



CREATING RURAL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Support to integrated
agribusiness
hubs in Africa

PROGRAMME COMPLETION REPORT

(2019–2025)



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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The Creating Rural Youth Employment Opportunities: Support to Integrated Agribusiness Hubs in Africa Programme (ABHP) has employed the following definitions of training, internship, apprenticeship and mentoring. While some of them are inspired by the definitions of the International Labour Organization, they have been adapted to cater to the nature, scope and breadth of support the programme provides to youth.

Training sessions: Structured sessions on theory and practice taught by specialized service providers with a view to developing specific competencies. Training sessions seek to increase trainee awareness, understanding, knowledge and competencies on a given topic to render knowledge actionable towards wage and self-employment.

Internship: Short-term work experience during which the intern receives on-the-job training and gains experience in a particular field or career area supported by the ABHP. Internships under the ABHP last three to six months, on average, and are either unpaid or paid. Unpaid interns, however, receive basic support to help cover the costs of participation.

Apprenticeship: A system for training a new generation of practitioners of a trade or profession through on-the-job training and, often, some support in classroom study. Apprenticeships can also enable practitioners to obtain a licence to practice a regulated occupation. Depending on the field or occupation pursued, apprenticeships last from one to three years. Apprenticeships under the programme last six months to two years, on average, and are either unpaid or paid. However, unpaid apprentices receive basic support to enable them to take advantage of the apprenticeship opportunities facilitated by the programme.

Mentoring: All work-based learning programmes, such as internships, apprenticeships, traineeships, industrial attachments, etc. for wage employment, along with business bootcamps and incubation and acceleration programmes for self-employment.

Partnering host: An organization that assumes management of the ABHP at the country level. The partnering host manages and coordinates all operations related to the programme in country and is responsible for delivering the expected outcomes.

Industry attachment: A structured, credit-bearing work experience in a professional work setting during which the student acquires and applies knowledge and skills.

ACRONYMS

ABHP	Creating Rural Youth Employment Opportunities: Support to Integrated Agribusiness Hubs in Africa Programme
AI	artificial intelligence
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
GEWE	gender equality and women's empowerment
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IITA	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture
ILO	International Labour Organization
SH/SEA	sexual harassment/sexual exploitation and abuse



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Creating Rural Youth Employment Opportunities: Support to Integrated Agribusiness Hubs in Africa Programme (ABHP) was designed to generate sustainable employment and income opportunities for rural youth in agriculture and related sectors. Implemented across nine countries – Algeria, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria and Rwanda – the programme operated in diverse socioeconomic contexts with varying timelines and institutional arrangements.

Launched in December 2019 and concluded in December 2025, the ABHP was jointly financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Visa Foundation and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Conceived as a pilot, the programme tested an integrated model to facilitate access to decent employment, primarily wage employment for vulnerable rural youth. It not only exceeded its targets but generated critical evidence, lessons learned and strategic insights for future programming.

With a total budget of approximately US\$18 million, the programme was managed by IFAD's Environment, Climate, Gender and Social Inclusion Division, while partnering hosts and implementing partners managed day-to-day operations and coordination.

The programme prioritized wage employment (70 per cent) while also promoting entrepreneurship (30 per cent) to stimulate indirect job creation. Its implementation was guided by two core approaches: (i) a three-phase model: pre-hub, hub nurturing, and post-hub growth, and (ii) an ecosystem approach, whereby partnering hosts acted as brokers to bring employers, training institutions, financial service providers and policymakers together to jointly address systemic barriers to youth employment.

The ABHP delivered exceptional results, achieving 291 per cent of its life-of-project target for direct employment. By October 2025, 32,833 rural youth had secured employment (against a target of 11,275), including 24,393 in wage employment (270 per cent of the target) and 8,440 in self-employment (374 per cent of the target). Youth-led enterprises generated a further 26,684 additional spillover jobs, bringing the total jobs facilitated to 59,517 across the nine countries.

Women accounted for 12,844 of directly employed youth (227 per cent of the target). While significant progress was made, the programme recognizes that achieving full gender parity in some contexts will require more intensive gender-transformative approaches beyond the scope of this pilot phase. Younger youth (18 to 25 years old), often the hardest to reach, accounted for 41 per cent of the beneficiaries. Several country programmes also successfully engaged youth with disabilities and other highly vulnerable groups.

These results were achieved despite daunting challenges, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted early implementation in several countries. Later-entry countries benefited from the adaptive learning and experience gained during earlier phases.

Strong programme management, rigorous technical and financial oversight and a highly informative midterm review were instrumental in refining implementation strategies and maximizing impact. The review provided key insights on youth employment pathways, training approaches, geographic targeting and beneficiary segmentation.

Cost-efficiency analysis conducted in 2025 estimated an average cost of US\$567 per beneficiary, with a cost structure of 41 per cent fixed and 59 per cent variable costs. Evidence also shows that early integration of ABHP approaches in IFAD country portfolios significantly increases efficiency and scalability.

The programme heavily emphasized knowledge management, stakeholder engagement and policy dialogue. Regional learning events held in Kigali (2024) and Naivasha (2025) brought key actors together to advance discussions on effective rural youth employment strategies.

Two independent outcome evaluations conducted in 2025 by IFAD and the International Labour Organization confirmed the programme's high degree of relevance, coherence and effectiveness. The evaluations highlighted significant positive impacts on youth employment, income, confidence and well-being, while identifying areas needing improvement for future scale-up, including:

- ▶ Improving job quality and career progression pathways;
- ▶ Strengthening post-employment follow-up and mentoring;
- ▶ Expanding access by youth entrepreneurs to financial services;
- ▶ Applying approaches aimed at tackling the root causes of gender inequalities and strengthening women's empowerment.

The ABHP pilot phase concludes not as an endpoint but as a proven model for expansion. Across nine countries, the programme has demonstrated that facilitating decent employment for vulnerable rural youth is both feasible and scalable. The evidence, partnerships and systems established over six years provide a firm foundation for future investments and the next phase of scaling impact.

OBJECTIVES AND KEY FEATURES

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Youth unemployment and underemployment remain among the most pressing development challenges in sub-Saharan Africa and, to a lesser extent, other regions globally. With the continent's youth population projected to more than double by 2050, the demand for decent and productive employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas, is rapidly intensifying. However, structural constraints, including limited awareness of employment opportunities, inadequate access to relevant skills development, fragmented labour markets, insufficient support services, social exclusion, persistent gender inequalities and limited access to various forms of capital continue to prevent millions of young women and men from realizing their economic potential.

