

# HOW TO... PROMOTE DIGITALISATION WITHIN RURAL YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES

## A Paper Series for Rural Youth Employment

Digitalisation can help youth and women in rural areas to better access knowledge, information and job opportunities. With increasing coverage of broadband internet, digital tools and platforms have exploded in their availability which has increased overall employment on the African Continent ([The Arrival of Fast Internet and Employment in Africa\(aeaweb.org\)](http://aeaweb.org)). Though several barriers exist, using digital solutions in rural communities is possible and necessary when working on improving employment for rural youth. This How-To-Paper illustrates already used methods of incorporating digitalisation in rural employment strategies through the global project 'Employment in Rural Areas with a Focus on Youth'.

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### THE CHALLENGE

Despite urbanisation trends, the rural population in Sub-Saharan Africa will continue to grow in the coming decades. With around 25 million young people entering the labour market every year in Africa, there is a demand for more and better jobs in the agri-food sector ([BMZ](#)). Unemployment and underemployment are particular challenges in rural areas, where agriculture and informal agriculture-related enterprises remain key to earn a living ([IFAD](#)).

The promotion of youth employment in rural areas poses various challenges. One of the major challenges young people in rural areas face, is access to knowledge, information and education ([FAO](#)). (Young) rural women are particularly affected by these constraints, as their mobility is even more limited due to financial and time limitations, as well as social norms ([Van den Broeck and Kilic 2019](#)).





## HOW TO DO IT

Digital solutions such as distance learning through digital platforms, digital matching services or access to knowledge through digital channels are considered a key solution to tackle

the accessibility challenge (FAO). They can open new doors to learning and education, as well as job and business opportunities beyond remote geographic locations.



### DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

Digital connectivity and access to digital solutions are steadily increasing. By 2030, 50% of the population in sub-Saharan Africa will have a mobile subscription, of which 88% will be with a smartphone. However, a digital divide will remain between rural and urban areas, as well as between women and men (GSMA report 2023). Many youths in rural areas still lack access to stable internet connections, digital devices and the digital literacy skills to access existing digital solutions. To avoid further marginalisation of people in remote rural areas, specific measures, such as digital literacy training, or the provision of online or offline access points to digitally stored knowledge are needed. It is pertinent to, wherever possible, work with existing digital solutions as their sustainability is often ensured (existing business cases, hosting and maintenance ensured, etc.) and costs to adapt them to the rural target group are considerably lower. The *Principles for Digital Development* provide helpful guidance when working with digital solutions. If these factors are considered, digital solutions can help to reach high numbers of people with comparatively low costs.



### DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Digital technologies allow youth to enter new areas of learning and knowledge and tapping into new markets and (business) opportunities beyond their physical communities. Besides access to information and networks through the internet, digital platforms can provide information on job

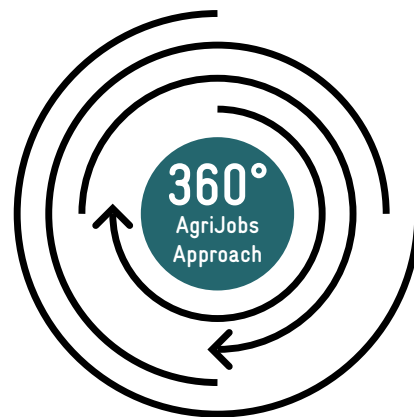
or internship openings (job matching services), market developments or provide online learning services. However, to avoid the creation of white elephants (expensive solutions that will not be used), in-depth assessments of the local conditions are required before implementation of any digital or hybrid solution.



