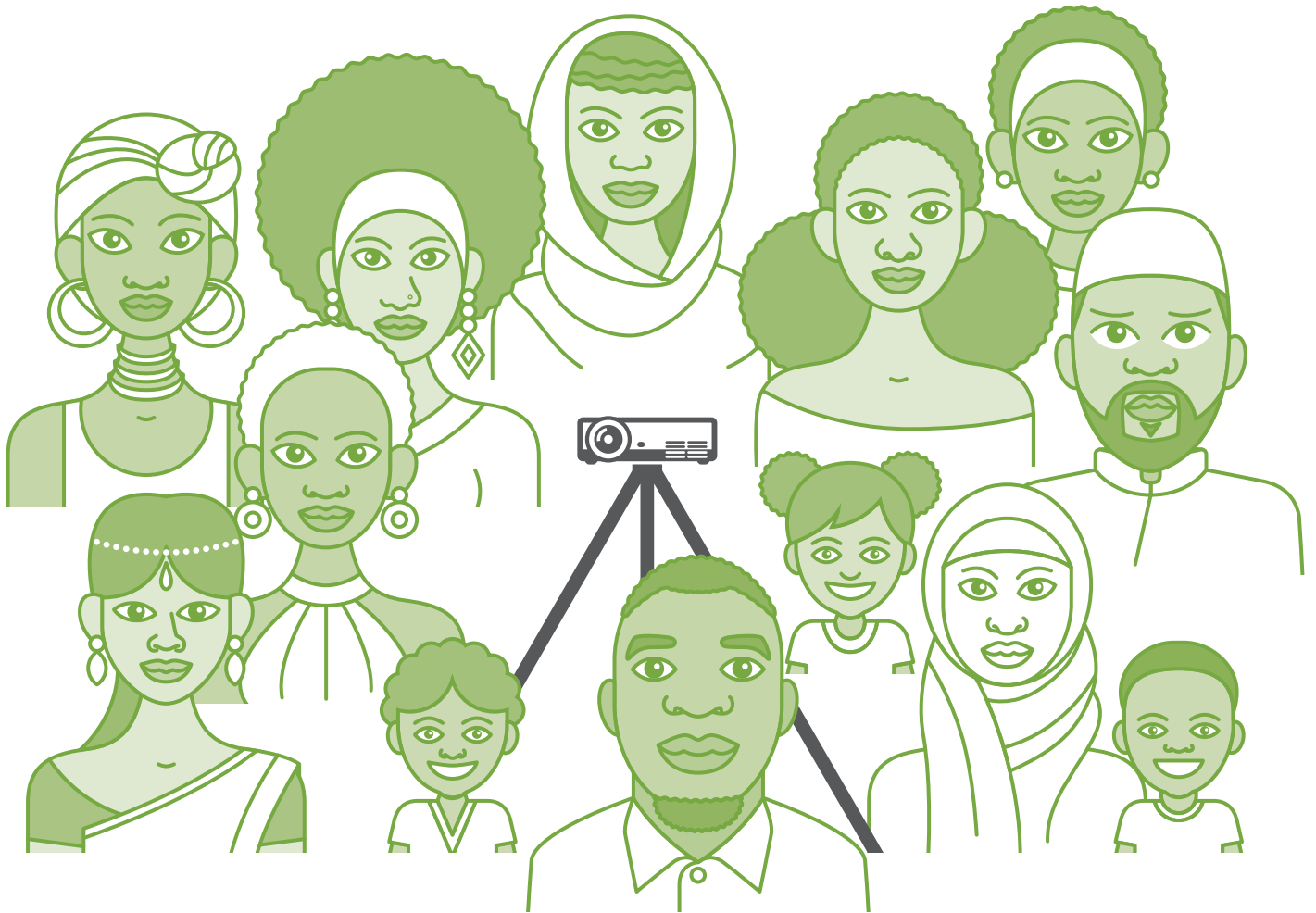


# Young changemakers



## Scaling agroecology using video in Africa and India

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## About Access Agriculture

Access Agriculture is an international non-profit organisation that works across all developing countries to enable the South-South exchange of and access to quality farmer-to-farmer learning videos to promote agroecological principles and rural entrepreneurship. Access Agriculture builds capacity for the production of videos and, upon demand, translates any video hosted on its platform into any local language. It enables access to these videos for multiple stakeholders, including rural advisory services, education

systems, media houses and farmer organisations. By improving access of youth, women, smallholder and marginalised farmers to relevant knowledge, Access Agriculture aims to contribute to more resilient food systems that can counter the changing climate and the erosion of our natural resources.