It is within this context that the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in partnership with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Visa Foundation, designed and launched the Creating Rural Youth Employment Opportunities: Support to Integrated Agribusiness Hubs in Africa Programme (ABHP). Conceived as a flagship initiative, the programme was grounded in the premise that an integrated, ecosystem-based approach to rural youth employment could achieve results beyond those attainable by individual stakeholders operating in isolation. The programme was formally launched on 19 December 2019 and concluded in December 2025.

PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES AND STRUCTURE

The ABHP was developed with a coherent set of objectives and related components.

The programme's objectives were operationalized through two mutually reinforcing components:

Component 1: Agribusiness hub support and capacity development. This component focused on the creation, development and operation of integrated agribusiness hubs and had two subcomponents: (i) pre-hub system development, and (ii) hub operations, including intensive support to youth and facilitation of their access to employment opportunities.

Component 2: Knowledge-sharing for policy dialogue and scaling up. This component aimed to systematically capture, document and disseminate the evidence, lessons and knowledge generated through programme implementation. Its objective was to inform policy dialogue and enable replication and scaling of the model by governments and development partners.

TABLE 1
OVERALL GOAL AND SPECIFIC PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

Overall goal of the ABHP: Create sustainable employment and income-generating opportunities for rural youth in agriculture and adjacent sectors in nine African countries. This goal was pursued through two specific objectives:

Specific objective 1: To build integrated agribusiness capacities that will stimulate and create both wage and self-employment for rural youth by identifying strategic partnerships to develop sustainable and innovative agribusiness hubs.

Specific objective 2: To generate empirical evidence of the developed and tested integrated agribusiness hub models to inform policy to drive the scaling up of the models to create decent employment for rural youth.

THE ECOSYSTEM APPROACH AND THREE-PHASE MODEL

Two core approaches defined the programme's methodology and distinguished it from conventional youth employment interventions: the ecosystem approach and the three-phase implementation model.

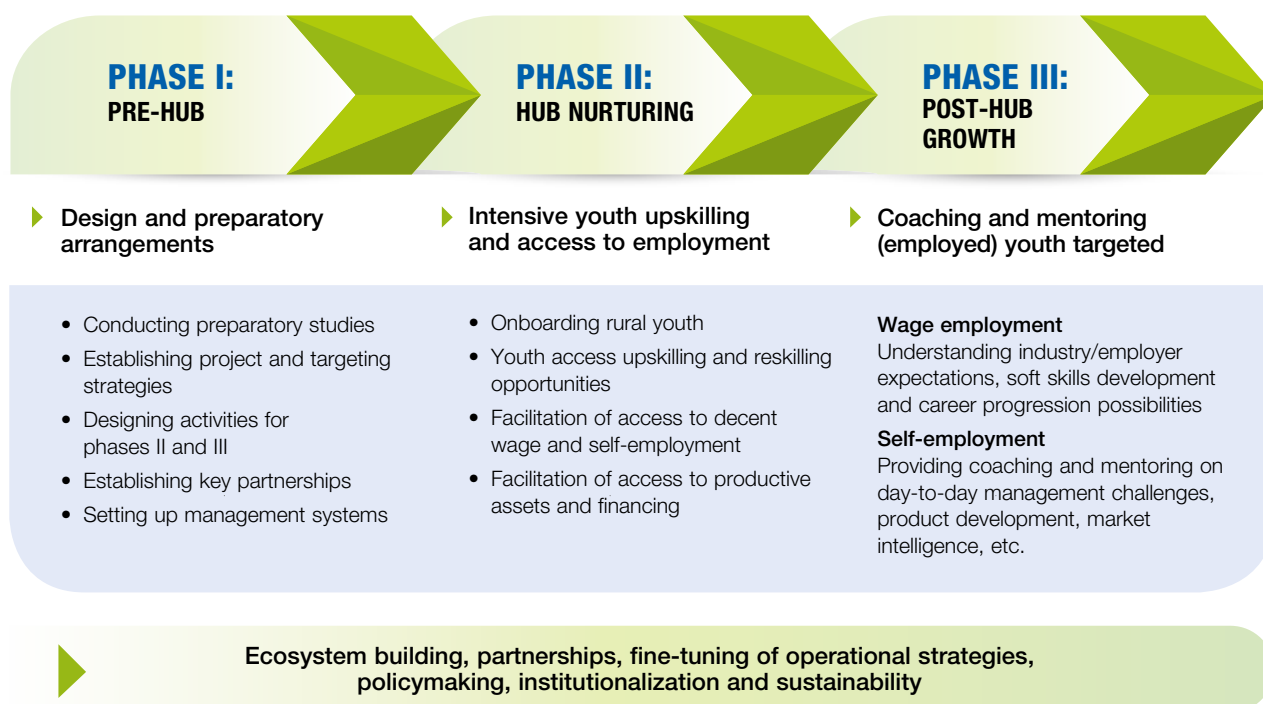
The ecosystem approach was grounded in the recognition that no single stakeholder, whether employer, training provider, government agency or non-governmental actor, can effectively address rural youth unemployment in isolation. In response, the programme brought together a comprehensive range of actors in each country context, including agrifood system employers, technical and vocational education and training institutions, financial service providers, business development service providers, labour market intermediation actors, policymakers and community stakeholders.

Through this approach, the programme fostered coordinated action across the ecosystem to address systemic constraints to youth employment. Partnering hosts played a key role as ecosystem brokers, facilitating collaboration, strengthening linkages and continuously devising adaptive solutions to respond to evolving labour market dynamics, economic conditions and technological advances.

As a complement, the three-phase implementation model provided a structured pathway for programme delivery at the country level:

- 1. Pre-hub phase:** focused on contextual analysis, the design of locally adapted approaches and the establishment of foundational systems and partnerships.
- 2. Hub-nurturing phase:** centred on intensive youth skills development and facilitation of access to employment opportunities.
- 3. Post-hub growth phase:** emphasized post-placement support, including coaching, mentoring and access to additional services to improve job retention and progression.