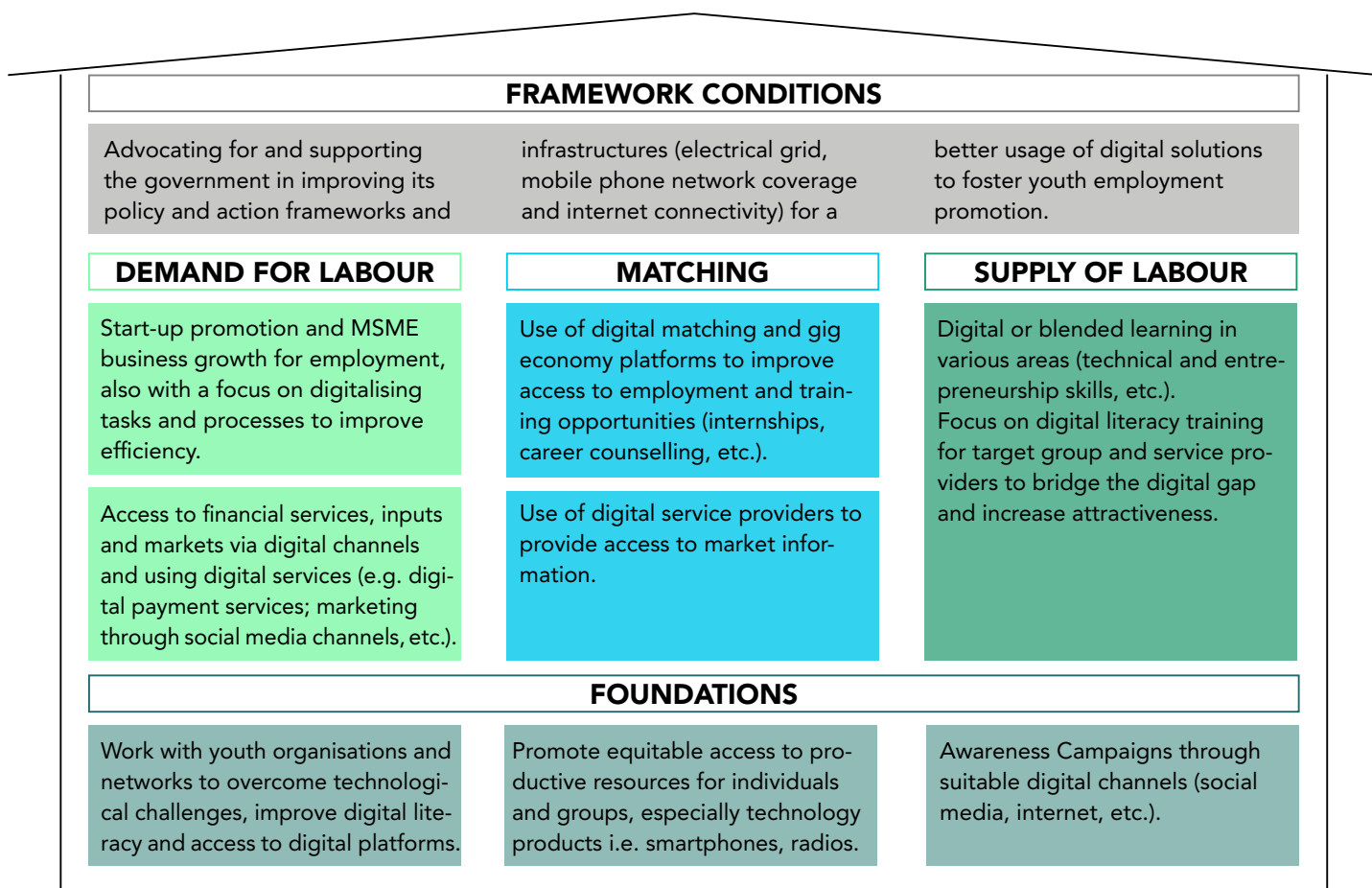
### TAILORED SOLUTIONS

Digital solutions are only of use, if tailored to the end users and adapted to their circumstances (based on their digital literacy skills, internet and technical access, e.g. type of phone, affordability, etc.). The global project 'Employment in Rural Areas with Focus on Youth' therefore partnered with the social enterprise [Butterfly Works](#) to conduct a human-centred digital readiness assessment of the target groups (e.g. youth, women, youth-led enterprises etc.) and implementing partners (e.g. ATVET centres, local employment agencies etc.), for all four countries of implementation – Burkina Faso, Kenya, Malawi and Mozambique. The reports were compiled using various methods ranging from individual interviews and group discussions to guided observations. Based on these assessments, commonly used channels and suitable digital measures were identified, as well as areas for further support (see 'Concrete Activities' below). Throughout project implementation, a continuous monitoring and adjusting to changing realities and encountered challenges is indispensable.

The global project implements an adapted integrated approach to employment promotion – the so called 360° AgriJobs Approach ([link](#)). The approach allows to analyse and address labour market constraints in rural areas in a holistic way. It combines the three main pillars of demand for labour (job creation), supply of labour (improving employability through qualification and skills) and matching (of demand and supply) with interventions to create favourable framework conditions and strengthening systemic foundations. Digital solutions can help solving problems in all spheres of the 360° AgriJobs Approach (see the graph below).



