombia, and Mexico has facilitated the design and implementation of a comprehensive and contextualized response to the specific needs of rural youth in each country. Moreover, the decisive support of the governments of the participating countries has been critical. This collaboration has allowed AgroJoven to consolidate its role as a comprehensive initiative that takes into account the complex challenges facing rural youth and also the need for coordinated and multisectoral approaches.

As such, this report provides an integrated analysis of the AgroJoven initiative, presenting a series of information, divided into the following sections. First, it provides a justification for this intervention and the context surrounding its creation, while also outlining the structural challenges facing rural youth and the opportunities stemming from their participation in international agrifood trade. It then describes the participatory methodology adopted, outlining the criteria for participant selection, the implementation phases, and the data gathering instruments. Later, it provides a profile of the young, agrifood entrepreneurs that took part in the workshops, demonstrating their territorial and educational diversity. Then it analyzes the major findings in each country, organized thematically and illustrated with direct evidence gathered during

the sessions. The document includes an analysis of current topics that the young people identified as priorities (digitalization of international trade, sustainability, and fair trade), along with their respective short- and medium-term actions. Finally, it presents the evaluation surveys that show the impact of the training, followed by conclusions and recommendations aimed at strengthening similar training processes and generating conditions that enable young people to assume a leading role in transforming the agrifood sector of the region.



JUSTIFICATION AND CONTEXT

2



Young people from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), particularly those residing in rural areas, stand to play a strategic role in the regional agrifood systems of today and tomorrow. Close to 30 million youth between 15 and 29 years of age live in rural areas in LAC, 9.6 million of which are involved in agricultural activities (IICA 2018). However, the impact of youth on the transformation of the agrifood sector transcends mere numbers: their creativity, openness to digitalization, and capacity for innovation are elements that are key to the modernization, sustainability and resilience of the sector.

Historically, the agrifood sector has been critical to the regional economy. It accounts for almost 7% of the GDP of LAC (IDB 2023) and continues to be fundamental for the development of its economies. This has been partly due to the increase in agrifood exports: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) project that by 2028 the region will account for 25% of global agricultural and fisheries exports, enjoying sustained leadership in fruits, vegetables, and products of animal origin (FAO 2019).

There are, however, interrelated challenges that justify actions to implement interventions targeting rural youth with export potential. First, net rural-urban migration is responsible for more than half of the growth in the young, urban population, more so in the case of females (as much as two thirds of female youth migration). The causes are multiple: poverty, limited educational achievements, a greater level of informal employment, and barriers to access production assets, such as land. Indigenous rural youth face even more critical conditions (ECLAC 2019). This exodus of rural youth is a structural factor that threatens the competitiveness and continued agricultural development of the region (Dirven 2016).

On the other hand, a recent study (2024) of the Economic Commission for Latin

America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) predicts that by 2030, only 8.2% of youth in the region will be employed in agriculture, which represents a loss of 1.2 million youth from the sector. At the same time, 70% of this population will migrate to the service and business sector, which will displace the young labor force employed in this strategic sector and leave agriculture facing problems due to the lack of qualified human capital, thus limiting innovation and modernization.

Furthermore, in comparison to their urban peers, education is less accessible to rural youth and is often of a lower quality. They must also contend with more precarious employment conditions and limited access to production resources. Indeed, less than 10% of agricultural proprietors are younger than 29 years and the primary



means of ALC se ha consolidado como una región clave en la seguridad alimentaria mundial, al destinar más del 40 % de su producción agroalimentaria a la exportación y al mantener un superávit que supera los USD 174 000 millones anuales (Summa 2023). Solo en 2024, las exportaciones de frutas alcanzaron más de USD 41 000 millones, equivalente a la cuarta parte del mercado global (Agraria 2025).

Nonetheless, despite the region's “triple threat” (low growth, inequality, weak institutional capacity), the agrifood sector continues to report high levels of productivity and resilience—factors that are vital to global trade (FAO 2019). This dynamism is supported by increasing logistical and technological value chains, where young people have room to make their mark through the associated digital tools and entrepreneurship.

LAC has consolidated its position as a key region in global food security, by allocating more than 40% of its agrifood production for export purposes and maintaining an export surplus of more than USD 174 billion per year (Summa 2023). In 2024 alone, fruit exports surpassed USD 41 billion, representing one quarter of the global market (Agraria 2025).

Yet, notwithstanding this strategic position, the region faces significant challenges. In 2024, approximately 28% of the LAC population, which is equivalent to approximately

187.6 million people, experienced food insecurity, whereas 27% could not afford a healthy diet. These gaps were even more marked in rural areas, where 39% of the population is classified as poor, in comparison to the 24.6% recorded in urban areas (Salazar et al. 2025).

Moreover, the dynamic export market is concentrated in great measure in three countries: Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico, which together account for more than three quarters of the value of the region's agricultural production (Bloomberg 2024). The primary destination markets for these exports are the major developed and emerging economies. Key strategic partners include China, United States, and the European Union, which account for 6%, 4% and 3% of these exports, respectively (DataSur 2025). Projections indicate that the region's presence will grow further, with the agrifood trade

surplus increasing by as much as 30% in the coming decade, accounting for almost one fifth of global agrifood trade (Swissinfo 2022).

In this context, the boom in international agrifood trade and digitalization have opened up opportunities for youth entrepreneurship and employment. However, this potential is limited by structural barriers: more than forty million homes in the region have no internet connection and rural women are the population group with the lowest access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) (RIMISP 2021, IDB 2020). Small-scale agriculture has limited access to financing, reduced access to state-of-the-art technology, and fewer opportunities for training, thus perpetuating rural exclusion and restricting the potential of youth to capitalize on the transformation of agrifood systems (Contxtto 2025).

Moreover, based on current trends in the labor market, a projected 30.2% of employed youth in 2030 will be employed in trade (ECLAC 2024) – a sector that is demonstrating marked growth. If the region manages to build combined capacity in both agriculture and trade, as well as prepare the coming generations to lead the way in higher value-added and export sectors, this will ensure even greater dynamism and development of regional and local economies.



**Employed youth in 2030
will be concentrated in
commerce**



METHODOLOGY

3



The AgroJoven initiative implemented a mixed methodology, placing emphasis on participation and experiential design to maximize learning and foster horizontal knowledge sharing among young, rural entrepreneurs. This approach sought to balance theory with practice, promoting the acquisition of specialized knowledge, as well as the development of negotiation skills and of associative capacities.

Selection of participants was defined based on criteria seeking to identify rural youth with export potential and the capacity to multiply knowledge within their communities. Demographic aspects and training were the first consideration, with selection aiming for individuals between 18 to 35 years, preferably with academic training related to the agrifood sector; working in this field, either in their own or family businesses; and with a technical or professional level that would allow them to effectively apply the acquired knowledge. Experience and level of formalization were the second consideration, with priority being given to businesses in operation for at least three years that appeared to be viable and sustainable, and that were either legally established or demonstrated a clear intention to be formalized. Emphasis was also placed on the fulfillment of quality standards backed by national or international certification, experience, or interest in technical training programs focusing on exportation, and participation in trade fairs, business roundtables, or commercial events. However, the process also included a methodological flexibility clause, which allowed for the inclusion of initiatives that, while not strictly fulfilling all criteria, showed great potential, were genuinely involved in export processes, and demonstrated a clear interest in accessing the international sphere. This flexibility prevented valuable applications from being excluded and ensured the participation of young people with the capacity to make a significant contribution to the objectives of the initiative.

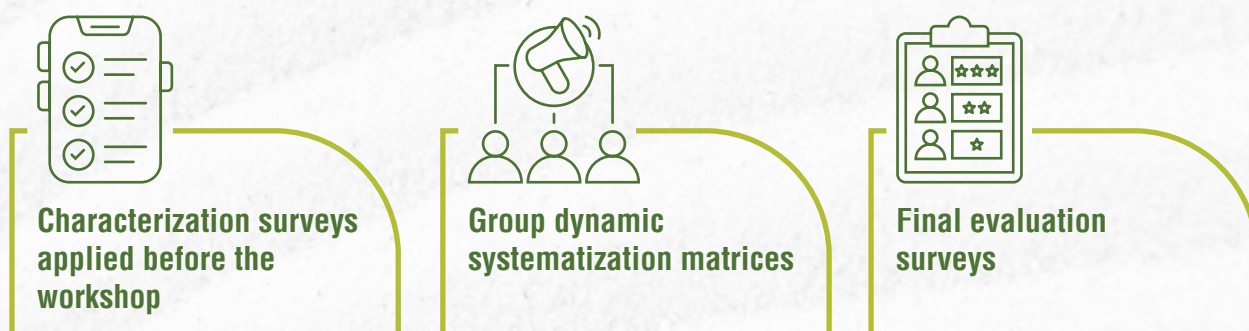
The process was divided into three phases that facilitated coordination in identifying profiles, providing technical training, and then ensuring participatory development of the proposals and impact evaluation. The initial phase involved the characterization and mapping of the participants, a task that was undertaken by the IICA hemispheric programs in collaboration with the Honduras, Colombia, and Mexico delegations, which were responsible for identifying and contacting the rural youth with the established profile and guaranteeing rural participation in each

country. Subsequently, participatory in-person workshops, designed to provide an opportunity for collective learning, were held over a two-day period. The workshop format alternated between keynote presentations, practical and group dynamic exercises, as well as interactive moments. This document represents the final phase, which is a systematization of the results and lessons learned based on the information gathered, as well as an analysis to identify common patterns and also elements specific to each national context.

