

Securing land tenure and access for the youth to modernize African agriculture¹

A. Introduction

According to a recently released report by the African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET 2017), agriculture can power Africa's economic transformation if, among other things, it is modernized and made profitable to make farming attractive to the youth. There is a strong case to attract youth into African agriculture: they are better educated than their elder folks; they dominate the African population, with the under 24 making up 60 percent, and yet the African farming population is aged, with the average farmer 60 years old (FAO 2014); and they are greatly unemployed or underemployed (Filmer et al. 2014). Possessing greater energy and education than their elder farmers, the African youth are better equipped to handle modern agricultural technology and entrepreneurship, and to reverse the ageing trend of the African farming population.

According to the ACET report, the agenda to attract educated young people into farming has to focus on addressing the challenges that discourage them from farming, generally the same as those that discourage older farmers, including access to land, inputs, finance and markets, but these challenges being even greater for youth, who lack the necessary resources and social networks. This paper focuses on the challenge to access land, that is secure, and on the policy actions to address the challenge.

This challenge for African youth to access land is a serious one. While Africa-specific data is scanty on youth access to land, global surveys indicate that access is limited. For example, a global survey of rural youth, including those from Africa, found that 52% of the young farmers who responded mentioned access to land as the most challenging constraint when they started farming while more than half of the respondents that were not practicing farmers mentioned access to land as one of the main factors that refrains them from starting a farming activity (MIJARC², FAO and IFAD 2012). Like adult farmers, young farmers must have land to start or expand farming activities. Moreover, those who are able to gain access to land get little and operate small farms even in land surplus countries. For example, a survey in some rural and peri-urban areas of Ghana found that the majority of the youth, both indigenes and migrants, held small land sizes of 1–3 acres for farming purposes (Kidido, Bugri and Kasanga 2017); this is less than one third of the average farm size in Ghana, about 8 acres equivalent to 3.2 hectares (Table 1).

And given that modernizing agriculture requires investments and working capital to raise productivity and run a commercial farm, the youth need secure titles for their land in order to use them as security for loans to finance investments and commercial operations. Formalization of land rights to secure titles could also incentivize part-time and low productivity farmers and elderly land owners to rent out their land and look for more rewarding opportunities off the farm. This process will facilitate land consolidation and make it easier for the educated youth who

¹ Paper for the 14-17 November 2017 Land Policy in Africa conference in Addis Ababa, by Frank F K Byamugisha and Yaw Ansu, consultant and Chief Economist at ACET, respectively.

² MIJARC stands for International Movement of Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth.

want to consider a farming career to acquire land through rental or outright purchase (ACET 2017).

Table 1. Average farm size in selected African countries

Country	Farm size (hectares)	Year
Botswana	1.9	2004
Burkina Faso	3.9	1993
Cameroon	1.6	1972
Côte d'Ivoire	3.9	2001
Ethiopia	1.0	2012
Ghana	3.2	2006
Kenya	2.1	2010
Madagascar	0.9	2005
Malawi	1.4	2009
Mali	4.1	2005
Nigeria	1.4	2010
Rwanda	0.7	2006
Senegal	4.3	1998
Tanzania	2.4	2003
Uganda	0.9	2006
Zambia	3.7	2008

Source: ACET (2017) based on data from Jayne et al. 2014.

B. Challenges for youth to accessing secure land

But African youth face numerous challenges to accessing secure land. The most binding include:

- Unfavorable land tenure systems and customary practices
- Over reliance on inheritance which limits choices in terms of timing, size, quality and location of land
- Undeveloped sales and rental markets
- Lack of resources to buy or rent land
- Inadequate access to information and lack of legal protection of land rights for the youth
- Lack of provision for youth in state-sponsored land redistribution programs

Unfavorable land tenure systems and customary practices. In Africa, only about 10% of arable land is registered (compared with 95% in Western Europe)³. The remaining, about 90%, is unregistered, mostly communally owned and managed according to customary law under a customary tenure system (Table 2). This customary tenure system is disadvantages to the youth: while almost every adult is given access to farm land, the youth virtually have no access to it except through inheritance. Customary practices, which mostly favor inheritance by boys, make access to land for girls and young women even more difficult as is evidenced in a number of countries including Gambia and Senegal (IFAD undated). While many countries in Africa have adopted

³ For share of registered land in Africa, see Byamugisha (2013); for the percentage of land registered in Western Europe, see Schmid and Hertel (2005).

statutory laws that grant women equal rights to land, customary laws continue to deny these rights in practice (Byamugisha 2013).

