International Labour Organization

Evaluation Office

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Independent final evaluation of ProAgro YOUTH: support to integrated agribusiness hubs in Algeria, Côte d’Ivoire, Madagascar and Malawi

QUICK FACTS

Countries: Algeria, Côte d’Ivoire, Madagascar, Malawi

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Evaluation type: Project

Evaluation timing: Final

Administrative Office: ROAF, Co-Abidjan, Co-Antananarivo, Co-Lusaka, Co-Algiers

Technical Office: EMPLAB (HQ), Decent Work Teams – Dakar, Cairo and Pretoria

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BACKGROUND & CONTEXT	
Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure	The ProAgro YOUTH programme, implemented by the ILO with IFAD and other partners, aimed to promote decent employment for rural youth in Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar and Malawi. The initiative was conceived as a pilot to test an integrated agribusiness-hub model linking skills development, job placement and entrepreneurship support to local value chains. The project's intervention logic combined two mutually reinforcing components. The first centred on country-level implementation through the establishment and operationalization of agribusiness hubs providing responsive upskilling services. The second component focused on knowledge generation and policy influence, documenting lessons learned, producing diagnostics and contributing evidence to regional and global debates on youth employment. Within this structure, the programme integrated dual pathways for wage and self-employment under an inclusive framework targeting NEET youth—particularly young women—while embedding gender equality and non-discrimination principles. The agribusiness hubs were conceived as local ecosystems connecting training institutions, private-sector actors, financial service providers and public agencies, and as mechanisms to generate scalable practices and inform future programming.
Present situation of the project	The programme was part of IFAD's Agribusiness Hub Programme, implemented in nine countries, and wrapped up in September 2025. Given the programme's designation as a pilot of the agribusiness hub model, it is possible that further projects based on the same concept will be implemented.
Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation	The final evaluation covered the period from July 2022 to September 2025 and included activities in four countries (Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, and Malawi), with field missions to all countries except Algeria, which had been assessed in a separate IFAD evaluation. The main objective of the evaluation was to assess relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact of the programme and to generate lessons and recommendations for future related projects. The clients of the evaluation include the ILO, IFAD, tripartite constituents, the end beneficiaries, and all relevant stakeholders.

Methodology of evaluation	The evaluation applied a mixed-methods approach combining documentary review, field missions, interviews, focus group discussions, and an online survey. Data collection tools were adapted to country contexts and guided by an evaluation matrix aligned with OECD/DAC criteria and ILO standards. Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative evidence ensured analytical depth, with interviews targeting ILO staff, implementing partners, tripartite constituents, and youth beneficiaries, and FGDs stratified by gender and vulnerability status. The survey, available in multiple languages, complemented field data and captured beneficiary perspectives on training relevance, employment outcomes, and future aspirations. Limitations included compressed timelines and uneven survey representativeness across countries; these were mitigated through triangulation of data sources and adaptive planning during field missions.

MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS	The programme was highly **relevant** to youth employment needs in rural Africa, addressing skill gaps and barriers to decent work through integrated agribusiness hubs. It aligned strongly with national employment strategies, SDG targets, and regional frameworks such as the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and the ILO Abidjan Declaration. Diagnostic studies and value chain mapping ensured contextual adaptation, identifying priority sectors like dairy and horticulture in Malawi, cassava and cashew in Côte d’Ivoire, and agro-processing in Madagascar. Gender and inclusion principles were embedded in design, though cultural barriers in Algeria limited women’s participation. Complementarity and coherence with other initiatives was evident, leveraging ILO’s technical expertise and tripartite networks, but synergies with financial institutions and IFAD investment programmes were limited. In terms of **effectiveness**, the programme substantially exceeded its quantitative targets, facilitating 14,255 jobs against 5,600 (255%), with 72% in wage employment—largely driven by Algeria’s strong institutional placement systems—while Malawi and Madagascar showed more balanced wage/self-employment outcomes. Training was short, practical and market-relevant, reflected in high satisfaction scores (4.5/5) and strong application of skills across business start-up, job search and wage performance, with

beneficiaries and partners reporting clear improvements in employability and confidence. However, job quality and sustainability varied: many wage placements were short-term or seasonal, and self-employment was hindered by limited access to start-up capital and weak financial linkages, as hubs lacked structured mechanisms to connect youth with credit providers. Component 2 generated useful knowledge products and regional dialogues, but capitalization was limited due to an undefined hub model and the absence of planned tracer studies, though the programme nonetheless demonstrated adaptability and innovation in response to contextual and operational challenges.