The workshops were designed with three central components that complemented each other. The first was specialized technical training delivered by specialists from the Institute's International Trade and Regional Integration and Rural Women and Youth programs, addressing key issues, such as the fundamentals of exporting, regulatory frameworks, market access, negotiation skills, and emerging trends in the agrifood sector. The second component consisted of participatory exercises and group work aimed at identifying trends, analyzing challenges and opportunities, and developing action plans, using tools such as the development of results matrices for different time periods. The third component focused on sharing experiences and networking, through activities such as business presentations and structured networking exercises to promote peer-to-peer learning and collaboration among the participating youth.

To reinforce the collaborative nature of the process, participatory methodologies were applied, such as cross introductions between the participants, territorial mapping exercises and electronic voting to prioritize the identification of relevant areas in the sector, coupled with group discussions to define concrete actions for improvement. The results were recorded in printed and digital matrices, to facilitate subsequent analysis and the development of proposals based on consensus. The analysis assisted in identifying common and specific patterns in the participating countries.

The information gathering mechanisms that were used were as follows:



Finally, multidisciplinary teams consisting of individuals from the project support programs and local officers conducted the training, guaranteeing adherence to ethical principles, such as informed consent and confidentiality. Moreover, participatory validation and source triangulation strategies were applied to improve the quality and reliability of results, with a view to ensuring that AgroJoven would be a formative, inclusive, and collaborative experience for rural youth in the region. Information was collected from a combination of initial and final surveys (to develop profiles, measure lessons learned, and collect assessments), observations from the facilitating teams, and the collaborative results matrices.

CHARACTERIZATION OF YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

4



The AgroJoven initiative was developed to address the need to contribute to the empowerment of rural youth as protagonists in agrifood development, equipping them with practical tools to expand their technical knowledge and transform them into knowledge multipliers within their communities. The principal characteristics of the participants are outlined below.

4.1. HONDURAS

The profile of the twenty rural youth who participated in the AgroJoven workshop in Honduras—eleven women and nine men—is indicative of both their personal career paths and the production and business ventures that they are managing. These youth, between 18 and 35 years of age, not only represent various regions of the country, but also a new generation that combines family traditions, innovation, and an export mindset.

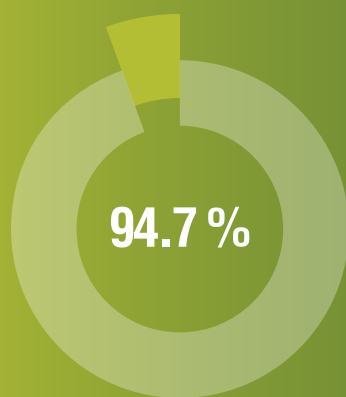


With an equal number of individuals from the 18-24 and the 25-29 age groups (each with 36.8%), followed by participants from the 30-35 age range (26.3%), the group featured both youth with businesses in the early stages of development along with others with more established ventures, all of whom were motivated by the desire to gain access to international markets. The participants were primarily entrepreneurs, managing or involved in family or personal initiatives. Many were second or third generation farmers, specializing in fields as diverse as specialty coffee, cocoa, and its by-products, tropical fruit, livestock, and dairy production, value-added products, agro-tourism, artisanal chorizo sausages, and agrifood services, among others.

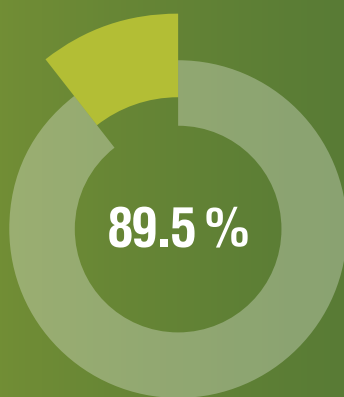
Some of the most noteworthy proposals involved processing and value addition, cassava and plantain flours, pinol, chocolates, infusions, and export crops – a clear indication that the participants were aiming to differentiate their products and to capitalize on the global demand for natural, organic, and certified products. Concerns regarding environmental sustainability, territorial identity and community involvement coincided with the desire to compete in regional and global markets.

In terms of training, most had pursued relevant technical or university studies: agroindustrial engineering, agronomy, agroexportation, food technology, chemical/industrial engineering, and international trade with a focus on agroindustry. Only one third of the group had received previous training in international trade, thus reflecting current gaps in specialized knowledge.

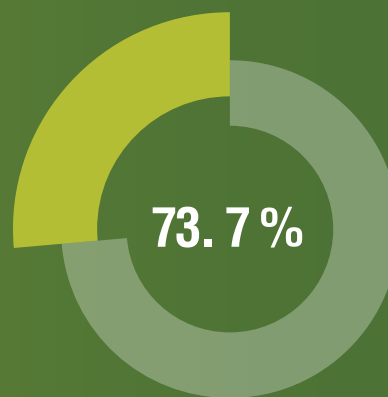




**Interest in
exporting**



**Lack of regulatory
knowledge**



**Lack of technical
knowledge**



The survey results demonstrate both potential and challenges. Indeed, 94.7 % of the participants expressed an interest in exporting (several of them had already begun concrete processes). Yet, 89.5% and 73.7% of the group indicated that legal and technical matters, respectively, were major obstacles. Almost everyone had an interest in training regarding regulations, procedures, and international marketing, as well as about facilities for access to networks, specialized consultancy services, and funding.

The business initiatives of the participants appeared to offer significant value addition in terms of social and rural impact: many of the youth are instrumental in generational information exchange, lead collaborative processes, generate employment in their communities, and advocate for formalization and entry into new markets. However, the perception is that the available opportunities are still limited. Only one in four of the participants believed that there was a clear path to export and most of them identified the lack of networks, institutional support, and access to production resources as challenges to be resolved.

Finally, most of them valued the in-person or hybrid training, seeking opportunities for validation and the development of networks of trust. They also asked that the workshops and initiatives to support access to international markets be continued.

4.2. COLOMBIA

Seventeen people attended the workshop in Colombia, eleven women and six men from various regions in the country, thus reflecting the rural and production diversity of the country's agrifood systems. The initial form was completed by nineteen individuals, representing various age groups: three were between 18 and 24 years of age, six between 25 and 29 years, and ten between 30 and 35 years.



Most had professional training, with 52.9% having earned university degrees in areas such as animal husbandry (including specializations in animal nutrition), agricultural engineering, public accounting, chemical engineering, business administration, and agroecological engineering. At present, 17.6% of the group are pursuing higher education in agroindustrial business administration, industrial engineering, and agricultural engineering. Moreover, an additional 17.6% have technical or technological training in administrative management and agricultural production, with 11.8% possessing only a high school diploma. This data indicates that most of the participants had mid-level or higher education linked to the agriculture and agroindustrial sectors.

The youth that took part in AgroJoven play fundamental roles in their families, communities, and businesses, whether as managers, legal representatives, producers, and heads of key areas, such as quality control, finance, soil fertility, and marketing. They are also local leaders, serving as community facilitators, the driving force behind collective initiatives,

advocates for sustainability, and as the ones that maintain essential family dynamics. Thus, their businesses not only generate income, but play a decisive role in territorial development and agrifood system transformation.

In terms of economic activity, 52.6% of the youth are involved in agricultural production, 15.8% in livestock production, another 15.8% in agrifood services, 10.5% in agroindustry, and 5.3% in marketing and distribution. This diversity attests to the multiple links of the agrifood chain to which young Colombians contribute with their work, innovativeness, and adaptive capacity.

Although 89.5% of the participants displayed a keen interest in exporting their products, a significant number of them were uncertain of how to begin the internationalization process. In fact, 52.6% reported that they had only basic knowledge of international trade, 5.3% were at an intermediate knowledge level, and 42.1% indicated that they had no knowledge about this area. As such, the priority areas that they identified were the need to strengthen capacities in existing



trade networks (17 out of the 19 applicants voted for this training), receive specialized technical advice (14 persons), access information on international markets (13 persons), and participate in training sessions focusing on exporting and business management for external markets. One person indicated the need for seed capital to pay for the certificates required to export.

Overall, the youth felt that export prospects were favorable, with only 5.3% believing that no opportunities were available to them. Nonetheless, there were significant differences. Specifically, 36.8% felt that there were only a few opportunities, 21.1% were able to identify some, and another 36.8% believed that there were many opportunities. Yet, sixteen of the original nineteen stated that they were unfamiliar with the international regulations and requirements, and fifteen indicated that they did not possess the technical knowledge needed to export. Consequently, they requested training in regulatory aspects, international marketing, negotiation strategies, use of digital platforms, ecommerce, financial management, and access to funding mechanisms.