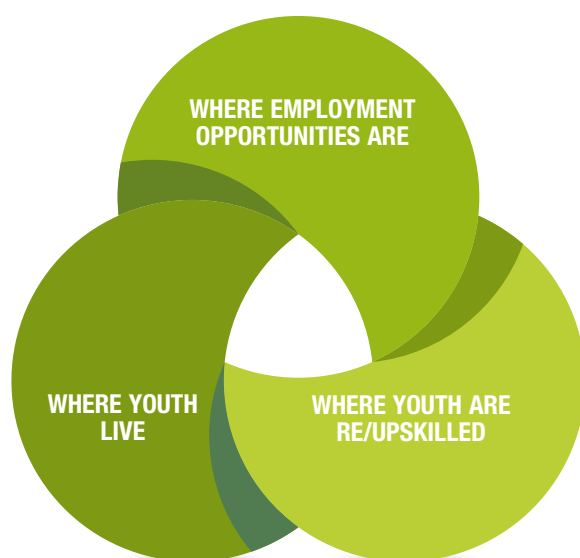
Together, these two approaches enabled the programme to deliver integrated, adaptive and scalable solutions to rural youth employment challenges.

FIGURE 1**IFAD'S THREE-PHASE AGRIBUSINESS MODEL FOR RURAL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT****GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE AND TARGET GROUPS**

Geographic targeting. The programme operated across nine African countries and was implemented in three sequential cohorts. The first, Nigeria and Rwanda, commenced in July 2020, followed by Cameroon, Kenya and Mozambique between September and October 2021. These early operations were heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and, as a result, generated critical lessons that informed subsequent programme adaptation and refinement.

The third cohort, Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar and Malawi, launched in September 2022. By this stage, the programme had incorporated substantial operational learning, resulting in greater efficiency and effectiveness, along with improved delivery across these later-entry countries.

Over the course of implementation, the programme developed a more nuanced and evidence-based understanding of geographic and beneficiary targeting. Geographic targeting evolved to encompass three interrelated spatial dimensions, as well as the need to actively manage the linkages between them to ensure effective pathways to youth employment:



The programme's experience indicates that success rates were higher when youth were targeted in catchment areas near wage and self-employment opportunities.

TABLE 2
GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE AND COMMODITY FOCUS, PER COUNTRY

COUNTRY	GEOGRAPHIC TARGET AREAS	COMMODITY FOCUS
Algeria	Biskra-Oued, Guelma and Mostaganem	Dairy, spirulina, fish farming and potatoes
Cameroon	Agrihub locations and vicinities	Cassava, maize, plantain, horticulture, ginger, palm oil, tree pepper, cocoa, poultry and piggery
Côte d'Ivoire	Bagoué, Poro and Tchologo	Cashew, mango, shea, beekeeping, phytosanitary products and dried fruit
Kenya	Nakuru, Kakamega and Kilifi	Fresh vegetables, dairy, cassava, fisheries, poultry, groundnuts, green grams and livestock
Madagascar	Analamanga, Vakinankaratra, Vatovany, Fitovinany and the Great South	Small ruminants, horticulture, dairy, wheat, soya, vanilla, cloves, pepper, sugar cane, fruit, restaurants and hotels
Malawi	Chitipa, Dedza and Chikwawa	Honey, greenhouse vegetables and dairy
Mozambique	Sofala, Manica and Tete	Horticulture, aquaculture, poultry, piggery and sesame
Nigeria	National hubs in Oyo, Imo and Abuja	Aquaculture, poultry, snails, greenhouse vegetables, cassava, livestock and mushrooms
Rwanda	National hubs in Musanze, Gishari, Kigali and Huye	Dairy, poultry, piggery, potatoes, maize, rice and vegetables

Target groups. The programme directly targeted unemployed and underemployed rural youth, with a deliberate focus on those experiencing heightened vulnerability. The targeting criteria incorporated key demographic dimensions, particularly age and gender. The programme distinguished between younger youth (18 to 25 years old) and older youth (26 to 35 years old), ensuring that interventions reached not only those easier to engage (typically older youth) but younger individuals, who often encounter greater barriers to labour market entry.

A gender target was set to ensure that at least 50 per cent of the beneficiaries were women. Accomplishing this required proactive, context-specific measures to address structural barriers that limit women's access to training, employment opportunities and productive resources.

The programme adopted a multilayered adaptive targeting strategy to ensure precision and inclusivity. This included segmenting employment opportunities, tailoring youth outreach and mobilization strategies, diversifying communication channels and addressing common constraints, especially those affecting young women's participation.

Deliberate efforts were also made to reach youth with multiple and intersecting disadvantages, particularly youth with disabilities, reflecting the shared commitment of BMZ, the Visa Foundation and IFAD to the principle of leaving no one behind.

Collectively, these measures ensured that programme interventions extended beyond the most accessible segments of the target population, facilitating more equitable access to opportunities for vulnerable rural youth.

IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW

MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The programme was managed by IFAD's Environment, Climate, Gender and Social Inclusion Division throughout its implementation period. A dedicated core technical team comprising a youth employment specialist, a programme analyst, a consultant covering gender and targeting and an administrative assistant provided continuous backstopping support to operations across all nine countries.

Overall responsibility for fiduciary oversight rested with IFAD, which ensured sound financial management and monitored technical performance across the portfolio.

Structured coordination mechanisms were put in place to support effective implementation. Quarterly technical meetings brought together IFAD, implementing partners and cofinancing partners (BMZ and the Visa Foundation) to review progress, address challenges and align on strategic priorities. These meetings were complemented with regular supervision and implementation support missions, which provided direct field-level oversight and operational guidance.

Standard operating procedures for financial management systems and reporting were harmonized across all country operations from the outset, ensuring consistency, transparency and accountability in the use of programme resources.

COUNTRY IMPLEMENTATION MODELS AND TIMEFRAMES

A range of partnering hosts and implementing partners were engaged to manage and implement country-level operations at different points as indicated above, including a host of recognized global and local partners committed to learning by doing, with a focus on how best to facilitate wage employment among rural youth.

TABLE 3
ABHP COUNTRY-LEVEL IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