As far as **efficiency**, the project demonstrated strong cost-effectiveness by leveraging existing infrastructure, mobilizing local expertise, and maintaining low unit costs per trainee without compromising quality or scale. Community-based delivery models and partnerships with national training institutions minimized overhead costs and facilitated efficient resource allocation. Estimated net unit costs per job ranged from USD 62 in Algeria to USD 324 in Madagascar. Timeliness was generally achieved through flexible planning and adaptive coordination, though delays occurred in all countries due to logistical constraints and administrative bottlenecks. Efficiency was reinforced by strong partnerships, which reduced transaction costs and enabled rapid rescheduling when disruptions arose.

The programme contributed to improved employability, income generation, and institutional learning, laying foundations for systemic change. Positive spillover effects included informal incubation, peer mentoring, replication of internship models by private firms, and other models of work-based learning. However, **sustainability** remains uncertain due to the absence of a formal exit strategy and persistent barriers to finance. Institutional uptake was strongest in Algeria, where services were embedded in public systems, while other countries initiated steps to integrate training into national frameworks. Long-term impact will depend on addressing structural gaps in financial inclusion and financial infrastructure.

	Regarding cross-cutting issues, gender inclusion was a strong feature in Sub-Saharan countries, with women representing 46–53% of beneficiaries, supported by flexible eligibility criteria and women-led hubs. In Algeria, cultural norms limited outcomes for female participants, with only 17% of beneficiaries being women. Disability inclusion remained limited, with only 7% of survey respondents reporting a disability, underscoring the need for clearer operational measures for scale-up, such as minimum accessibility standards, targeted outreach, and partner selection criteria to ensure inclusive delivery. Normative integration was reflected in curriculum harmonisation, promotion of labour standards, and OSH guidelines, while environmental sustainability was most systematically operationalised in Algeria through structured support for green entrepreneurship initiatives. **The evaluation concluded that ProAgro YOUTH delivered highly relevant and effective employment services, significantly outperforming planned targets. Its flexible, partnership driven approach allowed country teams to adapt the hub model to diverse contexts and generate measurable short-term gains. Nonetheless, long term impact remains dependent on strengthening financial inclusion, clarifying and operationalising the hub model, and establishing systematic follow up mechanisms such as tracer studies—to assess job quality, sustainability and pathways for scaling.**

RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES	
Recommendations	Based on previous conclusions and lessons learnt, the evaluation proposes the following strategic recommendations to consolidate gains and inform future programming: **1. Conceptualize and operationalize the hub model** Define the agribusiness hub model with clear operational features, including its role as a connector within value chains and its capacity to integrate training, employment services, and financial linkages. Develop guidance for hub operationalization at country and regional levels to ensure consistency among core features and scalability.

	2. Strategically combine hub-based employment support with other interventions and align deployment of ProAgro YOUTH services with the deployment of development finance While the hub model deserves focal support, the ILO intervention in agricultural labour markets creates other opportunities that enhance consistency and impact, such as development of internship programmes, capacity building of employment agencies, curriculum development and certification of prior knowledge, etc.). These initiatives should be strategically and explicitly related to hubs. Similarly, it would be beneficial to seek strategic complementarity and operational connections with financial institutions, ensuring that access to credit and start-up capital complements training and job facilitation. Also explore business acceleration as a means to foster wage employment in agricultural value chains. **3. Connect ProAgro YOUTH achievements with opportunities in the international development agenda** Look for opportunities for synergies and awareness building around support for women-led farms in the context of 2026 being the International Year of the Woman Farmer. Where possible, use this increased awareness to strengthen and scale gender-responsive entrepreneurship development by providing targeted financial support, business acceleration services, and mentorship opportunities to the emerging women leaders identified in Malawi and Madagascar, and ensure that future programme phases systematically resource and incentivize women's leadership within hub governance and partner institutions in every country. **4. Use a tracer study to monitor post-placement outcomes and strengthen knowledge management.** Include quality of employment indicators—such as contract status, social protection, and income stability—alongside quantitative targets, to better capture the sustainability and decency of jobs created. **5. Plan and monitor disability inclusion** Incorporate disability inclusion into pre-hub activities by conducting context-specific accessibility and needs assessments, adapting training and physical delivery modalities accordingly, and including

	disability breakdown in project monitoring tools. Consider adopting context-specific quotas or targets for disability inclusion.
Main lessons learned and good practices	**Lesson 1:** Support to entrepreneurship requires integrated financial inclusion measures **Lesson 2:** Business acceleration complements on-the-job training for systemic impact **Lesson 3:** The hub model is effective when fully operationalized **Good Practice 1:** Diagnostics for country adaptation **Good Practice 2:** “Discovery and immersion visits” in agro-food enterprises **Good Practice 3:** Curriculum development and harmonization