**He believes
there are export
opportunities**

Finally, most of the participating youth welcomed the in-person or hybrid training exercises, as a means of strengthening their knowledge in international trade, and stressed that these forums facilitate more comprehensive, practical training, adapted to the real needs of rural businesses.

4.3. MEXICO

The workshop in Mexico was attended by twenty-one young people (10 women and 11 men) from different states, although twenty-four applicants completed the initial form. The survey reflected the territorial and production diversity of the national agrifood sector and provided a representative sample of the rural youth with export potential. The age range was as follows: ten were between the ages of 30 and 35 years (41.7%), eight between 25 and 29 years (33.3%), and six between 18 and 24 years (25%).



In terms of training, the respondents came from a wide variety of academic backgrounds, with most having completed technical and professional training in the agrifood sector. Yet, their knowledge of international trade was limited: sixteen (66.7%) had basic knowledge of the field; six (25.0%) had no previous knowledge in this area; only two (8.3%) were at the intermediary level; and none of them had advanced knowledge of this area. Thus, 91.7% of the group reflected the considerable gap in specialized training, thus confirming the importance of AgroJoven in satisfying a genuine demand for technical training. Moreover, practically all the participants had never attended structured training programs on international trade, except for one individual who had completed a basic course in a local institution. This training deficit highlighted not only the limited prospects for training at the time but also made it clear that this was a strategic opportunity for IICA to consolidate its position as an expert in this field.

The motivation and thirst for knowledge were notably high. Seventeen applicants (70.8%) expressed their approval of the varied training modalities and seven (29.2%) indicated a preference for in-person workshops. This demonstrates their openness to integrated approaches, as well as their support for direct knowledge exchange, networking, and experiential learning. They were practically unanimous in their overall assessment of the training. Twenty individuals (83.3%) considered it to be extremely useful, four (16.7%) felt it was somewhat useful, and none of them rated it negatively. It was therefore evident that the group had a proactive approach to capacity development, recognizing training as a key tool in overcoming export barriers.

As far as specific training needs were concerned, the survey participants were clear and consistent in identifying the challenges they faced: twenty-three pinpointed export procedures and transactions as a priority (95.8%); seventeen emphasized international rules and regulations, as well as access to funding (70.8%); fifteen mentioned international marketing and market access (62.5%); twelve highlighted negotiation strategies and soft skills (50%); and seven focused on the use of digital platforms and electronic trade (29.2%). This hierarchy demonstrates that the Mexican youngsters recognized the need to master regulatory and operational aspects related to the exporting process, as well as the technical skills and strategies that will facilitate access to global markets.

RESULTS AND PRINCIPAL FINDINGS, BY COUNTRY

5



This section presents the main results and findings of the AgroJoven workshops in Honduras, Colombia, and Mexico, based on an analysis of participatory dynamics, questions, comments, and experiences shared by the participating youth. In each country, the workshops enabled the organizers to identify not only knowledge gaps in international trade, negotiation skills, business structures, digitalization, and sustainability, but also to recognize the existing capacities and young people's strong potential to be agrifood system leaders. The findings reveal structural shortcomings, such as the need to access specialized training, strategic contacts, institutional networks, and digital tools, as well as opportunities for associative arrangements, peer-to-peer learning, and the development of youth-oriented agendas that reflect key trends, such as trade digitalization, sustainability, fair trade, and agrifood system governance.

5.1. PRINCIPAL FINDINGS OF THE WORKSHOP



5.1.1. HONDURAS

The AgroJoven workshop in Honduras was attended by twenty rural youth entrepreneurs working in agrifood systems with export potential, representing various production subsectors: specialty coffee, value-added processed goods, livestock production, fresh produce, tropical fruit, and agrotourism. During two days of intensive training the course presented technical content on international trade, exportation of agrifood products, negotiation and business management skills, participation strategies, and skills development, while also emphasizing the importance of rural youth in these processes. The analysis of the dynamics, questions, comments, and experiences shared during the workshop facilitated the identification of relevant findings beyond the basic transfer of knowledge, pointing to structural needs, information gaps, and opportunities to strengthen rural youth exporters in Honduras.

The main results of the workshop are outlined below, organized according to topic and based on direct evidence gathered during the sessions:

a. Associative organizations: recognition of their importance, but unfamiliarity with the methodology needed to establish them

One of the most significant findings of the workshop was that the participants were cognizant of the fact that associative organizations are a strategic mechanism to strengthen production, trade, and negotiation capacities. However, despite this recognition, they lacked the knowledge to take effective action, as they were unaware of the concrete steps, methodologies and institutional pathways needed to create and formalize these associations, cooperatives, or networks.

During the first day of the workshop, the recurring questions raised were: “What steps would we take to form an association, like the ladies in the women’s association, and what would you recommend?” This query proved that despite the interest in establishing associative organizations, the means of operationalizing the concept continued to be a gray area. Traditionally, public policies and training programs stress the need to forge networks and

strengthen partnerships but devote less attention to practical tools and actions needed to begin and sustain successful associative processes.

This finding demonstrates the importance of situated knowledge and peer-to-peer learning. In response to questions on how to establish associations, the participants themselves were able to offer guidance to their colleagues based on previous experience. They recommended “associations and institutions such as Semprende and the Secretariat of Agriculture and Livestock that offer advice, mentorship, and training on how to form associations, rural savings and loan cooperatives, livestock schools, cooperatives, etc.” This shows that situated knowledge, which is defined as knowledge emanating from direct experience and contact with local institutions, is an asset that can be transferred and multiplied in forums such as the AgroJoven workshop.

b. The importance of situated knowledge and the multiplier effect of peer-to-peer learning

The workshop created an opportunity for horizontal information exchange, enabling young people at different stages of the exporting process—ranging from those in the early stages to those that had already exported products—to share experiences, doubts, and solutions. This enhanced situated knowledge: expertise stemming from concrete experience, rural areas themselves, and real production and trade conditions.

Those with more extensive experience in exporting were able to serve as experts and knowledge facilitators for their peers, by responding to questions on institutional access, differentiation strategies and brand management. For example, one of the experiences shared was of a young company established by eight individuals, between 20 to 25 years of age, who were all children of coffee farmers. The company had already exported its

first batch of specialty coffee to the United States. According to the testimonials of these entrepreneurs, “Associative organizations are important, and more so the pursuit of shared goals and results. Together, the eight producers cultivate 5,000 *quintales* of top-quality coffee.” The youth also expressed their desire to inspire others, recognizing that “agriculture is a challenging sector for young people.”

Therefore, training should not be structured solely as a unidirectional process (experts → youth), but as a platform for dialogue, where peer-to-peer sharing of experiences strengthens capacities, creates confidence, reduces information asymmetries and builds social capital. Situated knowledge is particularly valuable, because it adapts to specific contexts and overcomes cultural or institutional barriers that can make it more difficult to appropriate knowledge that is more abstract or standardized.

c. Gaps in access to knowledge on negotiation, business creation and brand positioning

At the end of the first day of the workshop the participants were asked: What was the most interesting thing that you heard today?” An analysis of the responses revealed that there was keen interest in the technical aspects of trade: the ABCs of exporting, types of tariffs, tariff codes, rules of origin, free trade agreements, stages of the export process, and the role of distributors. These responses and the interest shown in the topic and the youth focus of the workshop indicate that prior to this time, young, rural Hondurans had limited opportunities for training on trade-related matters, particularly regarding exportation, and had been more exposed to training focusing on production (cultivation techniques, livestock management, agroindustry).

This was clear from the comments by the participants. For example, one person noted that, “Successfully positioning my product on the international market will depend on the success of my negotiations.”

This comment shows that the participants understood that export success does not depend solely on the quality of the product, but on one’s ability to negotiate favorable conditions, build solid trade relations, and position differentiated brands in competitive markets.”

Another participant remarked: “You need a well-structured business in order to gain a foothold in the international market.” The statement demonstrates an awareness of the need for formalization, professionalization, and organizational structuring as key requirements to access international markets. Yet, this awareness is not always backed by practical knowledge on managing legal, fiscal, logistical, and financial aspects, building an export-oriented business, and developing marketing strategies that equip businesses with differing realities and limited resources to compete against companies from countries that are more developed in the export market.

d. The need for innovation in value addition and trade differentiation strategies

The workshop revealed that young Honduras are aware of the importance of adding value to their products to improve their competitiveness and profitability. One participant expressed a preference in generating “more value addition rather than volume”, which reflects a strategic understanding of the need to transition from quantity-oriented production models to models focusing on quality, differentiation, and niche products.

One example that illustrates this approach was shared by a young owner of a coffee business: “We provide facilities for our clients. Having identified the need for a coffee roaster, we have installed one close to where the farmers are located. We are the only ones offering door-to-door

transportation, as well as various types of packaging and other measures that offer added value to clients.” This testimonial demonstrates a capacity for innovation, adaptability to clients’ needs, and the provision of differentiated services that, rather than simply selling products, seek to develop integrated and market-oriented value chains.

