

Practical ACTION

LEARNING EVENT ON REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

11th -13th September 2023, Ciala Resort, Kisumu, Kenya.

Project Background

The Transforming Rural Economies and Youth Livelihoods (TREYL) project is a five-year initiative (January 2019 – January 2024) funded by the [IKEA Foundation](#) and implemented in Kenya's Kisumu and Homa Bay Counties by [Practical Action](#). Its objective is to establish vibrant and inclusive rural economies in Kenya by promoting agricultural livelihoods for youth, underpinned by agroecological principles and practices. The project aims to break the cycles of low productivity and increasing rural poverty, through a holistic and gendered approach, enabling young men and women to increase their income through agri-business.

The project has been building a business case to demonstrate that regenerative agriculture can be commercially successful and targeted an initial cohort of 6,000 young women and men, enhancing their business skills based on agroecological approaches to farming. It has developed multi-stakeholder platforms to improve the poultry, groundnut, tomato and African Indigenous Vegetable (ALV) value chains. Working groups, made up of commercial service providers and government agencies, are tackling access to finance, training services and the provision of market information. In the long term, the project aims to impact over 80,000 young people by demonstrating the viability of agri-business as a viable career option.

Context of the learning event

Youth account for 35.4% of Kenya's population (World Bank 2014), with 1,000,000 entering the labour market annually (Kenya Country Report on Youth Employment, 2014). With the trend of an increasingly young population set to continue (youth population could grow by 40% by 2030), the absolute number of unemployed youths continues to grow; according to 2019 Population and Census results, 75% of the total population are under the age of 35. It is estimated that 64% of unemployed Kenyans are youth with the majority moving away from the agricultural sector to fast growing non-agricultural sectors in urban areas. This migration has a further impact on the lives of young people and families as the move to urban centres has not translated into employment opportunities and even those with employment are left at considerable risk of falling further into poverty. Through the TREYL project, Practical Action has demonstrated that young people can be attracted into agriculture. Our aim is to positively influence the nature of rural economies. Specifically, we are supporting young people develop equitable roles in agriculture and use technology to access profitable, dignified, and diverse opportunities in farming and agribusiness, and thereby improve the food security, income and resilience of their families and the rural economy.

Global players in the food sector have combined efforts to strengthen food systems as part of a strategy to enhance food safety and security. Food safety has been a global concern with negative health effects of pesticides' misuse being one of the major public health problems worldwide. Kenya's chemical use in agriculture is known to have negative impacts on the health of farmers and is an increasing concern for consumers. Regenerative agriculture is recognised by many actors in global and national food and farming systems as necessary to address long term health and sustainability. Adoption of regenerative agriculture will improve nutrition through increased agricultural biodiversity, as well improve soils, water management, and ecosystems. At the farm level, it ensures that agricultural interventions work with nature by integrating biodiversity conservation and ecological processes in food production and reducing

Practical ACTION

external inputs to focus more on natural alternatives. It optimises the interactions between plants, animals, humans, and the environment to achieve socially equitable food systems within which people can exercise choice over what they eat and how and where it is produced.

Some of the most common causes of failing agriculture include lack of investment in new and inclusive market systems: limited access to marketing information, non-conformity to agricultural produce and products standards, inadequate markets and marketing infrastructure, poor post-harvest management, insufficient marketing and related entrepreneurial skills, inconsistent quality and high costs of inputs and low prices for produce and products, inefficiencies and high transaction costs along the value chains, weak farmer organisation and limited incentives for quality agricultural products. Market-based approaches that are demand-driven and incentive-focused and which include the local private sector, public sector and local communities working in partnership, have been proven to be successful in scaling the use of agricultural technologies.

Workshop rationale

The project tested innovative approaches to tackle low productivity, access to agricultural resources as well as negative perceptions that hinder youth's participation in agriculture while creating an enabling policy and market environment to support agricultural livelihoods. The approaches include:

1. Participatory Market Systems Development, an approach that works with the private and public sector to develop more vibrant market models that provide youth opportunities and stimulate regenerative agriculture.
2. Promotion of regenerative agriculture practices which preserves and enhances the soil, water and biodiversity resources helping to sustain productivity and support climate resilience while providing young entrepreneurial farmers with decent livelihoods.
3. Peer to peer mentorship – to support peer to peer delivery of technical knowledge and skills while attracting young people to participate in agricultural livelihoods.