COUNTRY	PARTNERING HOST	IMPLEMENTING PARTNER(S)	LAUNCH	COMPLETION	CLOSING
Nigeria	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA)	IITA / Africa Projects Development Centre	July 2020	30 June 2025	31 December 2025
Rwanda	Kilimo Trust	Kilimo Trust / Rwanda Polytechnic	July 2020	30 June 2025	30 October 2025
Cameroon	Corporation for Regional Rural Development Training (PROCASUR)	AGRO-PME Foundation (years 1–4); PROCASUR (year 5)	September 2021	30 June 2025	31 December 2025
Kenya	PROCASUR	Ustadi Foundation / Centre of Excellence for Livestock, Innovation and Business (CoELIB) / Pwani University	September 2021	30 June 2025	30 September 2025
Mozambique	Beira Agricultural Growth Corridor	Institute for Promotion of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises / Agrarian Training Institute of Chimoio / Immersion Découverte en Entreprise	October 2021	30 June 2025	30 September 2025
Algeria	International Labour Organization (ILO)	National Employment Agency / National Bureau of Studies for Rural Development / National Entrepreneurship Support and Development Agency	September 2022	30 June 2025	30 September 2025
Côte d'Ivoire	ILO	Côte d'Ivoire Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Agency (Côte d'Ivoire Petites et Moyennes Entreprises (CIPME) / National Agency for Rural Development (Agence Nationale d'Appui au Développement Rural) (Côte d'Ivoire) (ANADER)	September 2022	30 June 2025	30 September 2025
Madagascar	ILO	Malagasy–Norway Livestock and Agricultural Development Centre (Fiompiana Fambolena Malagasy Norveziana) (FIFAMANOR) Agricultural Vocational Training Support Centre (Centre d'Appui à la Formation Professionnelle Agricole) (CAFFPA) / Observatoire de la Jeunesse / Service d'Appui à la Formation Professionnelle Agricole et à l'Insertion	September 2022	30 June 2025	30 September 2025
Malawi	ILO	The Technical, Entrepreneurial and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TEVETA)/ Farmers' Forum for Trade and Social Justice (FAFOTRAJ)	September 2022	30 June 2025	30 September 2025

A defining feature of the programme was the diversity of implementation arrangements adopted across countries. Rather than imposing a standardized delivery model, the programme required each partnering host and implementing partner to design and adapt operational strategies, ensuring their responsiveness to local contexts and evolving needs. This included tailoring interventions to labour market dynamics, sectoral opportunities, institutional landscapes and the specific characteristics of vulnerable rural youth. In several cases, it also involved expanding beyond the initially designated geographic areas to capture emerging employment opportunities.

In Nigeria, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) leveraged its well-established agricultural research and development platform to expand operations across multiple states beyond the core hubs in Oyo, Imo and Abuja. This broad reach, combined with an expanding network of private sector partnerships, enabled Nigeria to emerge as one of the programme's top-performing operations in terms of both outreach and wage employment outcomes.

In Rwanda, Kilimo Trust worked primarily, though not exclusively, through the Rwanda Polytechnic network of integrated professional and research colleges as key entry points for youth upskilling and reskilling. This model proved particularly effective in reaching younger youth and stands out as one of the programme's best examples of ecosystem development. Notable achievements included the creation of a digital labour market intermediation platform and a pioneering programme for youth with disabilities that received national recognition.

In Cameroon and Kenya, PROCASUR established consortia with in-country implementing partners – the AGRO-PME Foundation in Cameroon and the Ustadi Foundation in Kenya – alongside networks of technical and vocational training institutions and local liaison offices that served as entry points for rural youth. Operations in both countries demonstrated the programme's capacity to generate wage employment at scale, even in contexts initially considered challenging, through innovative and adaptive mechanisms that evolved beyond those envisaged during the pre-hub phase.

In Mozambique, the Beira Agricultural Growth Corridor operated in one of the most structurally constrained environments in the programme portfolio. Limited private sector investment, recurrent climate-related shocks and a heavy donor focus on entrepreneurship significantly constrained wage employment opportunities. In response, the operation in central Mozambique adapted its model by shifting the emphasis towards self-employment and diversifying its entrepreneurship support packages to align with viable local opportunities in highly rural settings.

The four country operations managed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) – Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar and Malawi – benefited substantially from lessons learned during earlier phases of the programme. This allowed for faster start-up and more strategically focused implementation. The IFAD technical team provided targeted support to ensure that these lessons were embedded from the outset. ILO's ability to leverage synergies with its existing programmes, as well as its strong institutional relationships, proved particularly valuable in countries such as Algeria and Malawi. Across all four contexts, the involvement of national agencies and government institutions in implementation arrangements contributed to cost-effective delivery and in several cases strengthened the foundation for long-term sustainability.

KEY PARTNERSHIPS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Partnership development was not merely an enabling factor in the programme but a core delivery mechanism. Anchored in the ecosystem approach, each country hub actively built, strengthened and expanded networks of stakeholders across the full spectrum of actors relevant to rural youth employment. In several contexts, these partnerships were further decentralized to subnational levels to reflect geographic realities and improve responsiveness, as demonstrated in Algeria and Kenya.

Private sector engagement was critical to the wage employment pathway. Partnering hosts and implementing partners established and furthered relationships with agribusiness enterprises, processing companies, cooperatives and private sector associations, which served as key sources of employment and work-based learning opportunities. In Kenya, Nigeria and Rwanda, these relationships evolved into strategic partnerships that extended well beyond job placement, contributing to more sustainable and demand-driven employment outcomes.

Government partnerships were equally critical across both wage and self-employment pathways. These collaborations allowed for alignment with existing public programmes supporting youth employment, as seen in Algeria, Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire, and supported the institutionalization of services. In Algeria and Côte d'Ivoire, implementation was fully embedded in government institutions, strengthening ownership and enhancing prospects for sustainability. In Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda, partnerships with technical and vocational education and training regulatory bodies facilitated the certification of training programmes, thereby increasing formal recognition of the skills acquired by beneficiaries. In Cameroon, Mozambique and Nigeria, government institutions were engaged in ways tailored to the specific operational context.

Development partners, including German Agency for International Cooperation and IFAD's broader country programme portfolios, provided complementary entry points for beneficiary outreach and opportunities for synergy. This collaboration contributed to extension of the programme's reach while increasing cost-efficiency, including reductions in per-beneficiary costs in several countries.

Collectively, these partnerships were instrumental in translating the programme's design into tangible results at scale. By leveraging the comparative advantages of diverse stakeholders, the ABHP was able to expand outreach, improve the quality and relevance of employment opportunities and increase cost-efficiency. Importantly, the ecosystem of partnerships established under the programme provides a firm foundation for sustainability and future scale-up, as many of these relationships, systems and institutional linkages are expected to continue delivering impact beyond the programme's life cycle.

KEY RESULTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

RESULTS AGAINST PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

The ABHP significantly exceeded its life-of-project targets. Although designed as a flagship pilot programme with a relatively limited geographic scope, its primary aim was to test and demonstrate innovative models for rural youth employment across diverse contexts.

Over six years of implementation, the programme reached 54,720 rural youth. By October 2025, 32,833 had successfully transitioned into employment, equivalent to 291 per cent of the original target. The programme consistently observed that transitions into employment, particularly following intensive upskilling or entrepreneurship interventions, often require three to nine months. Therefore, although the transition rate was below the initially projected 85 per cent at the cut-off point, it is expected that this rate continued to rise beyond October 2025.