On the other hand, the initiative also identified structural challenges associated with brand creation and positioning in international markets, where competition with companies from other countries creates challenges in terms of resources, technology, access to market information, and marketing capacity.

e. Challenges related to seasonal agriculture and the importance of predictive and management tools

One of the most relevant findings from the perspective of export management was the concern regarding the disconnect between agricultural production cycles and negotiation and exportation times. One participant noted: “I negotiate with the client, based on the amount of coffee required. However, I have a specific harvesting time, and whereas negotiations may be in October, for example, I would only begin exporting in April-March. No one stores their coffee and there are specific months for exporting.”

This comment reflects the structural conflict between the time-based and seasonal nature of agriculture and the expectations and demands of international markets. This disparity creates uncertainty, complicates



commercial planning, and limits the young entrepreneurs' ability to negotiate future contracts or commit to delivering products at specific times, as they may not always have all the necessary information.

Based on this recognition, digital tools and other mechanisms were incorporated into the initiative to assist in managing seasonal considerations. Digital technologies, such as market information systems and digital platforms, can assist in improving efficiency, reducing risks and information asymmetries, and strengthening the negotiation capacities of young exporters.

f. Priority needs – strategic contacts and access to institutional networks

When the participants were asked about their expectations for the second day of the workshop, their priority needs were clear. Nine of the fifteen selected “key contacts” as their primary expectation, whereas six chose “a game-changing idea”. This preference demonstrates that, beyond technical knowledge, young people value access to networks, the development of social capital, and the ability to connect with strategic stakeholders that can facilitate insertion into international markets.

This need is consistent with previous findings with respect to associative organizations and situated knowledge. The participants recognized that success in exporting depends not only on what they know, but on their connections.

Access to strategic contacts can open doors to trade opportunities, facilitate access to financing, provide specialized technical advice, and reduce the transaction costs involved in searching for information and trade partners.





5.1.2. COLOMBIA

The AgroJoven workshop in Colombia was attended by a diverse group of rural youth from multiple territories who are engaged in agrifood production activities with export potential. During two days of training, the young people took part in technical sessions on international trade, the role and participation of youth in international trade, export processes, an analysis of the macroeconomic context, negotiation skills, and leadership, as well as on participatory dynamics, with a view to enhancing their strategic perspective and capacity for advocacy.

The sharing of experiences, doubts, and reflections was instrumental in identifying common patterns, structural barriers, and specific opportunities to strengthen the role of rural Colombian youth in international agrifood trade.

The principal findings of the workshop, organized according to themes, and based on evidence gathered during the sessions, are outlined below:

a. Access to knowledge

The young Colombians, not unlike the youth in Honduras and Mexico, placed great value on accessing specialized knowledge, particularly in relation to the macroeconomic context surrounding exporting, thus demonstrating a sustained interest in gaining a thorough understanding of the factors that affect the competitiveness of their businesses. The group showed a keen interest in the sessions on export procedures, tariffs, business agreements, and opportunities derived from these instruments, which shows that technical training continues to be a critical factor in accessing international value chains.

A positive element emphasized by the participating youth was the presence of government representatives, to address their queries and to align the theory provided with the reality in rural Colombia, thus enabling them to deepen their knowledge and grasp key elements to embark on export processes.

Moreover, the peer-to-peer learning and horizontal exchange of information allowed the participants to share experiences, challenges, and situated knowledge on trade, agrifood production, and differentiation strategies. This interaction enhanced the appropriation of the content and built a support community that the participants said was indispensable in advancing export processes in keeping with their various territorial realities.

It also demonstrated the importance of working in networks and accessing institutions, information platforms, certification mechanisms, and digital tools that can assist in overcoming barriers, such as limited market information or the complexity or challenges involved in undertaking export procedures.

b. International trade agreements and their relevance for youth in Colombia

An analysis of development policies, international treaties, competitiveness, direct foreign investment, and sustainability enabled the youth to understand how structural factors in the country affect their ability to access international markets. The exercise enhanced their strategic outlook and understanding of the role that young people can play in an agrifood sector, which, as the Institute continues to maintain in its messages, has the

capacity to position the country in various markets through innovation, quality, and sustainability.

Recurring questions during the sessions demonstrated participants' interest in understanding how to access preferential markets, what requirements are needed to satisfy quality standards, and how to anticipate the effects of seasonal productivity on trade negotiation times.

c. Strengthening of management, negotiation, and leadership skills

The young participants discussed how to position their products, establish sustainable trade relationships, and structure export-oriented business processes, emphasizing the need for both a high-quality product and solid business capacities. They also agreed that it was in their collective interest to gain an understanding of these strategic elements, as an essential step in transitioning from local production to competitive business models for international markets.





5.1.3. MEXICO

The young participants worked in diverse production sectors in the country, such as specialty coffee, processed value-added food, livestock production, the fresh and tropical fruit sectors, and agrotourism. The training covered technical issues related to international trade, exporting of agrifood products, and the development of negotiation and business management skills, among others.

An analysis of the dynamics, interventions, and shared experiences provided lessons and findings, but other than transmitting knowledge also revealed structural gaps, shortcomings in information, and strategic areas of opportunity to support the export activities of rural youth in Mexico.

The principal findings of the workshop, organized according to themes, and based on evidence gathered directly during the sessions, are outlined below:

a. Technical training

The young people repeatedly expressed an interest in training on specialized topics related to international trade and exportation. In short, they felt that “if you want to do something you must gain an in-depth understanding of the processes

required by the activity.” This perspective demonstrates their awareness that specialized technical knowledge is an effective means of mitigating the structural gaps and challenges that they face as young agrifood entrepreneurs. Along the same lines, the demand for training is even greater, given the perception that exporting is a highly technical and complex undertaking, which can only be mastered by acquiring specific skills. Thus, various priority areas for training were identified, including customs procedures, international regulatory frameworks, good trade practices, financing strategies, and the use of digital tools for international trade.

Moreover, the workshops created an opportunity for horizontal exchanges that were highly valued by the



participants, who considered them to be an excellent chance to meet other young people in similar situations and to learn from their experiences. This peer-to-peer learning proved itself to be a training component that complemented the formal technical knowledge, thus facilitating the sharing of strategies, identification of creative solutions, and development of a sectoral support network.

b. Assessment of peer-to-peer learning and development of networks

Another key finding was the importance that the young people placed on sharing the knowledge gained with their respective organizations, communities, and other interested stakeholders in their circles. This view demonstrates an understanding of knowledge as a common good and a

perception of social responsibility to their home communities. This willingness to multiply knowledge is strategically relevant to the objectives of AgroJoven, as it extends the impact of the training beyond the direct participants and contributes to building capacities at the territorial level.

c. Specific interests and contextualized technical demands

The workshops enabled specific interests to be identified, reflecting the unique features of each national context. In Mexico, there was a particular interest in customs-related issues, which prompted the IICA Delegation in that country to invite two specialists to discuss that topic. This demand was in response to the specific trade environment in Mexico, especially considering its participation in strategic trade agreements such as the Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Canada, which has generated specific opportunities, but also imposed specialized technical requirements.

The participants expressed practical concerns, such as: “What are the processes required to export?,” “Where do I begin if I have no experience?,” “How can I access information on export processes?,” and “How can I link up with other entrepreneurs and support networks?” The questions demonstrate participants initial level of knowledge of international trade, as well as the concrete demand for practical guidance and technical support.





5.2. PRIORITY AREAS

During the second day of the workshop a participatory exercise was undertaken in all three countries, aimed at identifying and prioritizing emerging trends in international agrifood trade, from the perspective of rural youth. The participants organized themselves into three working groups, each one focusing on analyzing specific issues that they considered to be a priority for the development of their businesses and the transformation of the agrifood sector. A two-part methodology was used. First, through the use of a mentimeter, the young people developed a prioritized list of the main trends. Second, they analyzed these trends as a group, by developing participatory matrices that organized the expected results and concrete actions into two time horizons: short- and medium-term. The groups then identified specific results, according to topic and time period, while also defining concrete actions to achieve these results.



5.2.1. HONDURAS

The information from the four groups provided a coherent picture of how rural Honduran youth perceive their priorities and needs in relation to two priority trends affecting the agrifood sector: digitalization of international trade and sustainability and trade. A summary of the findings, in accordance with the prioritized trends, is shown below:

a. Digitalization of international trade

The young participants understood that digitalization is essential to increasing the visibility of their businesses, accessing new markets and establishing commercial and financial ties beyond their communities. Yet, at the same time they admitted to having limited knowledge on how to achieve this. While recognizing the potential of tools such as digital marketing, ecommerce, or even other digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, they still require specific training to understand how these tools function, the steps needed to implement them and the institutions that can support these processes. Thus, this trend was prioritized and most of the proposals sought to bridge the gaps in digital capacity, access to market information, youth organization, and linkages with public and private stakeholders.

Prioritized short-term actions

The participants defined their short-term priority as the organization of intensive training processes, adapted to their production reality. First, they proposed training sessions on access to and use of technologies and digital tools, including digital marketing and ecommerce courses focused on the agrifood sectors, as well as training on the use of social media, content design, and the development of digital tools, such as ecommerce platforms. These actions aim to equip the participants to increase their visibility and the international recognition of their businesses, as well as to assist them to identify potential markets through available databases, platforms of digital business roundtables, and other online forums.