For more information on Access Agriculture, visit [www.accessagriculture.org](http://www.accessagriculture.org)



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# Foreword

**The issue of youth engagement in agriculture is a critical concern in both Africa and India. Traditional perceptions of agriculture as a low-status, unskilled occupation, coupled with limited access to resources and market opportunities, have contributed to a significant disinterest among young people in pursuing careers in agriculture.**

that create an enabling environment for youth participation and innovation in agriculture. By recognising and supporting the potential of rural youth in driving positive change in food systems, it is possible to build more resilient and sustainable agricultural systems in Africa and India.

also become catalysts for positive change in their communities.

The stories captured in this book reflect the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the ERAs. From those who left school at a young age to university graduates, and from individuals with no prior agricultural experience to those already running small businesses, the ERAs represent a wide spectrum of young people who have been driven by a common goal – to make a meaningful impact in their home communities. Their journeys have been marked by challenges, including the global energy crisis and the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, these challenges have also served as catalysts, igniting the desire among farmers to embrace ecological farming practices and reduce reliance on expensive inputs.

The impact of the ERAs has been profound, as evidenced by the success stories shared in this book. From training child mothers in Uganda to become beekeepers, securing user rights for youth to access local forests in Malawi, setting up community-managed tree nurseries and addressing deforestation, establishing farmer cooperatives and promoting

In Africa, the rapidly growing youth population presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the agricultural sector. With the aging farming population, there is an urgent need to engage and empower young people to participate in agriculture and agribusiness. Similarly, in India, there is a need to inspire and educate the youth about the potential of agriculture as a viable and rewarding career option. Efforts to promote agroecology and sustainable farming practices can serve as a catalyst for engaging and inspiring young people to contribute to the transformation of food systems in both regions.

Addressing the issue of youth in agriculture requires comprehensive strategies that encompass education and training, access to finance and resources, mentorship and networking opportunities, as well as policies

Access Agriculture has been at the forefront of empowering rural youth to transform food systems through its innovative last-mile delivery model. From 2019 onwards, the organisation has empowered over 120 teams of young Entrepreneurs for Rural Access (ERAs) across 17 countries in Africa and India. These ERAs have been equipped with a solar-powered smart projector containing a vast video library, enabling them to serve as private extension service providers and facilitate the dissemination of knowledge on agroecological practices to farming communities. The ERAs have emerged as dynamic changemakers, demonstrating their commitment to promoting agroecology and sustainable agricultural practices. This book serves as a testament to the resilience, creativity, and dedication of these young individuals, who have not only embraced agroecology but have

organic vegetable production to creating demand for training and fodder production, the ERAs have demonstrated their ability to drive change and create new opportunities for sustainable agriculture. Their efforts have not only led to increased agricultural productivity but have also contributed to the preservation of local food culture and biodiversity.

commitment to sharing knowledge and fostering positive change. Yet, their perseverance and dedication have earned them the respect and trust of local farmers, paving the way for meaningful engagement and collaboration.

As we celebrate the achievements of the ERAs, it is essential to recognise the critical role

of hope, inspiring others to join hands in creating a more sustainable and equitable future for agriculture and rural communities. As we embark on this journey of transformation, let us continue to support and empower the next generation of changemakers, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their efforts are recognised and celebrated.

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## The impact of the ERAs has been profound, as evidenced by the success stories shared in this book

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One of the key strengths of the ERAs has been their ability to engage with diverse target audiences, including rural women, youth, and marginalised communities. By leveraging the power of video-mediated learning, the ERAs have been able to reach out to those with limited mobility and literacy, providing them with valuable knowledge and skills to enhance their livelihoods. The impact of their work extends beyond agricultural practices, encompassing areas such as education, health, and environmental conservation. Nonetheless, the journey of the ERAs has not been without its share of challenges. They have had to overcome scepticism and mistrust in rural communities, demonstrating their

played by Access Agriculture in supporting and nurturing these young leaders. The organisation's coaching and support have been instrumental in equipping the ERAs with the skills and resources needed to succeed in their endeavours. The video library provided by Access Agriculture has not only served as a valuable knowledge resource but has also inspired the ERAs to think creatively and innovate in their approach to promoting agroecology.