In addition to direct employment outcomes, programme interventions generated 26,684 spillover jobs, bringing the total number of youth securing employment through the ABHP to 59,517. These results demonstrate the programme's high degree of effectiveness in facilitating both direct and indirect employment opportunities for vulnerable rural youth.

TABLE 4

PERFORMANCE TOWARDS LIFE-OF-PROJECT TARGETS AGREED WITH DONORS

TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT	LIFE-OF-PROJECT TARGET	ACHIEVED (OCT 2025)	PERFORMANCE
Direct jobs (wage and self-employment)	11 275	32 833	291%
Wage employment	9 020	24 393	270%
Self-employment	2 255	8 440	374%
Women securing direct jobs	5 638	12 844	228%
Spillover/indirect jobs	11 275	26 684	237%
TOTAL direct and spillover employment	22 550	59 517	264%

Performance peaked as country teams began to explore multiple entry points into employment. This was particularly evident in the early-joining countries – Cameroon, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria and Rwanda – where partnering hosts and implementing partners initially relied heavily on intensive training-institution-based re/upskilling, combining classroom instruction with practical training delivered at their centres or through partner institutions.

Over time, operational strategies evolved as private sector actors increasingly recognized the value of work-based learning partnerships with training institutions. Nigeria led the way by adopting a fully industry-based skills development approach at select sites for youth on the wage employment track, providing participants with direct exposure to industry practices, improving their skills and boosting their competitiveness in the labour market.

Following the midterm review, country partners began experimenting with a wider array of entry points. By this stage, robust employment ecosystems were in place, and partners had developed a nuanced understanding of local labour markets. This enabled the identification of multiple pathways for youth to secure employment, some of which were substantially more cost-efficient than those employed at the programme's outset.

TABLE 5

ABHP DIRECT EMPLOYMENT PROGRESSION (CUMULATIVE TOTALS PER COUNTRY)

COUNTRY LAUNCH DATE	LIFE-OF-PROJECT TARGET FOR DIRECT EMPLOYMENT			CUMULATIVE END 2021			CUMULATIVE END 2022		
	WE	SE	TOTAL	WE	SE	TOTAL	WE	SE	TOTAL
Nigeria Jul-2020	1 540	660	2 200	–	–	–	55	90	145
Rwanda Jul-2020	840	360	1 200	–	–	–	85	52	137
Cameroon Sep-2021	875	375	1 250	–	–	–	21	0	21
Kenya Sep-2021	875	375	1 250	–	–	–	–	–	–
Mozambique Oct-2021	120	1 080	1 200	–	–	–	–	–	–
Algeria Sep-2022	770	330	1 100	–	–	–	–	–	–
Côte d'Ivoire Sep-2022	1 050	450	1 500	–	–	–	–	–	–
Madagascar Sep-2022	1 050	450	1 500	–	–	–	–	–	–
Malawi Sep-2022	1 050	450	1 500	–	–	–	–	–	–
TOTAL	9 020	2 255	11 275	–	–	–	161	142	303

TABLE 5 *(continued)***ABHP DIRECT EMPLOYMENT PROGRESSION (CUMULATIVE TOTALS PER COUNTRY)**

COUNTRY LAUNCH DATE	CUMULATIVE END 2023			CUMULATIVE END 2024			CUMULATIVE END 2025		
	WE	SE	TOTAL	WE	SE	TOTAL	WE	SE	TOTAL
Nigeria Jul-2020	1 338	394	1 732	2 673	909	3 582	3 898	1 785	5 683
Rwanda Jul-2020	522	388	910	2 854	564	3 418	7 591	620	8 211
Cameroon Sep-2021	630	420	1 050	1 155	450	1 605	1 235	450	1 685
Kenya Sep-2021	548	372	920	1 147	386	1 533	1 237	428	1 665
Mozambique Oct-2021	40	224	264	133	1 033	1 166	159	1 175	1 334
Algeria Sep-2022	–	–	–	5 082	1 864	6 946	7 360	2 008	9 368
Côte d'Ivoire Sep-2022	142	383	525	763	287	1 050	1 153	430	1 583
Madagascar Sep-2022	188	247	435	541	594	1 135	964	756	1 720
Malawi Sep-2022	124	581	705	641	781	1 422	796	788	1 584
TOTAL	3 532	3 009	6 541	14 989	6 868	21 857	24 393	8 440	32 833

Critically, the programme demonstrated that intensive classroom training is not always a prerequisite for youth to secure employment. Only 32 per cent of targeted youth received comprehensive, centre-based training packages, while the remaining 68 per cent transitioned into employment through lighter-touch, lower-cost interventions. These packages included soft skills development, direct job placement, business development services, labour market intermediation and linkages to financial institutions. This finding has important implications for the design and cost-effectiveness of future scale-up efforts, highlighting the potential to achieve substantial employment outcomes through more flexible, resource-efficient approaches.

EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS: WAGE AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT

The programme consistently pursued its 70:30 wage-to-self-employment design ratio while maintaining the flexibility to adapt to country-specific realities, as exemplified in Mozambique. At the overall programme level, wage employment accounted for 74 per cent of all direct employment secured with programme support.

Across countries, several factors were consistently associated with successful wage employment outcomes: (i) strategic selection of geographic target areas and value chain nodes with genuine employment potential; (ii) effective labour market intermediation and youth-employer matching services; (iii) strong employer engagement and trust-building between stakeholders and the programme; and (iv) targeted work-based learning opportunities, such as internships and apprenticeships, that enabled youth to acquire practical competencies in real work settings.

Self-employment support focused on both start-up facilitation and business acceleration. The services offered included (i) incubation; (ii) access to productive assets, where feasible; (iii) linkages with financial services; (iv) business plan development support; and (v) technical skills development. Each country adapted these services to local entrepreneurial ecosystems, considering access to finance, the availability of start-up kits and the specific characteristics of the youth targeted. In Mozambique, where structural constraints limited wage employment opportunities, a self-employment-focused model yielded robust outcomes when entrepreneurship support was tailored to local market realities and delivered as close as possible to the beneficiaries.

These experiences underscore a key lesson: to be effective, operational strategies for both wage and self-employment must be context-sensitive and aligned with local labour market and entrepreneurial realities.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Youth segmentation by age

A critical programme operational decision was the segmentation of youth into younger (18 to 25 years old) and older (26 to 35 years old) age groups. This approach allowed the ABHP to actively reach youth who face the greatest barriers to employment, rather than serving only older youth, who are typically easier and less costly to engage. By setting explicit quotas for younger youth, achieving 40 per cent across the programme, the ABHP ensured that this subsegment was effectively served. Younger youth ultimately accounted for 41 per cent of all youth placed in jobs, demonstrating that appropriately designed interventions can successfully engage this harder-to-reach group. Success was supported by tailored mobilization strategies, careful follow-up and alignment with training institutions, where applicable.