Second, they stressed the need to build their capacity to participate in virtual business forums, both national and international. Thus, they felt that receiving training on the objectives, structure, and opportunities of these roundtables would be critical, as well as knowledge of the basic requirements for exporting to specific markets, for example to the United States, Canada, or the European Union. This includes the creation of multi-use platforms that compile information on young beneficiaries, products, and relevant contacts, based on data from institutions such as IICA.

Another short-term area of focus identified was the development of financial education related to trade digitalization. The youth proposed training on financial education to manage their businesses, minimum requirements to access loans, and an understanding of available financial

mechanisms. Along with this aspect, they pinpointed the organization of financial forums specifically targeting young entrepreneurs in the agrifood sector, in a bid to facilitate their access to investment and credit opportunities.

Lastly, they identified a series of actions aimed at conducting needs assessments in relation to digital trade, organizing a series of webinars on agricultural digitalization, and developing specific courses on artificial intelligence applied to the agrifood value chain. These activities would serve as initial steps in helping youth understand the potential of emerging technologies and enabling them to gradually apply these technologies in their business undertakings or areas of influence.

Prioritized medium-term actions

The proposed medium-term actions are aimed at strengthening structures and systems that would allow for supporting and scaling up the digitalization of youth-led agrifood trade. An initial objective would be to create and strengthen youth networks related to the digitalization of international trade, driving coordination between young entrepreneurs from different regions of Honduras. To establish these networks, it would be necessary to identify interested persons, define internal rules and regulations, and establish partnerships with institutions that offer recognition, funding, and technical support.

The youth also considered it necessary to develop more advanced skills in digital technologies applied to production and logistics, such as precision agriculture,

the use of drones, functional software for the agriculture sector, and irrigation and pest control systems. They also prioritized the need to understand and implement digital traceability systems based on technologies such as blockchain, which enable final customers to transparently verify the added value of the exported product (for instance, products grown by rural youth or organic or “gluten-free” certifications).

Another medium-term line of action they identified was the establishment of direct trade linkages with strategic partners through virtual business roundtables geared towards specific products (coffee, cocoa, plantain, honey, citrus fruits, spices, and dairy products, among others) and based on the profile and size of

participating businesses. The purpose of these activities would be to assist youth participating in training opportunities in achieving more stable access to marketing and export chains.

Lastly, participants highlighted the importance of “agents of change” programs aimed at strengthening entrepreneurial and logistical skills, the development of specific curricula in digital trade, and the establishment of partnerships with academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies. These programs would represent a key step in enabling youth not only to adopt digital tools, but also to strengthen their leadership in driving the modernization of Honduran agrifood trade.

b. Sustainability and trade

A second priority area identified by the participants was sustainability in relation to trade, which reflects their direct connection to the land, agricultural production, and the natural resources on which they depend for their livelihoods. The youth view sustainability not only as an external market requirement, but also as a determining factor for the continuity of their communities and future generations. At the same time, they recognize that, more and more, markets are demanding compliance with environmental standards, traceability, certifications, and sustainable practices. Thus, this issue is a key component of their international market entry strategy.

Prioritized short-term actions

A short-term priority for the young participants is gaining access to specialized training to better understand and meet the sustainability requirements of target markets. In this regard, they considered that they would benefit from intensive courses on the European Union Regulation on Deforestation-Free Products (EUDR), as well as training events on European trade regulations related to sustainability, traceability, and georeferencing. This training should be complemented by practical manuals geared towards the production sector that clearly explain the requirements, procedures, and measures to be considered starting from the production phase.

Second, the participants proposed implementing specific training programs to access organic and sustainability certifications (including those related to carbon neutrality, fair trade, and “zero deforestation,” among others). They underscored the crucial need for experts who can support and streamline processes, as well as for support packages that provide up-to-date information on how to introduce organic products into markets, such as those of the European Union, the United States, or Canada, detailing existing barriers and limitations.

The working groups also underscored the importance of building capacities in sustainable production throughout the value chain (production, post-harvest, processing, and consumption). To that end, they proposed actions such as virtual and in-person courses on sustainable agriculture, safety and food security; awareness-raising campaigns to encourage healthier consumption habits; and training in the adequate use of packaging that can better preserve products and highlight their added value. This, in turn, would allow for improving product presentation (packaging, labeling, and product descriptions), a key element to compete in demanding markets.

They also proposed training activities on new trends in sustainable trade, including the circular economy; market research for organic and local products; and the identification of specific niche markets (e.g., quail eggs, gluten-free flours, and fish-based sausages). Within this context, they considered it important to develop information packages that systematize the requirements of target markets and provide practical guidance on consumer segmentation and marketing channels.

Prioritized medium-term actions

The youth in attendance considered that, in the medium term, it would be advantageous to develop instruments and structures that could consolidate sustainability as a competitive advantage in international trade. This type of tool would allow for demonstrating compliance with environmental and social requirements throughout the production chain, which would facilitate entry into markets with high standards.

They also proposed implementing measurement and certification processes related to emission reduction and decarbonization, through emission sampling, analysis of NAMA sectors, CO₂ processes and associated certifications. The goal would be for young entrepreneurs to make a concrete contribution to reducing the environmental footprint and to be able to access certifications that add value to their products in the global market.

Another medium-term line of action they proposed was promoting sustainable agricultural production systems with an agroforestry and circular economy approach, which would facilitate the transition from monocultures towards more resilient and diversified practices. To that end, they proposed carrying out specific training sessions that could guide producers in designing and implementing these practices, in keeping with the requirements of international sustainability markets.

Lastly, they considered that, with the right support, rural youth would be able to qualify for fair trade, zero deforestation, and other sustainability certifications, thereby strengthening their role in responsible

value chains. To that end, it would be necessary to overcome challenges identified by the youth themselves, such as access to technology, the development of finished products, intellectual property, and fair trade, which require ongoing support, clear regulatory frameworks, and tailored opportunities for rural youth.

Thus, the proposals made by the working groups outline a concrete agenda: a) with respect to digitalization, advancing from training in digital tools towards the establishment of youth networks, traceability systems, and direct trade

linkages; and b) with respect to sustainability and trade, building on their understanding of regulations and certifications to develop traceability platforms, sustainable production practices, and international recognition of the agrifood products of Honduran youth.





5.2.2. COLOMBIA

During the second day of the workshop held in Colombia, rural youth identified two key priority areas for strengthening their business undertakings and participating in international agrifood trade: the digitalization of international trade and the relationship between trade and sustainability. These topics reflect both their aspirations with respect to international market access and the need to incorporate responsible practices and traditional knowledge into production and trade processes.

The information generated by the four working groups allowed for identifying expected results and concrete short and medium-term actions, reflecting a strategic vision aimed at building capacities and strengthening structures that would enable youth to increase their participation in international markets.

a. Digitalization of international trade

The Colombian youth cited the digitalization of international trade as an indispensable condition to improve the visibility of their business undertakings, expand their access to strategic information, and improve their capacity to enter international markets. They prioritized this topic because it would enable them to connect production processes to export opportunities, open more efficient marketing channels, and foster business management based on data and emerging technological tools.

Prioritized short-term actions

In the short term, the participants emphasized the importance of improving knowledge and the effective use of

digital tools geared towards trade. They considered it crucial to participate in seminars and workshops that explain how marketing platforms for the agrifood sector work and what digital marketing strategies can help improve product visibility. They also underscored the need to raise awareness on the use of digital platforms, including the creation of content, virtual catalogues, and tools that would enable them to adequately present their product offerings to potential buyers. The groups considered it a priority to access training programs that facilitate the management of strategic information on international markets, export regulations, and global trade trends.

Moreover, they highlighted the importance of promoting associative mechanisms

that foster market access by facilitating coordination among young producers, strengthening collaborative networks, and building collective capacities to negotiate more favorable conditions. Associative undertakings were recognized as a key means for achieving a more competitive supply, optimizing costs, and expanding commercial reach both at the local and international levels.

Lastly, the participants underscored the need to foster the development of public policies that support these processes, foster digitalization in the agriculture sector, and generate enabling conditions for youth participation in markets. In this regard, they highlighted the need for regulatory frameworks and institutional programs that facilitate technology access, ongoing training, and the consolidation of ecosystems that support rural entrepreneurship. These initial actions would enable youth not only to understand the potential of digitalization but also the associated requirements and opportunities.

Prioritized medium-term actions

In the medium term, the participants proposed establishing more robust structures to better support and scale up digitalization efforts. One of their main proposals was to strengthen support for the digital structuring of businesses, incorporating digitalization into areas such as marketing, logistics, inventory management, and technological innovation. They also identified the need to develop public policies that support youth digitalization by creating institutional frameworks that facilitate technology adoption in the agrifood sector. The groups underscored the importance of creating sector-specific information systems that provide real-time production, technology, and commercial data, thereby facilitating more informed and efficient decision-making. They also called for ongoing training in advanced tools such as data analysis and process automation. Through these actions, Colombian youth seek to transition from basic digital literacy to a more integrated ecosystem that enhances their competitiveness in international markets.

b. Trade and sustainability

In the case of Colombia, the second topic prioritized by participants was coordination between trade and sustainability. The rural youth identified this relationship as a fundamental pillar to guarantee the sustainability of their business undertakings, strengthen their competitiveness in demanding markets, and foster production practices that incorporate environmental responsibility, value-adding in products, and the incorporation of ancestral knowledge. They noted that sustainability is not only an external requirement, but also an opportunity to develop differentiated products, access specialized niche markets, and guarantee the continuity of natural resources on which they depend for their livelihoods.