Table 2. Estimates of registered and unregistered rural arable land in Africa

Land tenure system	Sub-Saharan Africa ^a (%)	North Africa ^b (%)	Africa (%)
Customary (unregistered land) (largely communally owned)	90–95	25–50	90
Modern (registered land) (largely individually owned)	5–10	50–75	10
Total	100	100	100

a. Customary land tenure consists mainly of communally owned land, especially in West and Central Africa, while modern land tenure (registered land) consists largely of individually held land.

b. Arable or irrigated land ranges from 1% of total land in Libya to 15% in Morocco.

Source: Compiled by ACET (2017), based on data from AU- AfDB-UNECA Land Policy Initiative 2009 and Byamugisha 2013.

Over reliance on inheritance which limits choices in terms of timing, size, quality and location of land. Inheritance of land is the main means by which young people obtain access to land. For example, in Uganda, inheritance accounts for 40 percent of the total land acquisitions in the central region dominated by individual ownership of land but as high as 91 percent of the total land acquisitions in the northern region where communal land ownership dominates (World Bank 2015). However, a number of factors have reduced the effectiveness of this means of access to land. A key factor is shortage of land. In many African countries, the average land being cultivated is already too small to support commercial agriculture, with farm size averaging less than 1.5 hectares in Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda (Table 1).

Moreover, the subdivision of land among a large number of siblings has led to fragmented and unviable land parcels which, in some countries such as Rwanda, has led to the imposition of legal minimum size limits (Byamugisha 2015). Even when inheritance of land takes place, the timing is uncertain. Elder farmers are often opposed to hand down land while they are still alive, as they often rely on it for their survival. At the same time, with life expectancy increasing in many countries, the youth have to wait longer to inherit their share of land. This means they have to work on the family land until this time comes, observing the rules of the elder as opposed to taking primary decisions as business owners. Finally, even when land is inherited, the recipient has no choice of land size, quality and location; so the farm business plan is forced to fit the characteristics of the inherited land.

Lack of resources to buy or rent land. The youth lack resources to purchase land. And they cannot access them through credit markets because they are not well developed, especially for long term credit (Andrianaivo and Yartey 2009); moreover, as they do not own land or other

assets, they cannot provide collateral such as land and savings. Leasing land may be an option in this case, but this is still not always possible for lack of resources and, as noted below, they are poorly developed.

Undeveloped sales and rental markets. Even in situations where the youth have resources, sales and rental markets are not always well developed especially in the majority of areas where land is communally owned. For example, in northern Uganda where land is largely communally owned, land acquisition through sale and rental by all age groups is only 6 percent. Both traditional and conventional land institutions lack the capacity to allocate and lease out land (ACET 2017, Chapter 2). For example, even in land-abundant countries such as Ghana and Zambia, the majority of landholdings are below commercially viable units. In Ghana, 60% of farm plots are under 1.2 hectares and 85% are under 2 hectares, the minimum size needed to commercialize and move out of poverty, while in Zambia, 50% of farms there are smaller than 2 hectares (ACET 2017).

Inadequate access to information and lack of legal protection of land rights for youth. In Africa, there is a lack of knowledge on land rights by all age groups including the youth (Deininger, Ali and Yamano 2008), and this impacts negatively on land tenure security for the youth as they are not aware of the relevant legislation and policies they can use to access and secure land. Moreover, legal protections of inheritance for youth, and especially young women, are weak, making the youth vulnerable to losing succession rights to the land they are meant to inherit (ACET 2017).

Lack of provisions for youth in state-sponsored land redistribution programs. In the sporadic divestitures of agricultural state land, often competitive mechanisms are used to dispose of land, with the highest competitors taking the land; the youth have no resources to access land through such mechanisms. In the major state-sponsored land redistribution programs in Africa, there were no explicit provisions for allocating land to the youth. These included: Kenya's one million acre settlement scheme at independence (Kanyinga 2009); Zimbabwe's post-independence land redistribution programs including the Fast Track Land Redistribution Program (Pazvakavambwa and Hungwe 2009); the post-apartheid land redistribution programs in South Africa (Lahiff and Li 2014); and Malawi's community-based land redistribution pilot program in 2004-2011 (Tchale 2014). Virtually all these programs required beneficiaries to organize themselves in formal groups, with members primarily being heads of households – mostly older farmers. Even in Ethiopia which mandated equal access to land for everyone aged at least 18 years, a recent study found that land access through allocation from authorities is virtually nonexistent while land that can be obtained from parents through inheritance or gift is too small to establish a meaningful livelihood (Bezu and Holden 2014). The land rental market has restrictions, including on the number of years land can be rented out. And yet the law prohibits the purchase and sale of land in Ethiopia.