Gender equality and women's empowerment

The programme adopted a gender parity participation quota to ensure that women were included in all operations. Across the portfolio, 12,844 women secured direct employment, exceeding the target by 227 per cent and accounting for 39 per cent of all youth employed. Country-level performance varied: Cameroon, Malawi, Nigeria and Rwanda achieved or approached gender parity, while Kenya, Mozambique and particularly Algeria faced persistent structural barriers, including restrictive gender norms, caregiving responsibilities, mobility challenges and the nature of available employment opportunities.

To mitigate these barriers, country hubs introduced innovative measures, including joint application interviews with spouses, childcare support during training, the recruitment of women near employment sites and extending age eligibility for women with young children. In Algeria, a specialized entrepreneurship package was developed to enable young rural women to pursue business opportunities near their homes. These practical interventions significantly improved women's participation and provide lessons for their systematic inclusion in future scale-up efforts.

The ABHP also established a grievance redress mechanism that included reporting and response protocols for sexual harassment/sexual exploitation and abuse (SH/SEA) in line with IFAD standards. No SH/SEA incidents were reported during the programme's lifetime. It should be noted that the programme was not designed to be fully gender-transformative. Achieving structural gender parity would require dedicated funding, specialized expertise and interventions that address the root causes of inequality. The ABHP's success lies in its mainstreaming of gender considerations across targeting, recruitment, training design and employment support.

Broader social inclusion

The programme made deliberate efforts to reach socially excluded youth, including those with disabilities, internally displaced persons, refugees, returnees, migrants and ex-combatants. Employer sensitivity to hiring persons with disabilities was the main determinant of success. Nigeria and Rwanda achieved remarkable results, enabling almost 170 persons with disabilities to secure wage and self-employment through partnerships with disability-sensitive employers and associations. Both Kilimo Trust and IITA received recognition for their commitment to inclusive employment, providing a model for other countries.

Digitalization and green programming

Environmental sustainability and digital innovation were integrated as cross-cutting themes from the outset. Cameroon and Kenya incorporated green job opportunities, including organic waste recycling, renewable energy, climate-smart agriculture and agroforestry, into their operational strategies. Nigeria and Rwanda developed digital platforms for labour market intermediation, increasing youth access to employment opportunities and improving operational efficiency.

The programme also highlighted the role of youth beneficiaries themselves as active information conduits. Many leveraged social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook to share programme opportunities with their networks and provide informal technical assistance to peers. This demonstrated the untapped potential of digital communication channels to increase outreach, engagement and peer-to-peer support, suggesting avenues for further exploration to increase programme effectiveness and impact.

Programme experiences also underscore the opportunity for the scale-up phase to systematically integrate green and digital perspectives from the outset. In addition, rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI) offer a timely opportunity to explore how AI tools could enhance operational efficiency, programmatic agility and the overall beneficiary experience in locations with reliable internet connectivity.

OUTCOME EVALUATION FINDINGS

In 2025, independent programme outcome evaluations commissioned by IFAD and ILO assessed the ABHP across strategically selected thematic areas, providing external validation of the programme's approach, results and lessons for scale-up. The full outcome evaluation report is available as a separate annex document accompanying the completion report. Key findings are summarized below.

Relevance and coherence

The evaluations confirmed that the programme was highly relevant to IFAD's institutional mandate, the participating countries' national priorities in rural youth employment and the needs of youth and other key stakeholders. The ABHP demonstrated strong internal coherence by effectively combining structured training with other upskilling mechanisms, labour market intermediation and support for emerging entrepreneurs and microentrepreneurs within a single programme framework. The evaluations validated the programme's proof of concept: the agribusiness hub model successfully mobilizes rural youth, develops market-relevant skills and facilitates employment access through dedicated, locally responsive ecosystems.

Impact on youth

Programme participants reported higher incomes, greater independence and confidence and improved overall well-being. Many young people were able to support their families by providing food, funding siblings' education and, in some cases, continuing their own. Satisfaction with the quality and relevance of upskilling services was consistently high across countries.

Areas for strengthening in scale-up

The evaluations highlighted several areas where future iterations of the programme could be strengthened:

- ▶ **Employment quality.** While some country operations generated formal decent work, others produced predominantly informal, low-paid or insecure employment.
- ▶ **Entrepreneurship support.** The integration of financial institutions and business development service providers was inadequate in several contexts. In some cases, the programme replaced these actors rather than building their capacity and connecting youth to them.
- ▶ **Post-employment follow-up.** Long-term mentoring and support for youth after transitioning into employment was identified as a recurring gap across the portfolio.
- ▶ **Standardization of definitions and targeting.** Employment definitions varied across countries, limiting the rigour of cross-country analysis. Additionally, vulnerability assessment approaches were not consistently standardized, though they were implicitly applied. Explicitly structuring and documenting these approaches could improve future comparability and targeting.

- ▶ **Gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE).** Programme experience shows that employment facilitation alone is not enough where restrictive gender norms limit women's participation in the labour market. Achieving gender parity requires targeted interventions that address structural barriers, including household-level engagement, childcare support, employer sensitization and financial inclusion. Strengthening GEWE systems through structured approaches such as the Gender Action Learning System improved monitoring of gender outcomes. Dedicated budget allocations will be critical to ensuring women's sustained access to and benefit from decent and productive employment.

Conclusion

Overall, the outcome evaluations confirmed the ABHP's high relevance, strong coherence and positive impact on youth employment and well-being. The findings provide actionable insights for improving employment quality, strengthening entrepreneurship linkages, standardizing monitoring approaches and improving post-employment support – key considerations for the programme's scale-up phase.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

BUDGET OVERVIEW

The ABHP was financed through three funding streams: a EUR 10 million grant from BMZ, a US\$3.5 million grant from the Visa Foundation and a US\$3.5 million contribution from IFAD.

BMZ funding was disbursed in five tranches over the life of the programme, with the fifth and final tranche of EUR 2 million received in 2024. Visa Foundation funding was disbursed across four tranches, with the final tranche of US\$583,060 also received in 2024.

FUND UTILIZATION

The following table summarizes the use of funds over the life of the programme.