Prioritized short-term actions

In the short term, participants highlighted the immediate need for technical guidance that would enable them to understand and meet the environmental and social requirements associated with sustainable trade. They pointed out the critical need to build capacities in financing, organic certification, sustainability trends, carbon footprints, labeling requirements, and international regulations—all of which are indispensable for accessing specialized markets. They also emphasized the importance of developing innovative, value-added products to compete in international markets. Moreover, they expressed their interest in participating in awareness-raising initiatives complemented by campaigns and workshops that address the issues of environmental responsibility, sustainable production, and adequate resource management. They also considered it necessary to receive training in this initial phase on emerging trends related to sustainability, finance, and information management, to improve product presentation and marketing.

Prioritized medium-term actions

The participants proposed a medium-term agenda aimed at establishing sustainability as a competitive advantage in international trade. They emphasized the

importance of strengthening knowledge exchanges with young people from other countries through the cooperative sector or trade networks, particularly on issues related to niche markets, negotiation, and sustainable trade. They also pointed out the need for more in-depth knowledge of environmental and social regulations related to exports, in order to facilitate compliance with international standards. The development of differentiating elements, such as brands and specialized labeling, was identified as a key strategy for positioning products with greater added value. They also emphasized the importance of protecting intellectual property associated with traditional products and knowledge through specific training processes.

Lastly, they highlighted the need to comprehensively implement sustainable practices throughout the entire value chain and to access information on funding sources geared toward business undertakings that incorporate environmental and social criteria.

Through the aforementioned actions, Colombian youth seek to consolidate responsible, innovative, and competitive production and commercial models on the international stage. They also recommended that methodological guides be developed so that they could easily access information and adapt it to their realities.



5.2.3. MEXICO

The exercise revealed three main areas of interest for participants: sustainability and trade, fair trade, and trade digitalization. The first two were mentioned by three of the working groups, while digitalization was specifically highlighted by one of the groups, and mentioned by all others as an element that would facilitate various processes.

a. Sustainability and trade

Sustainability was prioritized as the main aspect that must guide the transformation of the agrifood sector towards models that minimize the carbon footprint and ensure that international exchanges meet current needs without compromising opportunities for future generations.

A key challenge that the participating youth identified was overcoming difficulties in creating reliable indicators that allow for measuring and regulating the environmental impact of production. They raised questions regarding how to assign economic value to elements such as healthy soil or water availability, as well as how to strike a balance between the ecological, sociocultural, political, and economic dimensions of sustainability. They also identified current producers' resistance to eliminate the use of chemical inputs; pressure from consumers, who are becoming increasingly demanding in international markets, which, in turn, are enforcing stricter environmental standards; and regulatory challenges, particularly the lack of standardized phytosanitary check points between regions.

They also identified opportunities, including the use of agroecological tools that are already available, such as bioinsecticides; technical-productive training for younger generations, who are more open to sustainable models; the possibility to advocate for trade policies that establish stricter regulations; and the transformative potential of long-term changes in consumption patterns. They also recognized the strategic importance of preserving agrobiodiversity through the establishment of community seed banks.

Prioritized short-term actions

The participants proposed implementing agroecological tools through the use of bioinsecticides and promoting technical-productive training for younger generations. They identified the need for young producers to receive training on obtaining available certifications and seals, through technical advisory services, the development of a comprehensive portfolio of accessible seals, and support in the

establishment of producer networks that can reduce costs and facilitate access to certifications. They proposed developing sustainability indicators by creating economic and environmental metrics to measure impacts and establishing more environmental certifications. They also pointed out the importance of strengthening capacities to manage registration and labeling processes, and the use of digital tools, through coordination with entities such

as the National Institute of Industrial Property (INPI). Lastly, they prioritized the protection of native seeds through community seed banks that guarantee the preservation, exchange, and sustainable use of local varieties. They also considered it necessary to promote technical and business training programs in sustainable farming, technological innovation, and agribusiness management to contribute to intergenerational succession.



Prioritized medium-term actions

The youth considered it necessary to advocate for the development of trade policies that establish stricter regulations, in a bid to strike a sustainable balance between economic, sociocultural, political, and environmental aspects. They proposed standardizing environmental regulations at the global level, particularly phytosanitary controls, and tightening policies that regulate environmental

impact. They identified the need for young producers to incorporate sustainability criteria into marketing by identifying responsible suppliers and designing platforms that make it easier for customers to learn about the product offerings of sustainable suppliers. They also proposed building capacities in sustainable post-harvest practices and the circular economy through training on the use of inputs that reduce waste and specialized courses on the circular economy.

b. Fair trade

Fair trade was cited as a trend that will require strengthening technical and organizational capacities, as well as simplifying institutional processes and reducing intermediation. The participants shared their perspectives regarding its current implementation, raising key questions about the authenticity of fair trade practices in the current context.

They described the concept of fair trade as controversial, noting that it is often talked about yet not truly enforced. In this regard, they considered the persistence of low and volatile prices to be a key challenge, given its impact on small-scale farmers, while large companies maintain stable margins. They highlighted the issue of trade informality and unfair competition between large and small-scale producers, as well as the practice of reserving the best products for export under fair trade certifications, while local markets receive lower-quality products. They also recognized the need to strengthen young producer organizations and associative

undertakings that would enable them to improve their marketing and market access conditions.

Among the opportunities they identified were strengthening self-consumption as a key pillar; fostering peoples' well-being; creating stronger producer organizations that function as associations capable of negotiating better terms; harnessing the potential of locally sourced products that can be certified and adequately valued; and driving the decentralization of distribution chains to foster more direct linkages between producers and consumers. They also discussed the establishment of robust government policies to support youth training processes by providing partial funding.

Prioritized short-term actions

They proposed providing young producers with training in national and international export regulations and market access

mechanisms, as well as developing a joint position within the sector to maintain regulations and advance towards equal opportunities. They identified the need to strengthen capacities in fair trade principles and practices, through learning processes and exchanges with other producers and experienced companies. They proposed strengthening producer organizations by creating more robust associative structures and promoting training opportunities that could be partially funded by the government (50% government, 50% youth). They underscored the importance of creating sector-specific export guides detailing requirements, permits, and regulations. To that end, they proposed hosting intersectoral roundtables with the participation of agencies such as IICA. They also proposed building capacities in certifications, particularly for organic products, and working with cooperatives that facilitate collective certification to make it more affordable. They also identified the need to promote the certification of and assign greater value to locally sourced products, as well as to encourage self-consumption.

Prioritized medium-term actions

The participants underscored the need to establish stable, fair prices by implementing policies that protect the agriculture sector and eliminate intermediaries to create shorter distribution chains. They proposed combating trade informality by strengthening the sector's technical-productive capabilities and generating fair production conditions for all producers. They identified the need for young producers to strengthen their capacity to formalize their business undertakings through workshops on the necessary steps and incentives to foster linkages between producers and companies. They suggested expanding capacities to access funding sources and subsidies that foster participation in fair trade initiatives. Lastly, they emphasized the importance of promoting public policies that facilitate export processes through intersectoral working groups comprised of the public sector, private sector and civil society. They also highlighted the need for continuous evaluation mechanisms to monitor the implementation of process simplification methodologies.

c. Digitalization and trade

The participants recognized digitalization as a transformative trend with the potential to revolutionize rural youth access to international markets, although considerable barriers must be overcome to achieve its effective implementation.

They cited the lack of information and training in digital topics as a key challenge, noting that while they may have “the basics to operate locally,” expanding into international markets is “virtually impossible.” They raised questions such

as how to reach end consumers in other countries and acknowledged a widespread inexperience with advanced technological tools. They also emphasized the fact that digitalization requires significant investment to achieve effective positioning and highlighted the need to withstand geopolitical tensions that can affect the stability of international digital markets.

However, the participants also recognized the transformative potential of digital technologies to optimize processes and reduce costs, especially when applied in the primary sector for small-scale production in rural areas. They highlighted the ability of digital tools to obtain specific information in real time, which facilitates more informed short- and long-term decision-making, and allows for making estimates and conducting data-based analyses. They considered that social media affords a key opportunity to generate data and information, create production records, and establish direct trade connections with international buyers.

Prioritized short-term actions

The participating youth proposed improving access to training in digitalization and new technologies, as well as raising awareness of available tools, which rural youth are often not familiar with. They identified the need to optimize production processes by implementing digital technologies to reduce costs in the primary sector. They also underscored the importance of training in digital marketing and in the use of technological tools to optimize crops.