C. Opportunities for youth to access land

While there are challenges to overcome, there are also opportunities in Africa that can be exploited, including:

- Surplus land;
- Potential to create employment for the youth; and
- Potential to replace uneducated ageing farmers with educated youth

Surplus land. It is estimated that Africa contains more than half the world's uncultivated arable land. However, not all of this land is easily available for farming. With irrigation underdeveloped, most farming depends on rainfall, which effectively limits the potentially arable land that is actually usable for farming. In addition, much land remains idle because of undeveloped transport infrastructure which reduces accessibility to input and output markets. Despite these limitations, Africa is still relatively land abundant, as reflected in its crop area per agricultural worker compared with other parts of the world (ACET 2017). The abundance of land makes it easier for favorable public policy to have a positive impact on land access for youth.

Potential to create employment for the youth. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the youth employment challenge in Africa has become a top political priority for the region. There is a high level of under-employment and unemployment which, in the case of North Africa, was considered to be at the root of the Arab Spring uprisings⁴. A number of studies argue that promoting agricultural productivity and modernizing agriculture from upstream to downstream of the value chain would contribute significantly to addressing the employment challenge in Africa (Filmer et al. 2014; ACET 2017). Removing the land constraint on youth participation in agriculture would be an important step toward addressing the employment challenge. As the youth employment challenge has become a top priority for Africa, it offers an opportunity for policy action to increase youth access to land for agricultural modernization.

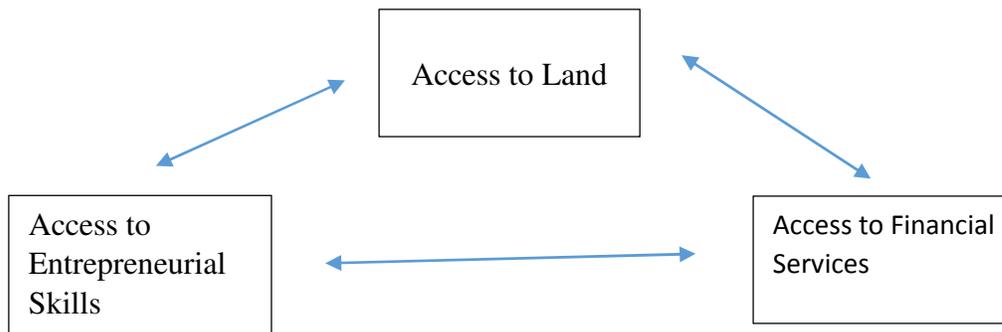
Potential to replace uneducated ageing farmers with educated youth. The average age of farmers in Africa is about 60 years (FAO 2014). The education level of farmers is low, in part because education systems in Africa have neglected agricultural training, reflecting a common belief that farming is an occupation for people without schooling. As access to education has expanded, fewer youth are staying on the farm. Making agriculture attractive and assisting the youth to participate in it by, among other things, increasing their access to land, would help to replenish Africa's ageing farmers with educated youth that are better suited to modernize Africa's agriculture (ACET 2017).

D. Policy Actions to Increase Youth Access to Land

To overcome the challenges faced by youth accessing land and using it to undertake modern agriculture, policy actions have to be undertaken that would ensure access to: land; financial services to acquire the land and farm it; and technical assistance to develop entrepreneurship skills (see Figure 1). Access to these services as an integrated package is important for youth to acquire land and use it to undertake successful commercial agriculture.

⁴ See International Labor Organization, 2012.

Figure 1. Policy Action for Youth Access to Land and other Associated Services



Source: Adopted from Misleh, 2014.