## Digitalisation measures in the 360° AgriJobs Approach



More information on digitalisation tools can be found in the Toolbox for Rural Youth Employment Promotion.

 **TOOLBOX for Rural Youth Employment Promotion**

 **Look for the #digitalisation-hashtag!**



# CONCRETE ACTIVITIES

The following section presents a selection of practical experiences and approaches that has been implemented within the Global Project Rural Employment with Focus on Youth.



## Biscate – Getting job opportunities directly to your phone

### ● Mozambique

Biscate is a mobile application that allows informal workers to find casual jobs ('gigs'). The application works online via browser or a smartphone app but also via simple text messages (USSD) on feature phones. Once a worker is registered, individual customers can request a worker's phone number when they need a specific service, such as assisting local farms in harvesting, or aiding in the packaging and distribution of various agricultural products. Corporate customers can contact the Biscate Team to hire workers in bulk to perform tem-

porary tasks for them and benefit from payroll services using mobile money. Workers can also interact between themselves to forge partnerships (value chain creation) and request internships from more experienced workers. The application also allows customers to rate the service providers and payments can be done conveniently via mobile payments. Though currently Biscate is mainly used around urban centres, the project is working with partners to expand into rural areas and the agri-food sector, through needs-based assessments identifying where Biscate can address the needs of rural workers. The application is particularly helpful for women who work from home and can gain an income and with-it financial independence all while not having to go physically jobhunting.

[Link to the article](#)

[Link to the platform](#)



## Multimedia campaigns – Reaching rural youth on their channels

### ● Kenya, Malawi, and Mozambique

Multimedia campaigns can be an effective way to reach rural youth. To be as effective as possible, it is important to choose platforms and networks that young people in rural areas already use. This can be radio, social media, printed media, or television. For this purpose, the global project is partnering with the Kenyan youth brand Shujaaz and the agricultural media house Mediae, tapping into their formats such as Shamba Shape Up. Through attractive content, youth learn about farming and businesses in the agri-food sector. The (social) media channels are also used to raise awareness on important social topics such as gender roles and sexual harassment in the work context.

In Malawi, the global project and its implementing partners started a campaign by distributing solar radios, SD cards with image materials (to be shared between phones) and comic posters in youth clubs. The combination of these different media aims at reaching youth on multiple channels and encourage the sharing of materials further (via SD-cards, Bluetooth, etc.). Radio broadcasts, social medias and billboards

were utilised to forward sensitisation messages in a fun and interactive way to increase youth involvement. The materials discussed issues around women empowerment and engaging women in agribusinesses. This material allowed for more women to be exposed to and benefit from existing opportunities in the agri-food sector, while sensitising men on the issues women often face. The mix of media production and material distribution to youth groups positively increased information exchange and opportunities for women and youth.

In Mozambique, a radio campaign was developed and broadcasted providing information on agricultural topics and job openings within the field. Through the radio programme listeners were able to call or write in to give their opinions on various topics creating a more exciting experience for young listeners.

This use of various, complementary media channels helps to reach rural youth in different ways, ensuring that those who may not have access to digital platforms are reached.



## Digital Opportunity Platform – Linking potential and opportunities

### ● Malawi and Kenya

The objective of digital job and learning platforms is to bridge the gap between talented professionals and companies seeking talent, to broaden the outreach and to simplify the process. The global project partners with existing platforms on the improvement of their services through online job readiness trainings (self-paced learning) and career orientation services, as well as the provision of additional internship and job opportunities. Often, these online learning systems are linked to possible job opportunities, providing a competitive advantage for youth who underwent the recruitment processes through these learning systems.

Partner platforms [Malawi](#) and [Kenya](#)

## E-extension Services – Advising customers through digital channels

### ● Kenya

In collaboration with the German-Kenyan tech start-up [agriBORA](#), the global project is enabling project partners (private sector partners and youth organisations) to provide e-extension services to their contracted farmers/members. The content is developed in close collaboration with experts and the target groups to generate contextualised, data-driven, real-time advisory in the form of bulk USSD text messages to young farmers. [agriBORA](#) is building the capacities of partner organisations to operate the system and generate revenues through it. To complement e-extension services, young service providers are equipped with smart field projectors to deliver advisory sessions at the community level. They are using a collection of open-source resources from [AccessAgriculture](#) to customise the content to the specific learning gaps of the community.



