

SUMMARY

A RURAL GREEN TRANSITION IN THE G5 SAHEL

Jobs for youth

Steve Wiggins, Peter Newborne, Colette Benoudji, Mamadou Diarra, Nene Kane, Marie Bernadette Kiebré and Saadatou Sangaré

This SPARC summary is based on the longer report, *Green jobs in agrifood systems: setting a vision for youth in the Sahel*, produced by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and ODI thanks to the contribution of the German Federal Ministry of Agriculture (BMEL) (Wiggins, S., Newborne, P., Benoudji, C., Diarra, M., Kane, N., Kiebré, M.B. and Sangaré, S. (2023) *Green jobs in agrifood systems: setting a vision for youth in the Sahel*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (<https://doi.org/10.4060/cc7033en>)).

Motivation

Populations of the five countries of the G5 Sahel – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – are (still) growing rapidly. Most people are young. In the five years between 2022 and 2027, 11.4 million youth will turn 16 years old, when most will seek jobs. If young job-seekers do not find decent employment, they may emigrate or turn to crime and insurgency.

At the same time, G5 Sahel countries must transform their economies to be environmentally sustainable, and especially to be adapted to a changing climate. They must pass through a green transition.

Purpose

Given that most people in the G5 Sahel live rurally, farming and herding, can a green transition in the rural and agricultural economy generate jobs for youth?

Approach and methods

Between September 2022 and January 2023, the research team spoke to key informants in the five countries, collecting data and literature to establish the key elements of a rural green transition. From this, we have estimated what jobs might be created by such a transition.

Findings

The transition to a green agrifood system could create more than 8 million additional, full-time jobs in the countries of the G5 Sahel by 2030 – helping those countries meet the demand for work.

Six transitions are already underway to green the agrifood system: moving to renewable rural energy, especially solar power; expanding small-scale irrigation; switching to climate-smart and environmentally sustainable agriculture; restoring common lands; creating fisheries; and recycling rural waste.

In some activities, such as soil and water conservation, the Sahel is already a world leader. In others, such as solar power, the Sahel has the potential to lead the world.

Much of the change needed does not depend on the state: private and collective efforts will drive change. The public role is to support and facilitate, not direct.

However, conservation of fields, pastures and commons in the rural Sahel generates benefits – such as capturing carbon – that serve others far beyond the villages. International finance should help pay for investments.

Policy implications

Ministers in the G5 Sahel should consult with leaders, managers and others already making the changes, to remove obstacles and otherwise help accelerate the changes underway. Some changes require only making progress on existing priorities: for example, more access to credit for farmers.

Ministers should decentralise public spending on land restoration as far as possible: instead of spending through central ministries, give more to communes, empower them to take decisions and provide technical support – so they can devise what needs to be done locally to restore local landscapes, with all the adaptations to context this entails.

Ministers for agriculture and forestry should reorient existing extension staff in agriculture and forestry agencies towards greener practices and towards working alongside farmers. If necessary, get them to take pride in local innovations, recognising the considerable achievements of Sahelian farmers in pioneering ways to conserve soil and water.

Where international public goods are being created, **aid partners** should look to have the Green Climate Fund and other vertical funds finance such activities. In particular, obtaining carbon payments for farmers who capture carbon should be a prime goal.

Researchers should look to harness advances in formal science, such as in remote sensing to local knowledge, skills and understandings. Local and regional think-tanks might broker the two domains of knowledge – and steer the scientists towards addressing priorities seen from below, to prompt them to ask better, more productive, questions.

Research funders should invest in monitoring change in rural areas, reviewing what is changing, why and how. They should look for innovations being tried in the field to find better ways of working, with even greater benefits. The ingenuity and drive of some local actors should not be underestimated or ignored: they are a key asset in making the green transition.

Funded by



This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK government; however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.