The distribution of funding across participating countries reflects the length and breadth of the corresponding operations. The information highlights yet again the role played by the countries that joined the programme early, which laid the groundwork for substantial learning that benefited the programme as a whole.

TABLE 6
CUMULATIVE USE OF FUNDS 2020–2025 ABHP

SPENT PER YEAR								
Source	As of 2020	As of 2021	As of 2022	As of 2023	As of 2024	As of 2025	Total admin. fee	TOTAL
BMZ (EUR)	403 154.72	1 608 527.53	3 917 577.43	4 564 945.50	7 326 253	8 798 246	800 000	9 598 246
Visa Foundation (US\$)	n/a	929 741.66	1 018 002.37	1 783 437.00	2 618 819	2 618 819	280 000	2 898 819
IFAD (US\$)	749 730.20	1 078 949.20	1 744 957.70	2 374 922.59	3 316 918.6	3 409 547.09*		3 409 547.09

* Final disbursements completed in early 2026.

Financial systems developed at the programme's outset were successfully adopted and harmonized across all nine countries, with standardized financial reporting and standard operating procedures ensuring accountability and transparency. No incidents of financial mismanagement were reported during the life of the programme.

COST-EFFECTIVENESS

A beneficiary cost analysis conducted in 2025 estimated the average cost per directly employed youth at US\$567 as of December 2024. The cost structure comprised approximately 41 per cent fixed costs and 59 per cent variable costs.

Cost per beneficiary varied widely across countries, reflecting differences in the intensity of the support provided, local operating costs and the employment pathways and strategies implemented in each context. For example, Mozambique reported the highest average cost per beneficiary, at US\$856, reflecting a higher-intensity model adapted to structural and operational challenges. Algeria, in contrast, achieved an exceptionally low cost of US\$146 per beneficiary, demonstrating how leveraging well-functioning government structures and programmes can yield highly efficient results.

Countries with larger in-country partnering host/implementing partner teams, such as Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria and Rwanda, tended to have higher fixed costs, consistent with more resource-intensive project management and operational arrangements. Efficiency increased when operations offered multiple entry points to employment, including lighter-touch, lower-cost interventions such as direct job placement, soft skills training or digital engagement.

This analysis underscores a key transferable lesson for the scale-up phase: **flexible context-sensitive approaches that combine high- and low-intensity interventions can maximize both reach and cost-effectiveness, ensuring that resources are efficiently deployed while maintaining quality employment outcomes for rural youth.**

SUSTAINABILITY

SUSTAINABILITY OF OUTCOMES

The ABHP was designed as a pilot flagship programme within IFAD, aimed at testing and demonstrating scalable approaches to rural youth employment, particularly in wage employment. Sustainability was not premised on the programme continuing indefinitely, but rather, on **building capacity, fostering partnerships and institutionalizing systems** to ensure that the ecosystems established could continue functioning independently and attract investment for future scale-up.

Outcome evaluations and programme monitoring confirm that sustainability prospects are highest when three conditions converge:

1. **Government integration:** Ecosystem stakeholders include government institutions as co-owners of the model, ensuring legitimacy, continuity and long-term resourcing.
2. **Private sector buy-in:** Employers and private sector associations maintain a genuine stake in the ongoing delivery of youth employment facilitation services.
3. **Institutionalized skills and systems:** Competencies, processes and tools developed under the programme are embedded in organizational systems rather than residing solely with external professionals.

Country examples highlight these dynamics:

- ▶ **Algeria** demonstrates particularly strong sustainability, as all consortium members are government institutions with stable mandates. Governance structures established under the programme continue to bring employers, government agencies and workers' organizations together in a formal, durable arrangement.
- ▶ **Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda** benefit from formalized technical and vocational education and training curricula that integrate programme-supported training into national technical and vocational systems, along with digital platforms and permanent government engagement. For example, Rwanda's **r-yes.com** platform continues to connect rural youth with employment opportunities beyond programme operations.
- ▶ **Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire** illustrate ecosystem adoption by partners who continue to implement elements of the ABHP model independently.

Knowledge management investments, including technical policy briefs, “how to do” notes, programme brochures and research outputs from Nigeria, ensure that the lessons from six years of implementation remain accessible to IFAD, development partners and other stakeholders seeking to replicate or scale the model.

The sustainability of outcomes is also reinforced by the **flexibility and responsiveness** of the ABHP model, which demonstrated that a range of entry points for youth – wage employment, self-employment, work-based learning, digital intermediation and entrepreneurship support – can be adapted to local realities while maintaining impact. This adaptability heightens the potential for ecosystems established under the programme to continue generating employment outcomes independently.

FINANCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Financial sustainability under the ABHP is closely tied to **strategic partnerships, cost-effective operational models and evidence-based approaches**. The programme demonstrated that lower-cost interventions, such as soft skills development, direct placements and digital labour market intermediation, can complement more intensive upskilling approaches while maintaining significant employment outcomes. This flexibility lowers per-beneficiary costs, improves efficiency and bolsters the case for continued investment by governments, private sector actors and development partners.

Institutional sustainability was achieved where ecosystem actors internalized responsibilities for youth employment facilitation. In countries such as Algeria, Malawi and Rwanda, **government agencies and technical and vocational training institutions** took ownership of key programme functions, including curricula development, certification and employment linkage services. Similarly, private sector engagement, particularly through partnerships with agribusinesses, cooperatives and employer associations, helped ensure ongoing demand-driven employment support.

The ABHP also demonstrated that **integrated ecosystem approaches** increase sustainability by distributing responsibilities across stakeholders rather than concentrating them in a single implementing entity, embedding monitoring, mentoring and support mechanisms in existing institutions and promoting collaboration between governments, the private sector and youth organizations.

Scalability potential is high due to:

- ▶ **Documented proof of concept** with measurable results across nine countries;
- ▶ Adaptable operational models that balance intensive and lower-cost interventions;
- ▶ Knowledge products and technical guidance capturing lessons learned;
- ▶ Established networks of committed government, private sector and development partners ready to expand the approach.

Collectively, these factors suggest that the ecosystems, skills and partnerships developed under the ABHP provide a firm foundation for the **sustainable and scalable expansion** of rural youth employment initiatives across Africa. Future investments can leverage these structures and learning to **increase impact, efficiency and reach** while further strengthening gender inclusion, social equity and financial linkages.

RISKS TO SUSTAINABILITY

The outcome evaluations identified **minor but tangible risks**:

- ▶ **Limited institutional mandates or funding streams** for service providers may reduce service delivery after programme closure.
- ▶ **Programme substitution of critical services**, such as financial or business advisory support, could leave youth-led enterprises vulnerable if local actors are not fully capacitated.
- ▶ **Fragile ecosystems** lacking a critical mass of employers or service providers remain dependent on partnering host/implementing partner engagement.

