

# Info Note

## Youth opportunity spaces in low-emission dairy development in Kenya

*Research findings and policy recommendations*

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### Key messages

- Invest in both formal and informal dairy value chains to support more inclusive youth employment opportunities.
- Support diverse youth interests and the multiple ways that youth engage in the dairy sector.
- Invest in youth-specific collective action initiatives through inclusive financial mechanisms.
- Tailor low emission development (LED) interventions to specific cultural contexts.

### Problem statement

The dairy sector in Kenya produces over 4 billion liters of milk per year and supports 1.3 million producer households with a vital contribution to incomes and nutrition. However, total national production fails to meet demand. There is a need for increased efforts to support value chain development growth in the sector. In addition to the potential of dairy to support economic growth, the dairy sector is receiving substantial attention as a pathway to achieve Kenya's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), commitments to international agreements to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emission intensities. Intensification of production would reduce emission intensities by generating a higher volume of milk per unit of GHG emission. However, Kenya's NDCs specify that the environmental target of GHG emissions reduction should be pursued in accordance with its broader sustainable development agenda. Low-emission development has significant implications for reaching International Sustainable Development Goals; specifically, Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG #8) and Gender Equality (SDG #5).

Kenya's youth population, defined as those between the ages of 15-35, constitute approximately 36% of the population and are largely under or unemployed. The Kenyan Youth Development policy – currently under review – emphasizes education, skill development and entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector to alleviate unemployment. While these are important, youth face numerous constraints to utilizing acquired skills and education to benefit the sector. Geography and social factors influence the positions of young women and men in society often result in differential access to capital, productive assets and knowledge.

The converging commercial and environmental agendas foreshadow a rapid and substantial transformation of the Kenyan dairy sector in the coming decade. This transformation raises numerous questions about technological interventions, as well as important questions about how to create youth-specific employment opportunities, especially for rural youth. A dual focus on technological and social dimensions of sustainable intensification will lead to interventions that are environmentally, economically and socially beneficial. Dairy intensification has the potential to create and support employment, innovation and equitable access to opportunity.

### The policy challenge

In addition to market dynamics promoting intensification in the dairy sector, the Kenyan government is in the process of developing a Green Climate Fund (GCF) proposal that, if successful, would invest tens of millions of US dollars in promoting low-emission development in the dairy sector. The aim is to reduce GHG emissions intensities, enabling Kenya to achieve its NDC targets for reducing emissions from the agricultural sector, while

simultaneously increasing milk production through the promotion of dairy intensification technologies. However, the history of dairy intensification and commercialization around the world has shown that such processes can create winners and losers in the sector and deepen existing inequality. Kenya's challenge will be to integrate the goal of fostering viable rural livelihoods into low-emission development planning. Social outcomes of the GCF investments should be considered in proposal planning stages to ensure that socio-economic inclusivity goals are considered alongside economic growth and environmental targets. Greater inclusion of youth in LED policy development will support the opportunity to increase youth employment through low-emission dairy development.

## Research questions and objectives

The objective of this study is to understand how intensification in the dairy sector, in combination with changing urban-rural dynamics, influences young women and men's employment opportunities. Then we describe how local geographic and social factors, such as norms, relations, and networks, may enable, or constrain, young men and women's abilities to navigate and take advantage of emerging opportunity spaces in the dairy sector.



*LED dairy interventions need to be tailored to the cultural context to provide needed support to youth interested in dairy production. Photo: Renee Bullock (ILRI).*

## Research design and methods

This research was designed to generate evidence that will inform LED strategies that will address youth employment and economic and environmental targets. We analyzed qualitative data from youth who participate in various nodes of the dairy value chain to identify the key opportunities, constraints and strategies they use to engage in Kenya's intensifying dairy sector.

This study was conducted in Nakuru and Kiambu Counties to compare regional differences in youth experiences in dairy. Twelve key informant interviews

were conducted with dairy stakeholders, including livestock officers and extension agents in cooperatives, to understand broader regional issues about youth and dairy. This informed the design of subsequent focused group discussions. A total of 22 sex-disaggregated FGDs were conducted, with a total of 200 participants. Qualitative data were then coded and analyzed for key themes. Finally, a workshop with 22 research participants was held to validate findings, refine key messages and solicit youth policy recommendations.

## Findings

### 1. Geography matters

Youth participation in dairy value chains is heavily contingent upon a variety of geographic factors, such as roads and electrification, proximity to markets, availability of dairy infrastructure and supporting institutions. These locally variable contextual factors make up the enabling environment for youth engagement in dairy. Without these fundamental parts in place, dairy is not as attractive as a business opportunity.

### 2. Gendered value chains

The increased number of specialized tasks have created more work opportunities and possibilities, though this is heavily gendered. Easy to enter, flexible positions include selling milk and casual labour. Both require low capital investments. Women and men transport milk to urban centres, however women seldom drive vehicles and rely on public transport and private hires, expenses that reduce their profits. In Nakuru, norms about women's mobility restrict their selling activities.

Casual labour is also common and is carried out by men. Women are generally not viewed as strong enough and it is considered "dirty work". More difficult, specialized and remunerative positions include running agrovet shops, providing AI services and installing biogas. Men tend to enter these positions more easily because of better access to capital and training.