AGRI-JOBS  
4 YOUTH!

## The E-Poultry app – Digital systems for private sector development

### ● Kenya

Contract farming requires lean processes. Digitising and automating such processes (managing supplies, advisory to farmers, logistics and recordkeeping) enables private sector partners to scale their operations, monitor the quantity and quality of commodities and ultimately integrate more youth agripreneurs into their supply chain. The e-Poultry app, an Enterprise Resource Management (ERP) system owned by the social enterprise Chicken Basket is providing these services for the poultry-sector. The app supports the contract farmer's entire poultry management and enables the buyers to keep track of the connected farmers in terms of electronic renewal and management of their deliveries.



## Online learning to bridge the spatial gap to rural youth

### ● Burkina Faso and Kenya

There are different online learning courses available, mostly for free, for example on the international digital learning platform Atingi. In certified, self-paced courses, entrepreneurs can learn for instance how to manage their businesses, including management skills, financial know-how and an understanding of the socio-economic impact of gender dynamics.

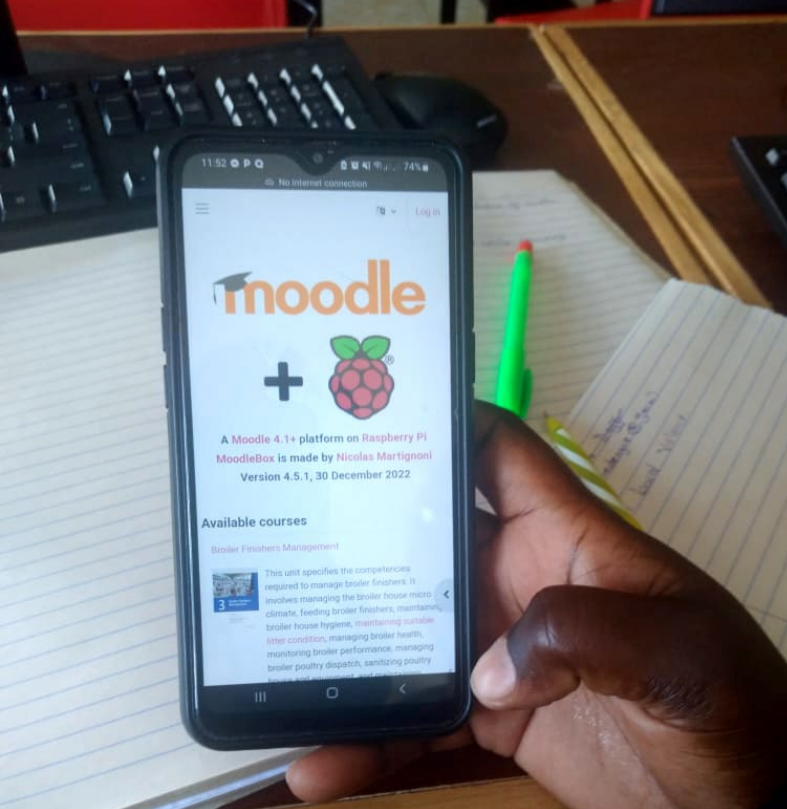
Other blended learning courses offer focus on theoretical and practical knowledge that can be linked to classroom training in ATVET centres (modular short courses). The centres provide the required infrastructure for hybrid learning courses (including access to the online content), trainers are trained on blended learning methods and curricula for blended courses are developed. They include an interactive learning landscape with videos, audios and quizzes that convey theoretical knowledge and are directly linked to the physical classroom training sessions. This often makes learning more attractive and fun for youth.



Chicken Basket Success Story [Youtube](#)







## Virtual Reality Training – Innovative and immersive training for youth

### ● Mozambique

Financial literacy trainings often take an extensive amount of time to complete and can be tiring for trainees, therefore new innovative techniques can be adapted to increase retention and interest while decrease time commitment. The Virtual Reality technology is used in Mozambique to provide a training on financial literacy to rural youth and women. The Virtual Reality Training can be developed by a service provider initially making 360° videos that depicts and didactically relates to the information in a training manual, that is then placed in a 3D story board. An avatar voice guides through the training which is completely offline. The training equipment consists of a certain number of Virtual Reality glasses, that can be recharged and used again and again.