African governments need to undertake appropriate land policies and associated agrarian reforms to make that happen. While this is a relatively new area of land policy reforms, African governments can build on some past initiatives to develop policy actions to enable their youth acquire land and contribute to the modernization of African agriculture. The policy actions can be grouped into three categories:

- Market-improving policy actions;
- Market-based policy actions; and
- Government-based policy actions.

Market-improving policy actions. Even if inheritance is the primary means of youth access to land, it is an inadequate mechanism because, with average per capita family landholdings declining over time, the land passed on to the youth is inadequate and too unpredictable and unreliable especially in terms of size, quality and timing of acquisition. It simply cannot support small and medium-size commercial farms which Africa needs to transform its agriculture and its economies. Therefore it is important that land markets, both sales and rental, be developed and made transparent and accessible to all age groups so that the youth can use it to access farm land or to top-up what is acquired through inheritance. This is an important area of public policy and should include the following policy actions as documented in the ACET Report (ACET 2017)⁵:

- Improve tenure security over communal lands by organizing and formalizing communal land-owning groups, demarcating the boundaries of their land, and registering it as Mexico has done successfully;
- Develop local land governance institutions to improve the allocation and leasing of communal lands as Botswana, Mexico and Fiji (Dodd 2012) have done;
- Improve tenure security over land that is now individually owned through systematic land titling, using simple low-cost mapping technologies like Rwanda has done successfully;

⁵ The ACET report documents not only the policy actions but also country case studies and references where they have been done successfully.

- Ease restrictions on land rental markets as Ethiopia is doing, following in the footsteps of countries like China and Viet Nam;
- Improve land information systems through re-engineering and computerization to reduce land transaction costs and improve transparency like Rwanda and Uganda have done;
- Bring idle land into use through policy actions including imposing a tax on unused agricultural land to encourage land owners to use, sell or rent it out; developing transport infrastructure to open up inaccessible agricultural lands; and improving mechanisms for allocating unused state land for productive use;
- Strengthen formal and traditional institutions responsible for resolving land disputes; and
- Enhance and protect the land rights of women through legal and administrative reforms to support gender equality in constitutions, land-related laws, and laws that govern marriage, divorce, and succession, as Rwanda and Ethiopia have done.

Market-based policy actions. Even if land markets were developed, not all the youth that want to purchase or lease land would do so for lack of financing. Credit markets in most African countries are not well developed, and the youth lack secure land that is commonly used as collateral to secure loans. Consequently, it is necessary for African governments to intervene not only to improve the markets to deliver the land, but also to help the financial markets deliver credit to the youth to purchase the land and productive inputs for farming the land. It is also necessary for governments to play their traditional role in supporting the necessary infrastructure and entrepreneurship training to enable the youth engage successfully in commercial agriculture.

While in the past African governments have not undertaken market-based policy actions to support the youth to engage in commercial agriculture, there are some experiences from Latin America that Africa can learn from. The prominent ones are the Land Fund Programs for the youth in Brazil and Mexico which were supported by the World Bank (Box 1). The Brazil one, *Nossa Primeira Terra* (NPT) in Portuguese translated as Our First Land Program, was the most successful. It was part of a larger market-based land redistribution program called in Portuguese *Programa Nacional do Crédito Fundiário* (PNCF) translated as the Land Credit National Program, which was supported by the World Bank⁶. The NPT support for youth, organized in groups, included: commercial loans repayable over 20 years with 3 years of grace for purchasing land; and grants from government to finance on farm communal investments, and technical assistance and training in organizational and agro-business management. Loan repayment was very good, and the World Bank rated its project as moderately satisfactory and the youth NPT as among the most successful of its kind.

On the other hand, the Mexico Land Fund Program was less successful. The Young Rural Entrepreneur and Land Fund Program was started in 2004 with 3 components: (i) grants for capacity building in entrepreneurship; (ii) land purchase loans initially at around 5% (about one third of the commercial loan rates) raised to commercial rates since 2007; (iii) grants or subsidized credits for on-farm investments on acquired land. Assistance was given to older landholders, who transfer their lands to young farmers, to access social welfare schemes as an incentive for early inheritance within Mexico's ejido (communal) land ownership system which did not allow land sales outside the community. World Bank supported the program with a pilot project only up to 2010 and the program continued thereafter with only government support. When financing terms for land acquisition were changed from subsidized to commercial loans, the Program experienced a drop-out rate of more than 50% after completion of the capacity building phase. Another reason for the drop-out was the inability to mortgage purchased land as

⁶ The World Bank project aimed to support 4,000 youth and 50,000 adult farmers (World Bank 2009).

it was illegal to mortgage communal land. On the whole, land purchase did not do well as it required more money at commercial rate after 2007; however, land rental was successful as it required less money.