### 3. Norms, practices and relations

The main ethnic groups differ in Kiambu and Nakuru counties. Kikuyu and Kalenjin ethnic groups differ in their historical experiences in dairy farming systems and the role of dairy in their livelihood practices. These differences affect current norms and social relations in the community and the household that mediate youth's acquisition of capital, assets and knowledge. Social relations with parents and spouses were described as being the most important to enable youth participation in dairy.

Parents' primary ways to support youth is through asset inheritance and moral support. Land inheritance laws have made it possible for both sons and daughters to

inherit. However, rates of land subdivision and parents' unwillingness to give land has reduced land inheritance rates, especially in Kiambu County. Parents often discourage youth entry in dairy, more so when they have made significant investments in education. Upon completion of school, parents' expectation is for their sons and daughters to pursue white collar jobs.

Gender norms and practices in married households typically require that women carry out most of the reproductive tasks, such as cooking, cleaning and child care. These activities influence women's available time to earn income through dairy. Women in the homestead may assume responsibility for many of the labour intensive dairy production tasks, such as feeding, watering, and milking. Women's potential to benefit from dairy often depends on context specific cultural norms. Age, gender and ethnicity intersect in particular ways in Nakuru that make dairy unattractive to women, because Kalenjin women are effectively prohibited from owning cows and land and seldom participate in decision-making about income.

#### 4. Networks and knowledge

Cooperatives exist in both counties and are important in the dairy value chain. However, intergenerational tensions often limit youth empowerment and voice in dairy cooperatives. Age hierarchies and norms can discourage, or even prohibit, young and old from participating in groups together.

As an alternative, young women and men, mostly in the rural areas of Nakuru County, have organized into youth groups through regional dairy projects that support business and skill development. Youth groups provide opportunities to interact with and learn from each other. Youth groups' activities include savings and knowledge sharing.

Youth's increased access to mobile phones has ushered in new ways to learn about local and global dairy practices, to link to markets, e.g. heifer sales, and to connect with dairy farmers in social media platforms.

#### 5. Agency and dairy in life transitions

Dairy plays important and diverse roles in and across youth transitions that occur between the ages of 18-35. These transitions are not necessarily linear. Young women and men move between places, in and out of work and across life phases. We identified four common youth pathways in dairy that can be distinguished by the reasons for entry and length of time in dairy.

One pathway refers to youth who enter dairy as laborers to earn money during a phase of uncertainty, specifically the transition period between school completion and "finding a job". Youths will easily move on once a better

opportunity comes along, e.g. white-collar job. A second group enter with intention to explore whether dairy can be a stepping stone into other more remunerative positions in the value chain, such as value addition or establishing a milk ATM. They may drop out of dairy production, or they may keep it as part of a diversified livelihood strategy. The third group of youth, the majority of our sample, enter the sector with a vision of dairy as a core livelihood strategy. Dairy production is a key part of their efforts to diversify income, either in or out of the dairy value chain. Finally, the fourth pathway refers to well-educated youths who have been "tarmacking" for years, and enter dairy in later stages of youth, e.g. in their 30s, and often as a fallback option after not having found a white-collar job. While there may yet be other pathways, the important point to recognize is that youth motivations and abilities to engage in dairy varies across life phases and socio-ecological contexts.

#### 6. Youth as agents of change

Youth are agents of change who alter social norms through their personal practices and relations, namely deciding who to marry and how to raise children. Increasingly, but not everywhere, young women and men marry individuals from different ethnic groups, occasionally breaking out of restrictive ethnicity-based norms that prohibit women's ownership of assets, for example.

Youth, are often more educated than their parents, and are making choices to raise their children differently by resisting older generation's gender specific roles, practices and boundaries. Rather, youth as parents are renegotiating and expanding opportunities for boys and girls to pursue life choices.

### Policy recommendations

The Kenyan NDCs specify that LED should be aligned with SDG targets. The following policy recommendations suggest how to practically integrate these social targets in pursuit of environmental and economic targets of low-emission development.

**Invest in both formal and informal dairy value chains to support more inclusive youth employment opportunities.** The majority of milk consumed in Kenya is traded in the informal sector, which is a source of both casual work and more remunerative opportunities for youth. Entry into the informal sector can be a gateway to more formalized work opportunities, especially value addition, sales and innovations. Creation of less prohibitive regulations would enable youth to cultivate and develop business and innovations.

**Support diverse youth interests and the multiple ways that youth engage in the dairy sector.** Young women and men participate in the dairy sector in a variety

of ways and during different life transitions and phases. Intervention strategies should facilitate diverse engagement of women and men in rural and peri-urban locations and create more equitable youth opportunities in the dairy sector.

**Invest in youth-specific collective action initiatives through inclusive financial mechanisms.** Collective action in the form of youth self-help groups can be a significant enabling factor in some areas overcoming barriers to entry into the dairy economy. Membership in youth-only groups enhances access to capital, assets and information in ways that membership in cross-generational cooperatives do not. The provision of youth empowerment funds has assisted groups in going to scale with business ideas and financial support to groups should be increased.

**Tailor LED interventions to specific cultural contexts.** Ethnic groups across Kenya have different cultural heritages and beliefs that influence youth and gendered roles, relations and practices in decision making and asset ownership. Strategic attention should be given to social and rural development outcomes in the design of LED interventions and specific focus on how to increase the potential of intensification to support youth employment and youth equitable outcomes. Youth should be engaged in policy processes and share their insights and expertise with relevant stakeholders.

## Further reading

- IFAD. 2019. [Creating opportunities for rural youth](#). IFAD Report.
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