These risks are well understood and will inform the scale-up phase, where sustainability will be a **central design feature**, including greater integration of permanent institutions, diversified funding mechanisms and improved ecosystem governance.

LINKING SUSTAINABILITY TO RESULTS AND SCALE-UP

The ABHP demonstrates that **impactful and sustainable rural youth employment is achievable** when interventions:

- ▶ Are embedded in **locally responsive ecosystems**;
- ▶ Combine **wage and self-employment pathways** tailored to market realities;
- ▶ Incorporate **inclusive targeting and gender considerations**;
- ▶ Leverage **cost-effective, flexible operational strategies**.

These elements provide a firm foundation for scale-up. By systematically addressing identified risks, institutionalizing operational lessons and building on strong government and private sector partnerships, the ABHP model is **replicable, sustainable and scalable across sub-Saharan Africa and beyond**.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

WHAT WORKED AND WHY

Six years of implementation across nine African countries generated substantial operational knowledge, revealing the factors that drive success (see annexes for annual reports over the implementation period):

- ▶ **Context specificity drives success and sustainability.** Operations that adapted to local labour market dynamics, geographic realities and the specific profiles of vulnerable youth consistently outperformed static one-size-fits-all approaches. Investments in preparatory research and adaptive management were critical to relevance and meeting targets.
- ▶ **Not all youth require intensive in-classroom training.** Lighter-touch interventions including soft skills, confidence-building, direct job placement and labour market intermediation were sufficient for a significant share of youth to secure employment. Intensive re/upskilling should be targeted to those who need it most, optimizing cost-effectiveness while maintaining impact.
- ▶ **Wage employment is feasible with targeted strategies.** Access to wage employment was achieved when strategic geographic and sector targeting, strong employer engagement, trust-building and work-based learning were combined. These approaches enabled youth to gain competencies and demonstrate their skills in real work environments.
- ▶ **Staggered implementation and adaptive management add value.** Later cohorts benefited from early learning, facilitating faster, more effective deployment in Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar and Malawi. This validated the programme's phased roll-out approach as a mechanism for improving operational efficiency and outcomes.

WHAT DID NOT WORK WELL AND WHY

- ▶ **Post-employment follow-up was insufficient.** In phase III support, coaching and mentoring after placement was the weakest element across countries. Limited operational bandwidth constrained systematic follow-up – a gap that must be addressed in future programming.

- ▶ **Youth access to financial services was constrained.** Limited engagement with financial service providers left some youth-led enterprises without the capital or advisory support needed to consolidate the business. The programme occasionally substituted these services itself, highlighting structural barriers that require ecosystem-based solutions in the scale-up.
- ▶ **GEWE outcomes require dedicated resources.** While gender mainstreaming facilitated substantial female participation, structural barriers in Algeria, Kenya and Mozambique limited outcomes. Achieving true gender equality requires more intensive, well-resourced proactive interventions beyond standard operational measures.
- ▶ **Employment definitions must be standardized.** Variability in how employment outcomes were recorded limited cross-country comparisons. Standardized definitions and job quality metrics are critical to accurately monitoring decent employment outcomes.

For practical guidance on applying these lessons, including step-by-step approaches, see the “how to do” note in the annexes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING

The ABHP reinforced the strategic framing of rural youth as **agents of inclusive rural transformation** and not merely beneficiaries or risks. Future programming should embed:

- ▶ Context-responsive design and adaptive management;
- ▶ Cost-effective flexible employment pathways;
- ▶ Inclusive targeting and gender-transformative approaches;
- ▶ Standardized definitions of employment and job quality;
- ▶ Structured post-placement support and financial inclusion mechanisms.

The **Policy and Partnership Forum** (Naivasha, 2025) endorsed these lessons, underscoring the importance of ecosystem-based interventions for scalable, sustainable rural youth employment. The policy priorities discussed during the forum are available in the annexes.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The ABHP closes as one of IFAD's most compelling recent flagship initiatives, demonstrating that ecosystem-based rural youth employment models can cost-effectively deliver substantive impact at scale.

- ▶ **Employment impact exceeded targets.** A total of 32,833 young people secured employment, nearly three times the life-of-project target of 11,275, with an average cost per beneficiary of US\$567.
- ▶ **Scalable, cost-effective approaches were validated.** Lighter-touch interventions, adaptive management and ecosystem-based strategies facilitated robust results across diverse labour markets and institutional arrangements.
- ▶ **Inclusive and sustainable results were achieved.** Younger youth, women, and youth with disabilities benefited from targeted interventions, and partnerships with government, private sector and training institutions laid the foundation for sustainability.

Recommendations for scale-up

1. **Standardize employment monitoring and job quality metrics:** Implement a common results framework across countries, building on methodologies such as the ILO job quality score.
2. **Increase attention to structural barriers to GEWE:** Dedicate resources and strategies to overcome structural barriers and achieve parity, particularly in contexts with persistent gender inequities.
3. **Strengthen phase III/post-employment support:** Ensure that coaching, mentoring and follow-up for career progression and enterprise growth are systematically embedded.
4. **Embed financial inclusion in the ecosystem:** Engage financial service providers as committed partners, develop group-based savings and microfinance linkages and leverage IFAD portfolio synergies to ensure youth access to capital.

5. **Prioritize sustainability:** Anchor ecosystems in government and institutional structures, formalize ownership and explore monetization pathways for hub services to reduce donor dependence.
6. **Maintain adaptive, context-specific operational strategies:** Retain a flexible locally owned approach while standardizing core frameworks for monitoring, targeting and results.

The ABHP confirms that **decent employment for vulnerable rural youth is achievable, scalable and cost-effective**. The programme's tested model and lessons learned provide a compelling basis for investment in a scale-up phase, promising wider systemic impact and transformative opportunities for rural youth across Africa.



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ANNEXES

1. [Programme outcome evaluation report](#)
2. [First year annual progress report](#)
3. [Second year annual progress report](#)
4. [Third year annual progress report](#)
5. [Fourth year annual progress report](#)
6. [Fifth year annual progress report](#)
7. [Final year progress report](#)
8. [Policy forum report](#)
9. [Policies to advance youth empowerment and decent work in Africa's agri-food systems: Priorities from the policy lab session held at the Agribusiness Hubs Policy and Partnership Forum](#)
10. [How to do note: The ecosystem approach to decent rural youth employment and entrepreneurship](#)



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