Box 1. Market-based land transfers to the youth

Brazil – Land Program for the Youth (*Nossa Primeira Terra*)

To respond to the demands of the Union of Rural Workers, the Brazilian government established in 2003 a land program for the youth (aged 18 to 28 years), known in Portuguese as *Nossa Primeira Terra* (Our First Land Program), as part of the Land Credit National Program or *Programa Nacional do Crédito Fundiário* (PNCF) which received funding of US\$202 million from the World Bank, with support ending in December 2008 but with continued funding from government of Brazil. Four thousand (4,000) rural youth, organized in groups, were targeted and, as of December 2008, 2,500 had received support: loans for land purchase (20 year term, with 3 years grace, at 12% nominal interest rate -- 4% after inflation); and grants for on-farm infrastructure investments prioritized by youth groups (including small irrigation schemes, access roads, communal tractors and small scale agro-processing) and technical assistance and training to develop capacity of the youth in group and agribusiness management. Based on World Bank evaluation of the project, it was moderately satisfactory, generating an economic rate of return of 12.6%; and loan repayment by project beneficiaries was at 97%, regarded as successful.

Source: World Bank 2009; Lambais 2008; Misley, 2014.

Mexico – Young Rural Entrepreneur and Land Fund Program

To check rural-urban youth migration, the Mexican government started a Young Rural Entrepreneur and Land Fund Program in 2004 to support youth with capacity building in entrepreneurship, followed by funding to purchase or rent underused land with loans initially at around 5% (about one third of the commercial loan rate) but at a commercial rate since 2007. Additional funding, either in grants or subsidized credits, were provided for on-farm investments on acquired land. At the same time, assistance was given to older landholders, who transferred their lands to young farmers, to access and participate in social welfare schemes (life-long pension payments, health insurance and life insurance) as an incentive for early inheritance within Mexico's ejido (communal) land ownership system, which did not allow land sales outside the community; and in fact, 90% of land transfers were within families. World Bank supported the program with funding of US\$ 100 million for a pilot project (but only \$53m disbursed as government used its own funds) which, at completion in 2010, had provided technical assistance for capacity building for 11,000 young farmers, of whom 4526 received loans to acquire land. While the World Bank project ended in 2010, the Mexican government continued the program with its own financing. When financing terms for land acquisition were changed from subsidized to commercial loans, the Program experienced a significant drop-out rate, of more than 50%, after completion of the capacity building phase. Another reason for the drop-out was the inability to mortgage purchased land as it was illegal to mortgage communal land. Unlike land purchase, land rental was successful and the main mode of land acquisition because it was much cheaper than purchasing land use rights. The incentive, in terms of capacity building and awareness campaigns to access social welfare schemes, given to senior farmers (above 65 years of age) to transfer land was effective: about 80 percent of the land transfers was from farmers aged at least 65 years. Partly due to the cut back in the World Bank loan by nearly 50% and the pilot nature of the project, the World Bank rated the performance of its project as unsatisfactory at completion in 2010.

Source: World Bank, 2011; Misley, 2014; and de Dinechin and Larson, 2006.

The incentive to transfer land from senior farmers (above 65 years of age), in terms of capacity building and awareness campaigns to access social welfare schemes, was effective: about 80 percent of the land transfers was from farmers aged at least 65 years.

Government-based policy actions. Unlike market-improving and market-based land policy actions which are built around and driven by the market, the government-based land policy actions are centered on the government to transfer land to the youth. And unlike the former where land is purchased in the land market directly by the youth, in the latter, the youth receive land owned, controlled or directed by the government. Examples of government-based land transfers are summarized in Box 2. For example, Ethiopia has a law that entitles every citizen aged at least 18 to have access to agricultural land but, due to a shortage of land, many youth do not have access to it. On the other hand, the governments of Gambia and Togo directed local communities to provide land use rights to the youth for specific farming projects without charging them rent. And finally, the government of Senegal allocated state land to the youth for farming under an IFAD-funded project, without charging rent, but required the youth to acquire project-supported loans to farm the land and raise productivity. What is common in these examples is that the programs in the 4 countries were all small, highly constrained by the lack of land or government resources available to fund the programs. In general, government-based land transfers are not common because, as they are typically funded by grants and free of charge to recipients, they are too costly for governments to provide at scale and to sustain them.

