



Campaign support is empowering young people in East Africa like Delphin.
Photo by CRS staff

Empowering Youth: *Boosting Entrepreneurship In East Africa*

Young people should be empowered to work hard and build happy, healthy lives in their home communities. They deserve a chance to make the world a better place. Yet many are confronting unparalleled challenges. Now is the time to act.

Going Far

Too many young people—especially those living in rural communities—are being left behind. Through **Go FAR: The Campaign for Catholic Relief Services**, CRS is ready to catalyze transformational change across youth development systems worldwide. **Because we should, and because we can.**

The Need

East Africa is younger than ever. In Tanzania, for example, two-thirds of the population is under age 25. Many young Tanzanians are trying to enter the job market, but the formal sector can only absorb about 6% of them each year. Out of desperation, roughly 75% of young Tanzanians are working in the precarious “gig economy” and earning next to nothing. These informal sectors not only perpetuate poverty, but also put young people at risk of experiencing serious labor violations or human trafficking.

Across East Africa, safe and dignified job opportunities are diminishing while the number of job seekers grows. Eighty percent of unemployed Kenyans are younger than 35, and 84% of Uganda’s young people work informal jobs. Young men and women in remote, isolated villages are especially cut off, left behind by rapidly changing climates and technologies. Rural young people in particular lack access to local opportunities, as well as the markets, financial services and other resources needed to start sustainable businesses of their own. Now COVID-19 is limiting their options and mobility even more.

“I couldn’t just cross my arms and wait.”

—Delphin

The Opportunity

We must reach young people where they are and help them not just fill but also create safe, stable jobs—for their own futures and for the vitality of their communities. **We cannot afford to lose this generation.** In this critical moment for the young people of East Africa, CRS’ agency strategy has committed us to **bring our tested youth programming to scale via digital learning and support systems.**

Our comprehensive approach to youth development begins with CRS’ in-person trainings. We engage young men and women in microfinance and entrepreneurship programs designed for vulnerable, low literacy learners without prior business experience. This is followed by mentoring and linkages to financial services to sustain their own business.



Delphin is one of many young East Africans to receive entrepreneurship and financial training from CRS. Today, he runs his own successful tamarillo farm. Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS

Now, building on previous work, CRS is expanding our reach to young people in underserved rural areas—providing digital training and support systems that young entrepreneurs need to succeed.

With our pilot programs beginning in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, young people will be provided complementing support through our digital platforms. The platforms offer virtual entrepreneurship trainings and connect youth with peer and private sector mentors. These resources will help prepare and accompany young people through the process of finding jobs or starting and running businesses. All technologies will be accessible by even the simplest cell phones and will dramatically reduce costs while increasing our reach.

The Impact

CRS is poised to build on our experience in empowering youth by bringing our work to scale. Over the next 10 years we seek to reach 5 million young people by transforming government and private sector youth workforce systems. Over the next three years in East Africa we will:

- **Strengthen the environment for entrepreneurship** by creating partnerships with governments, businesses, microfinance entities and youth-serving organizations.
- **Train and empower more than 100,000 young people** and help 65% run their own businesses.
- **Test mentoring and peer-to-peer learning approaches.** Mentoring helps young people network and connect with business owners in their communities. Peer-to-peer learning allows young graduates of our programming to train others in the skills and lessons they've learned.
- **Innovate digital platforms** to deliver remote training courses based on CRS' curriculums on entrepreneurship, savings and loans support, and business development skills for rural young people to market effectively, organize and network, and manage finances. Trainings will be adapted to be delivered via interactive phone calls, videos and other accessible media.

Building A Better Tomorrow

At 26, Delphin Hakizimana is one of many hardworking entrepreneurs who got his start after attending a CRS youth employment program in Rwanda. Like other young people across the rural district of Nyabihu, Delphin knew there was opportunity in farming—as long as he could run the business well and gain access to start-up capital.

When he graduated from the youth program with newly honed business skills, he and his 30 classmates formed a CRS-supported savings and loan group. Together, they gathered the collateral needed to apply for a bank loan. Delphin and seven other young people were awarded a loan of \$1,490, or about \$213 each. With this, he began growing tamarillos—a local fruit—on family land.

It was March 2020, with his first crop beginning to ripen, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Rwanda. "I have love and passion for farming. I couldn't just cross my arms and wait for the pandemic to end," says Delphin. He knew he would have to employ health precautions immediately to keep his farm running safely. "The government has been clear about how to operate safely. I know my staff and I have to keep our distance while harvesting and maintain the same distance while trading." Today, Delphin continues to work on his farm daily and, despite the odds, his business is flourishing.

The Legacy

The right to work is fundamental for all people. Together, we can empower vulnerable young men and women across East Africa with the knowledge and agency to build profitable enterprises of their own.

Learn More

about our vision for youth:
gofar.crs.org