Through this interactive tool trainees can interact with the training module content and increase understanding and interest in the material presented. This process takes ± four hours. At the end of the training, the trainees are tested on eight to ten questions, to show what they have learned through the Virtual Reality experience. This innovative approach is not only more attractive for youth, but further is more cost efficient for organisations as there is a reduced need for longer held trainings and therefore a lower requirement of materials, staff and venue costs. The training can easily be replicated and thus supports the outreach to a bigger target group, making Virtual Reality training a good possibility for rural communities and especially youth.

## Raspberry Pi – Using offline solutions to connect youth to knowledge

### ● Burkina Faso, Kenya, and Mozambique

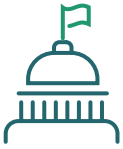
Lack of access to the cellular network and unreliable internet connections are key factors that hamper access to online learning content and knowledge. Offline systems, low-cost self-assembly computers and open-source learning management systems can help to bridge that gap. Raspberry Pi is a low-cost computer with a Linux operating system with additional free open-source tools (open-source version of Microsoft Office, etc.). Combined with the media server Moodlebox, the Raspberry Pi can be turned into a wireless access point that includes a Moodle server.

The Learning Management System (LMS) Moodle can be used for document sharing, learning courses and is often used by AT-VET centres and schools to provide blended learning courses. Through the Moodle Box, learners can connect to the LMS via Wi-Fi. In the global project, youth organisations were trained to assemble a Raspberry Pi and provide content to their members. Further, training centres were supported in installing Moodle as a LMS and trainers were trained to use Moodle for themselves and for their students. This allowed for a youth-friendly learning approach and self-paced learning offers.





## LESSONS & RECOMMENDATIONS...



The use of digital tools depends on technical infrastructures. This requires political will. Therefore, both local and national policies need to work at improving access to electricity and power at affordable prices as well as internet coverage and pricing structures.



There should be consideration that realities of digital readiness and digital infrastructure can vary massively between certain regions in a country and especially between urban and rural areas. Especially in areas with no network or internet coverage, offline solutions (such as offline learning platforms, Raspberry Pi, etc.) should be considered.



Where the lack of digital infrastructures and low digital literacy levels of partners and target groups hinder the introduction of purely digital solutions, it is recommended to combine various digital with analogue measures or use low-entry digital solutions, such as radio or USSD text messages. These combinations can vary based on the target group's digital literacy level, as well as their access to digital technologies.



Using popular digital media amongst the target group such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, TikTok, Facebook and radio channels can help reach more youth and in turn provide them more access to important information concerning employment opportunities. It is key to know which digital platforms targeted youth use and which channels and partners are already active with existing audiences.



Women often lag behind when it comes to digital literacy skills and access to devices and digital tools. Therefore, it is imperative to include women specific trainings on digital literacy to ensure they are considered in the overall picture. Sensitising and including the wider community and community leaders can help to make digital solutions accessible for women. It is important to always keep do no-harm principles in mind, especially in culturally sensitive settings.



The rapidly changing nature of technologies needs constant adaptations and maintenance, which need human and financial resources. This requires a careful planning of financial flows to pay for maintenance in the long run (business model), as well as institutional anchoring to ensure that digital solutions can be used beyond project periods. Therefore, collaborating with existing platforms and service providers is necessary.



To improve outreach to the target groups and save costs, it makes sense to work with groups of young people, e.g. youth organisations or cooperatives instead of focusing on individuals.



When using new digital tools or platforms, it is vital to design them in a way that is exciting, and attractive to youth such as virtual reality training, gamification approaches or other advanced digital solutions.



Proper training on the usage of digital platforms is crucial to ensure that both employers and job seekers know how to use them. This can be done through training and various other sensitisation activities.



This **series of How to Papers** has been developed by the **Global Project Rural Employment with Focus on Youth** and aims to process and systematise the project's practical experiences. Each **How to Paper** has a thematic focus and provides a brief overview of innovative approaches and inspiration for practical implementation. The series targets implementing organisations and donor agencies working in the field of youth employment.



It is important to address questions of data security from the onset, when working with digital tools. The [Principles for Digital Development](#) provide a good framework for these and other pertinent questions.

**The results of the global project show that digital tools relating to matching can help increase employment connections. Thus far digital matching formats make up 38% of the total matching in the project, and digital platforms like Brighter Monday and Shujaaz show that 9 out of 10 users confirm improved employment prospects.**

→ **Digital platforms** show that **9 out of 10** users confirm improved employment prospects!

## IMPRINT

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