Box 2: Government-based land transfers to the youth

Ethiopia – Legal entitlement to land access at age 18 years

Ethiopian federal law (proclamation) entitles every citizen at least 18 years access to agricultural land which should ensure adult youth access to land. But due to a shortage of land in many of Ethiopia's regional states, many youth do not have access to land. For example, a recent survey in Southern Ethiopia covering relatively land abundant districts of Oromia Region and the land scarce districts of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' (SNNP) Region found that land access through allocation from authorities was virtually non-existent while land that can be obtained from parents through inheritance or gift was too small to establish a meaningful livelihood. The land rental market had restrictions. As a result of limited land access, the youth had turned their back on agriculture, with only 9% of youth planning to pursue farming.

Source: Bezu and Holden, 2014.

Gambia – State-directed customary land allocation to youth groups under IFAD Projects

Two on-going IFAD projects, the Livestock and Horticulture Development Project and the National Agricultural Land and Water Management Development Project, are establishing village vegetable gardens which are managed by women and youth groups called kafos to raise income from them. Through the kafos, young people gain access to customary land which they can cultivate and make an income. The projects provide kafos with training, tool kits and inputs to support production and marketing. In addition, the projects support the community to have their land registered following written agreement between the kafos, and traditional and government authorities.

Source: IFAD, undated.

Senegal – State land allocation to the youth under IFAD Projects

Under IFAD Agricultural Value Chains Support Project and the Extension Project, state-owned plots of land are being allocated to young rural people, 50 per cent of whom are young women, to increase production and incomes. The Project supports youth to organize in groups to access state-allocated land and to receive project-supported group loans, through banks, to raise productivity on the land.

Source: IFAD, undated.

Togo – State-directed land allocation to the youth through community agreements

The Togolese government in 2008 and 2009 created zones of planned agricultural development (ZAAP) to facilitate access to land for young farmers. It started by identifying suitable land for agriculture, zoned it for agricultural use in the local physical development plan, and entered into agreement with the land-owning communities or individuals to delimit and parcel it out for use by young farmers. The beneficiary youth were issued with land use certificates as a means to secure their land. The state provided additional support such as access to credit and advisory services to farm the allocated land. Beneficiary youth were drawn from within and outside the communities.

Source: IFAD, 2014.

E. Conclusions

The challenge of access to land by African youth is a formidable one but not insurmountable. With Africa possessing surplus uncultivated arable land, public policy makers should be able to fix the land access problem, motivated by the opportunity to leverage the abundance of educated youth to modernize Africa's agriculture while also creating badly needed employment and

income-generating opportunities for them. This paper has identified a policy menu that African policy makers can put to use in their respective countries.

The policy menu has three components. The **first** one is market-improving and aims to develop and make agricultural land sales and rental markets transparent and accessible to all including the youth; this is a “must do” for all African policy makers and includes land registration for individually owned land, as Rwanda has successfully done, and also for communally owned land like Mexico has also successfully done; but it does not target the youth as the primary beneficiaries. The **second** one is market-based; it aims to augment land and credit markets to deliver agricultural land and production services specifically to the youth to undertake farming. So, they work to overcome barriers not only in the land markets but also in the financial ones, and involve targeting services to the youth based on market principles. Africa has no experience with such market-based policy actions. The best available are from Latin America, specifically: (i) the Brazil Land Fund Program which supported youth groups with commercial loans to purchase land, and government grants to finance on-farm investments and agro-business training; and (ii) the Mexico Land Fund Program which supported youth with entrepreneurial training, and subsidized (and later commercial) loans to rent or purchase land and make on-farm investments; and also assisted senior farmers to access and participate in social welfare schemes as an incentive to transfer their land to young farmers. And the **third** one is government-based; it aims to transfer government-owned or controlled agricultural land to the youth either through a legal mandate as Ethiopia did, a transfer of state-owned land as Senegal did or a transfer of government-controlled community land as governments of Togo and Gambia did. Where state-owned land and government-controlled communal land are abundant, this mode of land transfer is feasible although not much land has been transferred to the youth in Africa using this mechanism.

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