Prioritized medium-term actions

The participants suggested facilitating international digital access by developing more tools to reach end buyers in other countries and creating systems with specific information to improve decision-making regarding production and trade. They proposed developing data analysis systems by implementing processes to generate information for analysis and decision-making, as well as creating digital production records to facilitate continuous monitoring and improvement.

In addition to the three aforementioned topics, the participants raised concerns across all areas of international agrifood trade:

With respect to inclusive trade, they highlighted the need for policies that make it easier for youth and new producers to enter export markets, and for broader access to information about the opportunities the private sector offers, so that such knowledge is not limited solely to government support. With respect to regional integration, they emphasized the importance of common standards and certifications that facilitate marketing processes, which would help young people export more easily between countries. In relation to governance and multilateralism, they hoped to exercise political influence to achieve fairer trade regulations, and, in turn, ensure that international agreements strike a balance between environmental, economic, and social interests. Lastly, regarding intellectual property, they expressed an interest in protecting local knowledge and products through certifications and collective trademarks that recognize and value biocultural heritage.

RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION SURVEYS COMPLETED BY PARTICIPANTS

6



With the aim of evaluating the training experience and measuring the main results of the process, a final evaluation survey was distributed to participants of the AgroJoven program in the three countries where the workshops were held: Honduras, Colombia, and Mexico. The survey gathered information regarding participants' overall perception of the workshop, their knowledge of international trade and agrifood exports before and after receiving training, the extent to which the proposed objectives were met, and their assessment of various methodological and training aspects, as well as open-ended comments and suggestions from participants.



6.1. HONDURAS

Participants in Honduras gave the highest possible rating (5 out of 5), which demonstrates that the workshop was successful and had a significant impact on young Hondurans in the agrifood sector. With respect to the evolution of their knowledge, the survey results reveal that the workshop successfully narrowed participants' learning gap. Participants began the program with limited knowledge of international trade and agrifood exports but completed it with considerably greater knowledge. This difference suggests much more than the acquisition of new information: it also means that the program contributed to enhancing participants' entrepreneurial, technical, and professional skills, in addition to their relational capital, which can drive new professional and business opportunities.

The survey respondents considered the quality of trainers to be a key differentiating factor. Comments such as “excellent presenters who are well-versed in each topic” reflect that technical expertise, in addition to the materials and content shared, created a highly valued learning environment that should be replicated in future initiatives. The learning material and references to national and regional experiences also received positive reviews, which suggests that adapting the global content to local realities was an effective teaching strategy.

The suggestions made by participants reflect a consistent demand for a more practical application of content. Requests for “case studies,” “group exercises,” or “negotiation role-playing” indicate that participating youth have developed an interest in applying the knowledge acquired in real-life scenarios and in acquiring knowledge through more participatory exercises. This demand affords an opportunity to design content that addresses these suggestions, such as presenting key information through case studies, group simulations, or more practical exercises.



The AgroJoven Honduras workshop has proven to be an effective learning program that has contributed to empowering youth in the agrifood sector, by providing them with concrete tools to access international markets. More than just a success metric, a 100% satisfaction rate confirms that the program successfully reached a key demographic within Honduras's agrifood sector. The demand for more in-depth practical training or further exploration of certain topics indicates the relevance of this subject matter for young entrepreneurs in the sector and their need for technical support to better position themselves in international markets.

Lastly, the difference between the level of knowledge participants reported having before the workshop and the level they achieved according to the evaluation survey demonstrates not just a solid grasp of the material, but also a significant confidence boost in those areas. This improvement in self-confidence and in the ability to address issues related to international trade, agrifood exports, and negotiation is a key achievement of the workshop. These individuals feel better prepared and are more interested in delving deeper into these topics and tackling new challenges in their own business undertakings, thereby opening themselves up to new opportunities in the agrifood sector and at the international level.





6.2. COLOMBIA

Participants expressed a high level of satisfaction with the workshop carried out in Colombia. A total of 77.8% of participants expressed a high level of satisfaction, assigning the highest possible rating (5), while 22.2% of participants gave a rating of 4, reflecting an overwhelmingly positive response to the learning experience.

With respect to their level of knowledge before the workshop, most of the participants reported having limited knowledge of international trade and agrifood exports: 88.8% rated their knowledge with a score of between 1 and 3, while just 11.1% rated it with a score of 5, corresponding to a high level of expertise in the subject matter. They gave a much higher rating to the knowledge they possessed after the training process: 50% of participants gave it a rating of 4, 27.8% a rating of 5, 16.7% a rating of 3, and just 5.6% a rating of 1.

With respect to the fulfillment of proposed objectives (generating technical knowledge of international trade, strengthening negotiation skills, and recognizing the importance of youth participation in the agrifood sector), most participants considered that they were largely met. However, a few participants considered that objectives were only partially or poorly met: three participants had this perception regarding the first two objectives, and two participants regarding the third objective.

The methodology employed also received a very positive rating. Among the highest-rated aspects were the clarity of the presentations, the use of audiovisual aids, interaction with the facilitators, the quality of the teaching materials, as well as the duration and organization of the workshop. The practical exercises, group dynamics, and references to national and regional experiences were rated as acceptable, good or excellent.

Lastly, the overall feedback gathered indicates that participants greatly valued the workshop. They emphasized the need to continue this type of training to delve deeper into the topics discussed, to extend the program's duration, and to establish specific youth forums aimed at strengthening their knowledge of trade and exports. They also recommended strengthening the methodological approach by incorporating more practical exercises, creating opportunities to learn more about the participating enterprises, facilitating the exchange of products, and fostering closer ties with the Hemispheric Rural Youth Community led by IICA's Rural Women and Youth Program.



6.3. MEXICO

The survey results regarding the workshop carried out in Mexico were very positive: the average rating was 4.94 out of 5. Virtually all participants described the experience as excellent and gave it the highest rating; only one participant gave it a rating of 4. With respect to the evolution of their knowledge, most participants considered their knowledge of international trade and agrifood exports to be limited: a third of them gave it a low rating (2/5) and another third a medium-low rating (3/5). This changed drastically after the training session: close to 80% rated their knowledge with scores of 4 and 5, about 17% with a score of 3 and only one person gave it a score of 2.

With respect to the proposed objectives (generating technical knowledge of international trade, strengthening negotiation skills, and recognizing the importance of youth participation in the agrifood sector), most participants considered that they had been largely fulfilled. However, some participants considered that they had been only partially achieved: three people indicated this regarding the first two objectives and two regarding the third.

The methodology employed was also highly rated. The clarity of the presentations, the practical exercises, and the group dynamics were the most highly rated aspects. However, there was a greater diversity of opinions regarding references to national and regional experiences, as well as the duration of the workshop, which was the lowest-rated aspect. Even so, most participants were satisfied or greatly satisfied with the use of audiovisual resources, interaction with the facilitators, and the quality of the teaching materials.

Qualitative comments in the survey support this positive assessment. Among the most highlighted aspects were the knowledge acquired and its applicability to business ventures, the dynamic methodology that fostered participation and exchanges, and the opportunity provided by IICA, which they described as a source of hope and motivation to advance their projects. Among the most frequent recommendations were the need to extend the duration of the workshop to review topics in greater detail, to strengthen post-workshop support through complementary training processes, to share the work materials (presentations and guides) to facilitate their review, and to improve certain logistical details such as the layout of printed exercises.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

7



The AgroJoven initiative has yielded a series of relevant findings that go beyond its initial objective of providing technical training in international trade, providing insight into the perspectives, priorities, and needs of rural youth involved in the agrifood systems of Honduras, Colombia, and Mexico. These findings, which have been systematized based on an analysis of participatory activities, direct consultations, and prioritization exercises carried out during the workshops, reveal both established strengths and structural gaps that should be addressed at multiple levels of governance and action.

7.1. UNIFORMITY IN PRIORITIZED TRENDS

A key initial finding is that, despite their different territorial and production contexts, youth in the three countries agreed on the main priorities. Sustainability and trade were the most frequently prioritized topics in all three countries; trade digitalization was prioritized by youth in Honduras and Colombia and ranked third in Mexico, where fair trade was among the two most prioritized topics. This regional consistency suggests that young people involved in agriculture see clear alignment between the sector's regional challenges and opportunities.

However, there is also a disconnect between declarative knowledge and operational knowledge. While young people clearly understand the importance of trade digitalization, having internalized it through repeated exposure to the concept, most demonstrate a lack of understanding regarding exactly what it entails, how to implement it in their production contexts, and what their specific role is in this transformation process. This gap between “knowing what” and “knowing how” is fertile ground for intervention and indicates that technical training must go beyond conceptual awareness, focusing on practical implementation and contextualized support..

Lastly, the fact that youth prioritized sustainability is not solely due to external market demands, but also to their intrinsic desire to protect the land and natural resources on which they and future generations depend for their livelihoods. This perspective, which combines environmental, social, and territorial aspects, positions youth as guardians of a more resilient and responsible agrifood sector, rather than just passive participants that adapt to imposed regulations. This has implications for the type of support youth will require, given that sustainability can become a competitive advantage in specialized markets, in addition to serving as a pillar for territorial sovereignty and intergenerational responsibility.