In conclusion, the stories of the ERAs stand as a testament to the potential of rural youth to drive meaningful change in agriculture and food systems. Their dedication, resilience, and innovative spirit serve as a beacon

Together, we can unleash the power of rural youth to transform food systems and build a more sustainable and resilient future for all. 

Pierre Ferrand  
*Agriculture Officer (Agroecology & Ecosystem Services)*  
*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*

# Becoming a role model for rural young women



**Grace Harrison**

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Grace Harrison was born into a farming family in Lilongwe District, close to the border with Mozambique. At the age of 13, she joined the Permaculture Club in M'bang'ombe primary school, where schoolchildren learn to care for their local environment and produce their own diverse and nutritious food without the need for chemical inputs. She remained actively engaged with a similar student club working on sustainable farming at her secondary school.

*tural extension,”* Grace says with determination. *“From the earnings I have made from screening training videos to farmers, I have become independent. I have been able to build a small house and pay for my own university fees,”* she adds.

Most of her clients have been schools and Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLA), for whom she charges 7,000 Malawian Kwacha (6 Euros) per video show. Generally, three to five

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## Equipped with a smart projector and hundreds of videos in various Malawian local languages, it boosted her self-esteem

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Grace graduated with high marks and became an Access Agriculture Entrepreneur for Rural Access (ERA) at the age of 18. Equipped with a smart projector and hundreds of videos in various Malawian local languages, it boosted her self-esteem. She applied to study agricultural extension at the university, but was assigned to the Kamuzu University of Health Sciences instead, to study midwifery. *“It must have been God’s will that I had to do something in health, but after this I still plan to study agricul-*

videos are shown per session, and many VSLA clubs request to watch videos every two weeks. As Grace is often busy with her studies, she has trained a team of three other entrepreneurs, namely Binfred Mthambala, Kambeni Chimtolo and Precious Chimangiro. As rural women and youth make up the bulk of their audience, video screenings are done either in the morning or late afternoon, but never in the evening.

*“At first, many village women pretended to be busy, but when*

*they see that other women have improved their lives after watching the videos, they all want to join. And because the projector is a new thing that no one has ever seen before, often 20 to 30 youths attend the shows. They see me as a young role model. It is really wow,”* says Grace full of excitement.

In just two years, Grace has shown videos to about 5,000 people, of whom 64% were women and 56% were youth.

It is hard for the young entrepreneurs to provide quantitative impact assessments, as they do not do formal surveys, but in her home village, Grace has definitely seen many changes, of which she gives two examples:

#### Making soya cheese



After watching the video [Making yoghurt at home](#), Soflet Msandula, chair of the local Area Development Committee from Kazukutu village, started making yoghurt and selling it in different communities and markets. After watching some of the videos on soya bean, such as [Soya sowing density](#) and [Making soya cheese](#), she also began growing soya, a crop she had never grown before, and preparing it. Her life has changed in so many ways: she uses

the money earned for paying the school fees of her children and to buy farm inputs. She also teaches other people in her village how to make soya cheese. The people are also benefitting, especially in feeding their children.

Inspired by one of the videos, Monica Jevinala, chairperson from the Chikonde Youth Club in Kazukutu village, started to produce yoghurt for her family and relatives. Milk is readily available in the village, so she can make yoghurt any time she wants. Her three children are growing up healthy and her husband has become a great fan of her yoghurt.

#### Village savings and loan associations






One of the videos screened to all VSLA groups was exactly on the topic of [Village Saving and Loan Associations](#), so one would think that the groups would not learn anything new from it. But on the contrary. Grace believes it led to

one of the most striking changes she has seen. Earlier, the VSLA would just collect money and save it until the end of the year and then return the savings to the members. Once they had seen the video, they no longer collected money for just saving it, but to start businesses. From then on, women members agreed that each could borrow money and pay back with a small amount of interest to the group. Most women start with businesses, such as making snacks from soya beans, called African cakes, or selling clothes or other goods. At the end of the year, they realised the group had made more savings.

Asked about her future plans, Grace says: *“With the earnings from the video shows, I have also bought about one hectare of land in Kamenya village on which I want to grow crops. And I want to travel all across Malawi with the smart projector, as I know so many rural women are eager to do something, but they lack ideas. By 2028, I want to be a role model for all of Malawi, not just for my home village.”*

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