The main objective of the workshop is to enhance awareness and understanding of the benefits of regenerative agriculture among policy makers, share learning among organizations delivering programs in the agriculture sector, initiate policy dialogues as well as identify opportunities for future programming. Specifically, the workshop will create a platform to:

1. Share experiences, learnings and best practices on regenerative agriculture, youth engagement and private sector engagement approaches in unlocking opportunities in the agriculture sector.
2. Generate discussions on existing and needed policy frameworks for sustained impacts.
3. Identify opportunities for future interventions.

Workshop format

The workshop will be organized over 3 days and will include the following elements:

1. Plenary sessions where Practical Action and other practitioners share on experiences, lessons learned and good practices.

Practical ACTION

2. Interactive group discussions around specific issues/themes.
3. Field visits to youth-led agri-enterprises.
4. Gallery walks – presentation of interventions on posters.

Workshop sub-themes

- **Regenerative agriculture as a strategy for restoration and conservation of natural capital**

Unlike conventional agriculture that focuses on extraction, regenerative agriculture involves practices and principles that are regenerative in nature thus building natural capital. These practices allow nature to rebuild soils and increase biodiversity and return biological materials to the earth.

Regenerative agriculture practices that include agroecology, conservation agriculture, and agroforestry can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions from food production by reducing reliance on synthetic inputs and by building healthy soils that absorb rather than release carbon. As well as helping restore the natural carbon cycle, healthy soils hold water longer, reducing the impact of droughts, and are better able to absorb water, reducing the risk of flooding. When such practices are applied, they provide natural ecosystems that provide habitat for useful organisms, thereby increasing biodiversity. By reducing the use of synthetic inputs such as pesticides, pollinators and microbes can thrive; their role in maintenance of healthy ecosystems is globally recognized.

This sub theme will focus on practitioners sharing evidence on the impact of regenerative agriculture approaches, strategies for scale, existing barriers etc. This session will also include a discussion on policy frameworks in place, opportunities and current gaps in policy to support regenerative agriculture.

- **Young People as drivers of regenerative agriculture in rural economies**

Rural economies are failing to provide opportunities for economic growth and development, especially for young people, and are holding them back from advancing out of poverty. The knowledge, skills, energy, and potential of youth is not being harnessed and both the local agricultural sector and rural young people are not realising their full potential. Several reasons and drivers can be given to explain the reason for failing rural economies and the declining number of young men and women engaged in rural agriculture. These include limited access to land for on-farm activities, limited access to knowledge of the opportunities for young people in off-farm activities. Limited access to financing and other resources have demotivated young people who require financing that reflects the cost of investment in agricultural technologies, and repayment periods that better reflect agricultural seasons. Limited access to information and knowledge on seasonality that result to low productivity and the increasing land degradation has exasperated the problem, pushing more young people to urban centres, and heightening their risks of unemployment.

This session will include presentations that provide an overview of approaches implemented by Practical Action and other practitioners to increase youth participation in agricultural livelihoods and the benefits of regenerative agriculture, progress towards impact and the potential for scale. It will have a particular focus on the role of young people in regenerative agriculture. The practitioners will share their experiences, lessons learned as well as best practices. In addition, the session will include the voices of young men and women who have been supported by Practical Action in Kisumu and Homa Bay Counties.

Practical ACTION

Finally, the session will include a discussion on policy frameworks that incentivize youth, and opportunities for policy to enhance youth involvement.

- **Private sector engagement in regenerative agriculture**

There is an increasing demand for more sustainable food systems - from consumers in Kenya interested in healthy food to policy makers trying to ensure achievement of the SDGs. Sustainable food systems require more than just sustainable production - they need supportive private sector models that deliver relevant inputs and services and provide lucrative end-markets. This session will explore strategies for developing market systems that support regenerative agriculture. It will include both a focus on cross sectoral private sector collaboration and the design of specific business models. The sessions will include sharing from development partners and private sector actors who will also highlight private sector innovations.

Participation (150 pax)

The event will bring together a diverse group of individuals, including county government officials, project implementers, donors, researchers, private sector representatives and young agripreneurs to discuss vital themes in regenerative agriculture and agribusiness. It will feature stimulating panel discussions, presentations and field visits.