7.2. PERSISTENT DEMAND FOR SPECIALIZED TECHNICAL TRAINING AND SUPPORT

A second finding across all three countries was the demand for technical training in international trade, agrifood exports, and related skills. Although most of the participants had a solid educational background (between 52% and 67% had university training in related areas), they identified specific training gaps in customs procedures, international regulatory frameworks, negotiation strategies, international marketing, financial management, and the use of digital tools in trade, among other topics.

This is an active rather than a passive demand for practical results. The workshop evaluation surveys reflected very high levels of satisfaction among participants, who significantly expanded their knowledge. However, youth requested opportunities to apply knowledge in a more practical manner, with special emphasis on case studies, negotiation simulations, and applied exercises. They also considered that extending the duration of the workshop would allow for exploring topics in greater detail. This focus on practical and applied learning reflects the nature of the agrifood sector, where knowledge must be quickly translated into tangible actions.

7.3. IMPORTANCE OF PEER-LEARNING AND CONTEXT-SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE

A third noteworthy finding is the demonstrative value of horizontal learning and the sharing of experiences among rural youth from different backgrounds. During the workshops, when questions about specific processes in the countries were posed (such as “Which institution can I contact to formalize an association?”), the most effective answers did not come from the facilitators, but rather from participating youth, who had gone through those processes themselves. This phenomenon of situated knowledge and insights based on firsthand experiences proved to be particularly valuable, by enabling participants to overcome cultural and institutional barriers that can hinder the appropriation of more concrete or abstract knowledge.

This finding has clear methodological implications: training opportunities should be designed as platforms for dialogue, in which young people who have achieved the greatest progress in export processes act as learning facilitators for their peers, and in which horizontal interactions strengthen technical capacity and foster the development of social capital and support networks. The participation of a Honduran youth-led enterprise that was already exporting specialty coffee to the United States, for instance, served as a source of inspiration and provided confirmation that “although the agriculture sector may be complex for youth, they can still make progress.”

7.4. PERSPECTIVES AND QUESTIONS REGARDING CHALLENGES

The participants also addressed a specific challenge facing the agriculture sector: the tension between the seasonal nature of production and the negotiation and export timelines imposed by international trade. This temporal disconnect hinders their ability to negotiate long-term contracts, commit to scheduled deliveries, and access information requested at a given time. This confirms the importance of digital tools for forecasting, information management, and planning. Market information systems, precision agriculture technologies, data analytics platforms, and funding mechanisms that facilitate inventory management can help young people overcome these barriers and transform seasonality into strategic information for commercial negotiations.

In addition, young people shared their thoughts on international trade beyond merely technical aspects. In Mexico, for instance, the participants expressed critical views on established concepts such as fair trade, noting that “many companies talk about it without actually adhering to it,” and pointing out inequalities such as the fact that “the best products are exported under fair trade certifications while local markets receive lower-quality products.”

This ability to challenge established structures in international trade—by recognizing that third countries may impose stricter rules than their own and demanding that fair trade be “agreed upon with their own countries as well”—indicates that young people have a territorial and political vision of trade that is not limited to technical or commercial aspects. This affords opportunities to support them in developing a more critical and context-specific understanding of international trade that recognizes both opportunities and asymmetries, as well as to learn from their perspectives and visions.

7.5. REQUEST FOR STRATEGIC CONNECTIONS AND ACCESS TO NETWORKS

During the workshops, the participants recognized the importance of key contacts and social capital. This suggests that the young people understand that export success depends not only on accumulated knowledge, but also on access to strategic stakeholders: international buyers, distributors, financial institutions, certification agencies, and cooperation organizations, among others. The young people view these contacts as catalysts that open up business opportunities, facilitate access to financing, reduce transaction costs, etc.

This affords an opportunity to complement technical training with structured networking opportunities and connections with key players in the regional agrifood trade ecosystem. In the short term, participants' needs focus on training, workshops, greater visibility through digital platforms, connecting with other young people who have undergone similar processes, and support mechanisms. Their medium-term proposals have greater structural complexity, and include connecting with key trade stakeholders, developing public policies to standardize regulations and certifications, creating digital traceability platforms, and establishing formal youth networks in international trade.

These proposals demonstrate that the youth have identified the need for institutional frameworks and public policies that facilitate their integration into international markets, not just individually but collectively.

The AgroJoven initiative has demonstrated that participatory learning activities, when designed in a way that fosters openness to young people's voices, not only facilitate knowledge transfer (in both directions) but also allow for validating skills, building horizontal networks, and developing context-specific proposals that can guide future policies and actions. The results achieved in terms of participants' level of satisfaction, enhanced knowledge, and proactive attitude confirm that it is possible to empower these young people as strategic agents of change for the region's agrifood sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

8



The seven recommendations presented below are based on an analysis of the results of the AgroJoven process and the main findings identified during the implementation of the workshops in Honduras, Colombia, and Mexico. These guidelines seek to strengthen and scale up the impact of the actions carried out, fostering a comprehensive approach that includes capacity building in international trade and agrifood exports and the strengthening of soft skills such as leadership. They are also geared towards improving the territorial relevance of training processes, strengthening coordination between national and international stakeholders, and contributing to consolidating support mechanisms that facilitate rural youth participation in markets.

8.1. STRENGTHENING TRAINING CAPACITIES IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Training processes geared towards rural youth should review technical concepts related to international trade and agrifood exports as well as foster the development of soft skills, leadership, and negotiation skills. These are complementary areas that play a determining role in the sustainable management of youth-led business undertakings with the potential to export, as well as in their effective integration into national and international markets.

8.2. METHODOLOGICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING PROCESSES

From a methodological standpoint, it would be advantageous to identify the profiles, needs, demands, and specific characteristics of participating youth in advance. It is also advisable to incorporate practical exercises and facilitators who are knowledgeable about the national context during workshops, to organize structured networking opportunities, and to conduct final evaluations of knowledge and progress. Lastly, it is important to capitalize on the in-person modality as an opportunity to lay the foundation for exchange and learning networks between countries, which would facilitate the sharing of good practices and strengthen capacities in the medium and long term.

8.3. ROADMAP TO EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN THE AGROJOVEN MODEL

The roadmap should clearly define the following strategic lines of action:

- a. **replicating and expanding the trade and youth workshops to include a greater number of countries; and**
- b. **designing specialized training processes in countries where the AgroJoven initiative has already been carried out, with a view to implementing concrete actions that address the topics prioritized in each country. To that end, the specific production, commercial, and institutional contexts of each country should be taken into account to ensure that initiatives are pertinent and effective.**

It is also advisable to design formal mechanisms for intergenerational coordination, such as mentorship between well-established producers and youth, or structured forums for intergenerational dialogue, which can be incorporated into training processes and territorial associativity strategies.

8.4. INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION AND PARTICIPATION OF GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS

Technical personnel from government institutions should have broader participation in training processes, as this would allow for addressing specific queries from youth, providing guidance on regulatory frameworks, public policy instruments and existing support services, as well as facilitating inter-institutional coordination at the national level. This interaction would contribute to bridging information gaps and improving access to public resources and programs.

8.5. ACTIONS AT VARIOUS LEVELS OF NATIONAL GOVERNANCE

At the national level, coordinated actions should be promoted at various governance levels with the aim of creating and strengthening youth trade networks, fostering the intergenerational exchange of knowledge and experiences, and developing dissemination

and awareness-raising campaigns on key aspects of the export process. These actions should focus on rural youth and contribute to strengthening local and national ecosystems that support agrifood trade.

Moreover, given the interest youth have expressed in becoming involved in governance, AgroJoven processes could be aligned with national youth, trade, digitalization, and sustainability agendas, fostering opportunities for dialogue between youth, public institutions, and international agencies. Thus, any recommendations issued would not only benefit program participants, but would also inform public policymaking.

8.6. ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGENCIES

From a regional and hemispheric perspective, it would be valuable to capitalize on the strategic role that international organizations play in facilitating exchanges between networks of young entrepreneurs from different countries and regions, as well as the technical support they provide to governments in developing methodological tools to analyze trade trends, market opportunities, and mechanisms for accessing funding. Likewise, it is important to promote forums, technical dialogue opportunities, and specialized exchanges on financing options available to youth-led business ventures with export potential.

8.7. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, FOLLOW-UP, AND THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PROCESSES

It is important to guarantee ongoing technical assistance at the county level once youth begin the process of assessing their products' export potential. This support is key to strengthening technical capacities, reducing risks, and raising the odds of successfully entering international markets.

Although current recommendations highlight the program's technical support, the report demonstrates a high level of motivation among youth and their interest in receiving continued support. In that regard, post-workshop follow-up mechanisms should be explicitly incorporated, such as mentoring, periodic technical advisory services, communities of practice, or differentiated support based on their export experience. This would allow for capitalizing on learning achieved and effectively transitioning from training to successful market insertion.

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9



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AgroJoven



Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture

Headquarters

Vázquez de Coronado, San Isidro 11101

Tel: (+506) 2216 0222

Fax: (+506) 2216 0233

iicahq@iica.int

www.iica.int