**For immediate release**

**August 12 2023**

**PRESS RELEASE TO COMMEMORATE THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY**

**We, the under-signed Civil Society Organizations,** wish to join the rest of the world in celebrating International Youth Day on 12th August 2023. This year’s theme’’ ***Green Skills for the Youth: Towards a Sustainable World’’*** highlights the importance of equipping the youth with the necessary skills and tools to ensure a green transition. Further this theme provides an opportunity to nurture a generation of environmentally conscious leaders who are capable of driving positive change.

The world is embarking on a green transition. This is very critical to the attainment of Agenda 2030 and responding to the global climate challenge. The Global Food Systems Transformation Agenda cannot be achieved without the full participation of the 1.2 billion youth who make up 16 % of the world’s population. A successful transition towards a greener world will depend on the development of green skills in the population (OECD/Cedefop, 2014). This is very critical for the young people who can contribute to this transition for a longer time.

**We recognize and applaud** the various stakeholders especially the Government of Uganda for their renewed and maintained commitment towards Youth Empowerment in all spheres of Development. We further recognize the steps and strategies deployed to prioritize Youth empowerment while addressing the various issues related to agriculture, trade, environmental justice, women’s rights, farmers' rights, and fiscal and human rights-related issues.

As we celebrate International Youth Day 2023, **We are concerned;**

1. **Youth Hunger and Malnutrition**

Uganda has a young population and it is estimated that 48.47% of Uganda’s population is between the age of 0-14 years and 21.16% are aged between 15-24 years (GOU, Uganda Population 2022(Demographics, Maps, Graphs), 2022). Therefore 78% of Uganda’s population is below the age of 30. Young people are in an age group that requires optimum utilization of all food groups and consumption of considerable amounts of food. The inability of young people to access and afford nutritious food jeopardizes their growth, development, and future productivity. Hungry youth most often resort to unsustainable practices such a deforestation, overfishing or unsustainable agriculture to meet their immediate food needs. This can reduce the availability of resources for future generation.

**2.** **Low engagement of youth in Agriculture.**

Agriculture employs 65% of the working population, of which 63% are youth. However, production is predominately in the hands of the aging farmer population whose average age is 50 years. The youth in Uganda today are opting for non-agricultural careers in Urban areas and overseas. According to the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development, the Middle East is experiencing an influx of Ugandans looking for domestic jobs with at least 7,724migrant workers departing Uganda on a monthly average in 2022. Youth involvement in agriculture can promote the adoption of eco-friendly practices, contributing to soil health, water conservation, and biodiversity preservation.

**3. High levels of Youth Unemployment and underemployment**

Youth unemployment has been a longstanding challenge in Uganda, standing at around 6.58%, with over a million of youth released annually into the job market. The country requires to create more than 600,000 jobs per year to optimize this demographics dividend (GOU, Population Growth in Uganda: Challenges and opportunities, 2021). The food system holds inherent opportunities for this young population. However, the country has not valued the food produced and the entire food system to enable it makes economic sense, attract investments and technology.

**4. Access to Education and Quality of Education**

Disparities in educational opportunities and quality have hindered the personal and professional development of young people. Vocational training and extension services are potentially effective tools for teaching agricultural skills and providing capacity building trainings for rural youth, but they don’t always transmit the necessary skills, and so can result in poor employment outcomes (Bennell, 2017).

**5. Discriminative Social Norms and Representation**.

Discriminative social norms, gender roles and stereotypes has discouraged young women from pursuing careers in fields related to green skilling. This has limited their exposure to these opportunities and discourage them from taking up roles that are perceived as more "masculine." The lack of visible female role models in green sectors has made it difficult for young women to envision themselves succeeding in these fields.

**6. Youth Engagement and Empowerment:**

Youth are often underrepresented in various spheres of influence, such as government, policymaking, and community leadership. This lack of representation can lead to policies and decisions that don't adequately address their needs and concerns. Further encouraging young people to be active and engaged citizens can be challenging. Many youths feel disconnected from traditional civic activities and may need more avenues to get involved in their communities.

**7. Youth and Land Governance**

Young people's access to, control over, and governance of land face significant challenges. Discriminatory cultural norms and practices limit their rights and influence, hindering their participation in land governance processes. The generational transfer of land perpetuates this inequality, preventing younger individuals from acquiring land and contributing to land conflicts.

**8. Technology and Digital Divide**

 While technology provides opportunities for learning and communication, it also exacerbates the digital divide. Not all young people have equal access to technology and the internet, limiting their ability to fully participate in the digital age. Further in rural or economically disadvantaged areas in Uganda , there is insufficient technology infrastructure, including reliable internet access and electricity. This makes it difficult for youth to engage in online learning, access information, or participate in the digital economy.

9.  **Financial Literacy:**

Many financial institutions are wary of lending to younger people due to their limited credit history or perceived higher risk. This makes it difficult for the youth to secure loans. Many youth lack the financial resources and collateral required to start or expand businesses within sustainable value chains. Limited access to credit, loans, and capital can hinder their ability to invest in equipment, technology, and raw materials

**10. Economic Instability**

Youth entrepreneurs in Uganda face barriers such as complex regulations, high taxes, and bureaucratic red tape. They struggle to access accurate and timely market information, which is crucial for making informed decisions about product demand, pricing, and consumer preferences. The business environment in Uganda today involves inherent risks, such as price volatility, supply chain disruptions, and changing consumer preferences.

**We therefore recommend that;**

1. Promotion of access and consumption of safe and nutritious food especially among the young generation. This will improve the quality of life of the next generation. This can be through social safety net programs, school feeding programmes and support for small-scale farmers
2. Deliberate shift in public perception to view agriculture as a viable livelihood alternative and create an enabling environment to foster youth participation in agriculture. There is need to highlight the potential for value addition and food processing activities that can increase the income potential of agricultural products, making them more attractive to youth.
3. Develop educational programs that highlight modern and sustainable agricultural practices, as well as the potential for innovation and entrepreneurship within the sector. Agriculture has potential to solve the current unemployment challenges that Uganda is facing.
4. Strengthening the voice and agency of the youth to be able to actively participate in the key decision making and dispute resolution spaces to front issues that are pertinent to them.
5. Addressing discriminatory cultural norms and practices to rewrite the narrative to enable the youth to have access, use, control, ownership and management of land and their participation in decision-making processes.
6. Promote digital literacy and internet access through training and resources to help young people take advantage of the growing digital economy.
7. Education and Skill Development: Collaborative action by government and other stakeholders to invest in quality education and vocational training programs to equip young people with relevant skills for the job market.

**CONCLUSION**

**We invite** all the young individuals, educators, activists, and all those passionate about creating a sustainable future to join us in this endeavor. Let us unite under the banner of ***Green Skills for Youth: Towards a Sustainable World*** and embark on a journey towards a more environmentally responsible and prosperous World for generations to come.

**For More Information, Contact**

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